

American and British English differences

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This is one of a series of articles about the differences between **American English** and **British English**, which, *for the purposes of these articles*, are defined as follows:

- **American English (AmE)** is the form of English used in the United States. It includes all English dialects used within the United States of America.
- **British English (BrE)** is the form of English used in the United Kingdom. It includes all English dialects used within the United Kingdom.

American and British English differences
 British English (BrE)
 American English (AmE)
Vocabulary
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Written forms of American English are fairly well standardized across the United States. An unofficial standard for spoken American English has developed because of mass media and of geographic and social mobility. This standard is generally called a General American or Standard Midwestern accent and dialect, and it can typically be heard from network newscasters, although local newscasters tend toward more provincial forms of speech. Despite this unofficial standard, regional variations of American English have not only persisted, but have actually intensified, according to William Labov.

Regional dialects in the United States typically reflect the elements of the language of the main immigrant groups in any particular region of the country, especially in terms of pronunciation and vernacular vocabulary. Scholars have mapped at least four major regional variations of spoken American English: Northern (really north-eastern), Southern, Midland, and Western (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006).^[1] After the American Civil War, the settlement of the western territories by migrants from the east led to dialect mixing and levelling, so that regional dialects are most strongly differentiated in the eastern parts of the country that were settled earlier. Localized dialects also exist with quite distinct variations, such as in Southern Appalachia and New York City.

British English also has a reasonable degree of uniformity in its formal written form. The spoken forms though vary considerably, reflecting a long history of dialect development amid isolated populations. Dialects and accents vary not only between the countries in the United Kingdom, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but also within these individual countries.

There are also differences in the English spoken by different socio-economic groups in any particular region. *Received Pronunciation (RP)*, which is "the educated spoken English of south-east England", has traditionally been regarded as "proper English"; this is also referred to as *BBC English* or *the Queen's English*. The BBC and other broadcasters now intentionally use a mix of presenters with a variety of British accents and dialects, and the concept of "proper English" is now far less prevalent.^[2]

British and American English are the reference norms for English as spoken, written, and taught in the rest of the world. For instance, the English-speaking members of the Commonwealth often closely follow British English forms while many new American English forms quickly become familiar outside of the United States. Although the dialects of English used in the former British Empire are often, to various extents, based on standard British English, most of the countries concerned have developed their own unique dialects, particularly with respect to pronunciation, idioms, and vocabulary; chief among them are Canadian English and Australian English, which rank third and fourth in number of *native* speakers.^{[3][4]}

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Historical background

The English language was first introduced to the Americas by British colonization, beginning in the early 17th century. Similarly, the language spread to numerous other parts of the world as a result of British colonization elsewhere and the spread of the former British Empire, which, by 1921, held sway over a population of about 470–570 million people: approximately a quarter of the world's population in that time.

Over the past 400 years, the form of the language used in the Americas – especially in the United States – and that used in the United Kingdom and the rest of the British Isles have diverged in many ways, leading to the dialects now commonly referred to as American English and British English. Differences between the two include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary (lexis), spelling, punctuation, idioms, formatting of dates and numbers, and so on. A small number of words have completely different meanings between the two dialects or are even unknown or not used in one of the dialects. One particular contribution towards formalizing these differences came from Noah Webster, who wrote the first American dictionary (published 1828) with the intention of showing that people in the United States spoke a different dialect from Britain.

This divergence between American English and British English once caused George Bernard Shaw to say that the United States and United Kingdom are "two countries divided by a common language"; a similar comment is ascribed to Winston Churchill. Likewise, Oscar Wilde wrote, "We have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, the language." (*The Canterville Ghost*, 1888) Henry Sweet predicted in 1877 that within a century, American English, Australian English and British English would be mutually unintelligible. It may be the case that increased worldwide communication through radio, television, the Internet, and globalization has reduced the tendency to regional variation. This can result either in some variations becoming extinct (for instance, *the wireless*, superseded by *the radio*) or in the acceptance of wide variations as "perfectly good English" everywhere. Often at the core of the dialect though, the idiosyncrasies remain.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that although spoken American and British English are generally mutually intelligible, there are enough differences to cause occasional misunderstandings or at times embarrassment – for example, some words that are quite innocent in one dialect may be considered vulgar in the other.

Pronunciation

Grammar

Nouns

Formal and notional agreement

In BrE, collective nouns can take either singular (*formal agreement*) or plural (*notional agreement*) verb forms, according to whether the emphasis is, respectively, on the body as a whole or on the individual members; compare *a committee was appointed...* with *the committee were unable to agree...*^{[5][6]} Compare also the following lines of Elvis Costello's song "Oliver's Army": *Oliver's Army are on their way / Oliver's Army is here to stay*. Some of these nouns, for example *staff*,^[7] actually combine with plural verbs most of the time.

