

COMMON STYLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

Not all English dialects use the same style, especially when it comes to spelling and punctuation.

Also, depending on which part of the world you're in, the same word sometimes has different meanings and—to make it even more confusing—different words can have the same meaning!

Use this quick reference guide I've created to look up differences between British and American English.

Spelling

British English	American English
-ise spellings in most styles (organisation, emphasise) Exception: New Oxford Dictionary style uses -ize spellings (organization, emphasize)	-ize spellings (organization, emphasize)
ageing	aging
analyse, paralyse	analyze, paralyze
catalogue	catalog
centre, litre, theatre	center, liter, theater
colour, flavour, honour, labour, neighbour, mould	color, flavor, honor, labor, neighbor, mold
cosy	cozy
defence, licence (noun), offence	defense, license (noun and verb), offense
grey	gray
haematoma	hematoma
jewellery	jewelry
plough	plow
travelling	traveling

Punctuation, numbers, and dates

	British English	American English
Titles	Mr, Dr (without point)	Mr., Dr. (with point)
Dates	1 January 2020	January 1, 2020
Percentage	25 per cent	25 percent
Quotation marks	Use single quotation marks for quotes and double quotation marks for quotes within quotes. Full stop or comma is usually outside the closing quote mark.	Use double quotation marks for quotes and single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. Full stop or comma is inside the closing quote mark.
En dashes and em dashes	Use en dashes to insert a thought – like this – into a sentence. Make sure to include a space before and after the en dash.	Use em dashes to insert a thought—like this—into a sentence. Note that there is no space before or after the em dash.

Same word, different meaning

Word/term	British English	American English
chips/crisps	what Americans call “French fries”, Brits call “chips”	what Brits call “crisps”, Americans call “chips”
momentarily	lasting a moment	in a moment
pants	underwear	trousers

Different words, same meaning

British English	American English
autumn	fall
curtains	drapes
hall of residence	dorm
on holiday	on vacation
jumper	sweater
lift	elevator
lorry	truck
nappy	diaper
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gas
postcode	zip code
primary school	elementary school
rubber	eraser
shop	store
shopping centre	mall
state school	public school
sweets	candy
trade union	labor union
trainers	sneakers
tube (London Underground)	subway
trolley	shopping cart

References for British English

- [New Oxford Dictionary](#)
- [New Hart's Rules](#)

References for American English

- [Chicago Manual of Style](#)
- [Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary](#)