

OTHER DIFFERENCES

British English
in Oxford Street
at the weekend
stay at home
in the team
different from/to
outside the city

American English
on Fifth Avenue
on the weekend
stay home
on the team
different than/from
outside of the city/outside the city

11 June; the eleventh of June; June 11; June eleventh; 06-11-95
June the eleventh; 11-06-95
do something again
Monday to Friday
A to Z /zɛd/
do something over/again
Monday through/to Friday
A to Z /zi:/



British and American English

GRAMMAR

British English	American English
The present perfect is used for recent past actions: <i>I've just seen Jim.</i>	The past simple or present perfect is used for recent past actions: <i>I just saw Jim. OR I've just seen Jim.</i>
The past participle <i>gotten</i> is not used: <i>Your French has got better since I last saw you.</i>	The past participle <i>gotten</i> is used: <i>Your French has gotten better since I last saw you.</i>
<i>Have got</i> and <i>have</i> are both used in negatives and questions: <i>Have you got my book? OR Do you have my book? I haven't got a car. OR I don't have a car.</i>	<i>Have</i> is more common in negatives and questions: <i>Do you have my book? I don't have a car.</i>
Collective nouns are more commonly used with a plural verb. Singular verbs are also possible: <i>The crew are/is on deck. The crowd are/is shouting.</i>	Collective nouns are more commonly used with a singular verb: <i>The crew is on deck. The crowd is shouting.</i>
<i>Can't</i> is used to say that something is not possible: <i>Sally can't be here. All the lights are out.</i>	<i>Can't</i> and <i>must not</i> are both used to say that something is not possible: <i>Sally can't/must not be here. All the lights are out.</i>
The definite article <i>the</i> is used with musical instruments: <i>I play the violin.</i>	The definite article <i>the</i> can be left out: <i>I play violin. OR I play the violin.</i>
<i>And</i> is usually used after the verb <i>go</i> : <i>Let's go and see Mike.</i>	<i>And</i> is often left out after the verb <i>go</i> : <i>Let's go see Mike.</i>

SPELLING

British English	American English
centre, fibre, metre, theatre colour, favourite, flavour, labour, honour defence, licence practice (noun), practise (verb) programme analyse, paralyse, realise analogue, catalogue, dialogue	center, fiber, meter, theater color, favorite, flavor, labor, honor defense, license practice program analyze, paralyze, realize analog/analogue, catalog, dialog/dialogue

VOCABULARY

British English	American English
aeroplane	airplane
angry	angry/mad
autumn	fall/autumn
barrister	lawyer/attorney
bill (in a restaurant)	check
biscuit	cookie
bonnet (of a car)	hood
boot (of a car)	trunk
car park	parking lot
chips	french fries/fries
crisps	potato chips
crossroads	intersection/crossroads
dustbin	trashcan
film	movie
first floor	second floor
flat	apartment
gear lever	gear shift/stick shift
ground floor	first floor
holiday	vacation
hooter	horn
jab	shot/injection
lift	elevator
lorry	truck
mad	crazy
main road	highway
motorway	freeway
nappy	diaper
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gas
post	mail
public lavatory/toilet	rest room
queue (noun); queue (verb)	line; stand in line
rise	raise
rubber	eraser
rubbish	trash; garbage
shop	store
solicitor	lawyer/attorney
stupid	dumb/stupid
surgery	doctor's office
sweets	candy
tap	faucet/tap
timetable	schedule/timetable
torch	flashlight
trainers	sneakers
trousers	pants
underground	subway
windscreen	windshield
zebra crossing	crosswalk
zip	zipper

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ANGLAIS BRITANNIQUE / ANGLAIS AMÉRICAIN

ANGLAIS BRITANNIQUE	ANGLAIS AMÉRICAIN	FRANÇAIS
autumn	fall	automne
bill	check	addition
biscuit	cookie	gâteau sec
bonnet	hood	capot de voiture
boot	trunk	coffre de voiture
bumper	fender	pare-chocs
car-hire	car rental	location de voiture
car park	parking lot	parking
caravan	trailer	caravane
chemist's	drugstore	pharmacie
chips	French fries	frites
cinema	movie theater	cinéma
crisps	chips	chips
directory enquiries	directory information	renseignements (téléph.)
doorkeeper	janitor	concierge
dustman	garbage collector	éboueur
engaged tone	busy signal	sonnerie « occupé »
engaged	busy	occupé (téléphone)
estate car	station wagon	break
ex-directory	unlisted	sur liste rouge
extension	local	poste (téléphone)
film	movie	film
fireman	firefighter	pompier
flat	apartment	appartement
floor	storey	étage
form	class - <i>grade</i>	classe
garden	yard	jardin
goods train	freight train	train de marchandises
to grill	to broil	faire griller
ground-floor	first floor	rez-de-chaussée
handbag	purse	sac à main
holiday	vacation	vacances
hoover	vacuum <i>cleaner</i>	aspirateur
ice lolly	popsicle	esquimau (glace)
interval	intermission	entracte
jumper	sweater	pull
junction	intersection	croisement
letter box	mail box	boîte à lettres
level crossing	grade crossing	passage à niveau
lift	elevator	ascenseur
lorry	truck	camion
motorway	<i>freeway, throughway</i>	autoroute
nappy	diaper	couche (bébé)
number plate	license plate	plaque minéralogique
off-licence	liquor store	vins & spiritueux (mag.)
to overtake	to pass	dépasser (en voiture)
paperback	pocketbook	livre de poche
pavement	sidewalk	trottoir
petrol	gas	essence
postcode	zip code	code postal
postman	mailman	facteur
queue	line	file d'attente
railway	railroad	chemin de fer
roundabout	traffic circle	rond-point
rubber	eraser	gomme
rubbish	garbage, trash	ordures ménagères
shop	store	magasin
shop assistant	clerk	vendeur
sweets	candy	bonbons
tap	faucet	robinet
tin	can	boîte (consERVE)
toilet	restroom	toilettes
torch	flashlight	lampe électrique
trolley	cart	chariot (supermarché)
trousers	pants	pantalon
underground	subway	métro
wallet	billfold	portefeuille

American English

There are about twice as many speakers of American English as of other varieties of English, and four times as many as speakers of *British English. The leading position of the US in world affairs is partly responsible for this. **Americanisms** have also been spread through advertising, tourism, telecommunications and the cinema.