In AmE, collective nouns are usually singular in construction: *the committee was unable to agree...* AmE however may use plural pronouns in agreement with collective nouns: *the team takes their seats*, rather than *the team takes its seats*. The rule of thumb is that a group acting as a unit is considered singular and a group of "individuals acting separately" is considered plural.^[8] However, such a sentence would most likely be recast as *the team members take their seats*. Despite exceptions such as usage in the *New York Times*, the names of sports teams are usually treated as plurals even if the form of the name is singular.^[9]

The difference occurs for all nouns of multitude, both general terms such as *team* and *company* and proper nouns (for example, where a place name is used to refer to a sports team). For instance,

BrE: *The Clash are a well-known band*; AmE: *The Clash is a well-known band*.

BrE: *New York are the champions*; AmE: *New York is the champion*.

Proper nouns that are plural in form take a plural verb in both AmE and BrE; for example, *The Beatles are a well-known band*; *The Giants are the champions*.

Verbs

Verb morphology

See also: List of English irregular verbs

- The past tense and past participle of the verbs *learn*, *spoil*, *spell* (only in the word-related sense), *burn*, *dream*, *smell*, *spill*, *leap*, and others, can be either irregular (*learnt*, *spoilt*, etc.) or regular (*learned*, *spoiled*, etc.). In BrE, the irregular and regular forms are current; in some cases (*smelt*, *leapt*) there is a strong tendency towards the irregular forms (especially by speakers using Received Pronunciation); in other cases (*dreamed*, *leaned*, *learned*)^[10] the regular forms are somewhat more common. In AmE, the irregular forms are never or rarely used (except for *burnt*, *leapt*, and *dreamt*). Nonetheless, as with other usages considered nowadays to be typically British, the *t* endings are often found in older American texts. However, usage may vary when the past participles are actually adjectives, as in *burnt toast*. (Note that the two-syllable form *learnèd* /ˈlɜːnɪd/, usually written simply as *learned*, is still used as an adjective to mean "educated", or to refer to academic institutions, in both BrE and AmE.) Finally, the past tense and past participle of *dwell* and *kneel* are more commonly *dwelt* and *knelt* on both sides of the Atlantic, although *dwelled* and *kneeled* are widely used in the U.S. (but not in the UK).
- *Lit* as the past tense of *light* is much more common than *lighted* in the UK; the regular form enjoys more use in the U.S., although it is somewhat less common than *lit*.^[11] By contrast, *fit* as the past tense of *fit* is much more used in AmE than BrE, which generally favours *fitted*.^[12]
- The past tense of *spit* "expectorate" is *spat* in BrE, *spit* or *spat* in AmE.^[13]
- The past participle *gotten* is rarely used in modern BrE (although it is used in some dialects), which generally uses *got*, except in old expressions such as *ill-gotten gains*. According to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, "The form *gotten* is not used in British English but is very common in North American English, though even there it is often regarded as non-standard." In AmE, *gotten* emphasizes the action of acquiring and *got* tends to indicate simple possession (for example, *Have you gotten it?* versus *Have you got it?*). *Gotten* is also typically used in AmE as the past participle for phrasal verbs using *get*, such as *get off*, *get on*, *get into*, *get up*, and *get around*: *If you hadn't gotten up so late, you might not have gotten into this mess*. Interestingly, AmE, but not BrE, has *forgot* as a less common alternative to *forgotten* for the past participle of *forget*.
- In BrE, the past participle *proved* is strongly preferred to *proven*; in AmE, *proven* is now about as common as *proved*.^[14] (Both dialects use *proven* as an adjective, and in formulas such as *not proven*).^[15]
- AmE further allows other irregular verbs, such as *dive* (*dove*) or *sneak* (*snuck*), and often mixes the preterite and past participle forms (*spring*–*sprang*, U.S. also *sprung*)–*sprung*, sometimes forcing verbs such as *shrink* (*shrank*–*shrunk*) to have a further form, thus *shrunk*–*shrunken*. These uses are often considered nonstandard; the AP Stylebook in AmE treats some irregular verbs as colloquialisms, insisting on the regular forms for the past tense of *dive*, *plead* and *sneak*. *Dove* and *snuck* are usually considered nonstandard in Britain, although *dove* exists in some British dialects and *snuck* is occasionally found in British speech.
- By extension of the irregular verb pattern, verbs with irregular preterites in some variants of colloquial AmE also have a separate past participle, for example, "to buy": past tense *bought* spawns *boughten*. Such formations are highly irregular from speaker to speaker, or even within idiolects. This phenomenon is found chiefly in the northern U.S. and other areas where immigrants of German descent are predominant, and may have developed as a result of German influence^[16] (though in German, both are regular past participle forms, cf. *kaufen*, *kaufte*, *gekauft* (bought) and *lesen*, *las*, *gelesen* (read)). Even in areas where the feature predominates, however, it has not gained widespread acceptance as "standard" usage.