As a result, forms of English used in Britain, Australia, etc. have become less distinct. But there remain many differences in idiom and vocabulary, especially between British and American English. For most people, however, the most distinctive feature of American English is its *accent.

The development of American English

British people who went to the US in the 17th century spoke a variety of *dialects. After they reached the US their language developed independently of British English. New words were added for food, plants, animals, etc. not found in Britain. Many were taken from the Indian languages of *Native Americans. The languages of Dutch and French settlers, and of the huge numbers of *immigrants entering the US in the 19th and 20th centuries, also contributed to the development of American English. Inventions such as electric lighting, the typewriter, telephone and television added large numbers of words to the language and these, with the inventions, soon spread to Britain.

Spelling, grammar and pronunciation

In written English, spelling shows whether the writer is American or British. Americans use *-or* instead of *-our* in words like *color* and *flavor*, and *-er* instead of *-re* in words like *center*. Other variants include *-x-* for *-ct-* (*connexion*) and *-l-* for *-ll-* (*traveler*). British people consider such spellings to be wrong. American spellings which may be used in British English include using *-z-* instead of *-s-* in words like *realize*, and writing the past tense of some verbs with *-ed* instead of *-t*, e.g. *learned*, *dreamed*.

There are various differences in grammar and idiom. For instance, *gotten*, an old form of the past participle of *get*, is often used in American English in the sense of 'received', e.g. 'I've gotten 16 Christmas cards so far.' Americans say 'He's in the hospital' while British people say 'He's in hospital'. The subjunctive is also common in American English, e.g. 'They insisted that *she remain* behind.'

Several features of pronunciation contribute to the American accent. Any 'r' is usually pronounced, e.g. *card* /kɑ:rd/, *dinner* /'dɪnər/. A 't' between vowels may be flapped (= pronounced like a 'd'), so that *latter* sounds like *ladder*. The vowel /æ/ rather than /ɑ:/ is used in words like *path*, *cot* and *caught* are usually both pronounced /kɑ:t/, and 'o' as in *go* (/gou/) is more rounded than in Britain. *Tune* is pronounced /tu:n/ not /tju:n/. Stress patterns and syllable length are often also different, as in *laboratory* (/læbrətɔ:ri/, BrE /lə'bɔ:rətəri/) and *missile* (/mɪsl/, BrE /'mɪsəl/).

Americans tend to use very direct language, and polite forms which occur in British English, such as 'Would you mind if I ...' or 'I'm afraid that ...' sound formal and unnatural to them.

Regional differences

*General American English (GAE) is the dialect that is closest to being a standard. It is especially common in the *Midwest but is used in many parts of the US. The associated **Midwestern** accent is spoken across most of the northern states, and by many people elsewhere.

The main dialect groups are the **Northern**, the **Coastal Southern**, the **Midland**, from which GAE is derived, and the **Western**. The main differences between them are in accent, but some words are restricted to particular dialects because the item they refer to is not found elsewhere: *grits, for example, is eaten mainly in the *South and is considered to be a Southern word.

Northern dialects spread west from New York and *Boston. *New England has its own accent, though many people there have a Midwestern accent. The old, rich families of Boston speak with a distinctive **Bostonian** accent which is similar to Britain's *RP.

Midland dialects developed after settlers moved west from *Philadelphia. Both Midland and Western dialects contain features from the Northern and Southern groups. There are increasing differences within the Western group, as south-western dialects have been influenced by Mexican Spanish.

The Southern dialects are most distinctive. They contain old words no longer used in other American dialects, e.g. *kinfolk* for 'relatives' and *hand* for 'farmworker'. French, Spanish and Native-American languages also contributed to Southern dialects. Since black slaves were taken mainly to the South and most *African Americans still live there, ***Black English** and Southern dialects have much in common. The accent is a **southern drawl** which even foreigners recognize. An 'r' at the end of a word is often omitted, so that *door* is pronounced /dɔ:/, and diphthongs are replaced with simple vowels, so that *hide* is pronounced /hɪ:d/. Some people use *y'all* as a plural form of 'you'. This is more common in speech than in writing.

Southern dialects and accents are often thought by other Americans to be inferior. Black English and *Cajun English may also be less acceptable. Both varieties are restricted to particular ethnic or social groups, and the attitude probably reflects more general feelings about those groups.

An official language?

For a long time English helped to unite immigrants who had come from many countries. Now, Hispanic immigrants, especially in south-western states, want to continue to use their own language, and many Americans are afraid that this will divide the country. The Hispanic population is growing and will reach 80 million by 2050.

This situation led to the founding of the ***English Only Movement**, which wants to make English the official language of the US. Supporters believe that this will help keep states and people together, and that money spent on printing forms, etc. in both English and Spanish would be better spent on teaching the immigrants English. Others think that an official language is unnecessary. They argue that children of immigrants, and *their* children, will want to speak English anyway, and that a common language does not always lead to social harmony.

Oxford Guide to British & American culture