Use of tenses

- BrE uses the present perfect tense to talk about an event in the recent past and with the words *already*, *just*, and *yet*. In American usage, these meanings can be expressed with the present perfect (to express a fact) or the simple past (to imply an expectation). This American style has become widespread only in the past 20 to 30 years; the British style is still in common use as well.
 - "I've just got home." / "I just got home."
 - "I've already eaten." / "I already ate."

(Recently the American use of *just* with simple past has made inroads into BrE, most visibly in advertising slogans and headlines such as "Cable broadband just got faster".)

- Similarly, AmE occasionally replaces the pluperfect with the preterite. Also, U.S. spoken usage sometimes substitutes the conditional for the pluperfect (*If I would have cooked the pie we could have had it for lunch*), but this tends to be avoided in writing.
- In BrE, *have got* or *have* can be used for possession and *have got to* and *have to* can be used for the modal of necessity. The forms that include "got" are usually used in informal contexts and the forms without *got* in contexts that are more formal. In American speech the form without *got* is used more than in the UK. AmE also informally uses *got* as a verb for these meanings – for example, *I got two cars*, *I got to go*; but these are nonstandard and will be considered sloppy usage by most American speakers.
- The subjunctive mood (morphologically identical with the bare infinitive) is regularly used in AmE in mandative clauses (as in *They suggested that he apply for the job*). In BrE, this usage declined in the 20th century, in favor of constructions such as *They suggested that he should apply for the job* (or even, more ambiguously, *They suggested that he applied for the job*). Apparently, however, the mandative subjunctive has recently started to come back into use in BrE.^[17]

Verbal auxiliaries

- *Shall* (as opposed to *will*) is more commonly used by the British than by Americans. [7] (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shall#Current_common_usage) [8] (<http://www.bartleby.com/64/C001/056.html>) . *Shan't* is seldom used in AmE (almost invariably replaced by *won't* or *am not going to*), and very much less so amongst Britons. American grammar also tends to ignore some traditional distinctions between *should* and *would* [9] (<http://www.bartleby.com/64/C001/057.html#SHOULD>) ; however, expressions like *I should be happy* are rather formal even in BrE.
- The periphrastic future (*be going to*) is about twice as frequent in AmE as in BrE.^[18]

Transitivity

The following verbs show differences in transitivity between BrE and AmE.

- *agree*: Transitive or intransitive in BrE, usually intransitive in AmE (*agree a contract/agree to or on a contract*). However, in formal AmE legal writing one often sees constructions like *as may be agreed between the parties* (rather than *as may be agreed upon between the parties*).
- *catch up* ("to reach and overtake"): Transitive or intransitive in BrE, strictly intransitive in AmE (*to catch sb up/to catch up with sb*).
- *cater* ("to provide food and service"): Intransitive in BrE, transitive in AmE (*to cater for a banquet/to cater a banquet*).
- *claim*: Sometimes intransitive in BrE (used with *for*), strictly transitive in AmE.
- *meet*: AmE uses intransitively *meet* followed by *with* to mean "to have a meeting with", as for business purposes (*Yesterday we met with the CEO*), and reserves transitive *meet* for the meanings "to be introduced to" (*I want you to meet the CEO; she is such a fine lady*), "to come together with (someone, somewhere)" (*Meet the CEO at the train station*), and "to have a casual encounter with". BrE uses transitive *meet* also to mean "to have a meeting with"; the construction *meet with*, which actually dates back to Middle English, appears to be coming back into use in Britain, despite some commentators who preferred to avoid confusion with *meet with* meaning "receive, undergo" (*the proposal was met with disapproval*). The construction *meet up with* (as in *to meet up with someone*), which originated in the U.S.,^[19] has long been standard in both dialects.
- *provide*: Strictly monotransitive in BrE, monotransitive or ditransitive in AmE (*provide sb with sth/provide sb sth*).
- *protest*: In sense "oppose", intransitive in BrE, transitive in AmE (*The workers protested the decision/The workers protested against the decision*). The intransitive *protest against* in AmE means, "to hold or participate in a demonstration against". The older sense "proclaim" is always transitive (*protest one's innocence*).
- *write*: In BrE, the indirect object of this verb usually requires the preposition *to*, for example, *I'll write to my MP* or *I'll write to her* (although it is not required in some situations, for example when an indirect object pronoun comes before a direct object noun, for example, *I'll write her a letter*). In AmE, *write* can be used monotransitively (*I'll write my congressman; I'll write him*).

Complementation

- The verbs *prevent* and *stop* can be found in two different constructions: "prevent/stop someone *from* doing something" and "prevent/stop someone doing something". The latter is well established in BrE, but not in AmE.
- Some verbs can take either a to+infinitive construction or a gerund construction (e.g., *to start to do something/doing something*). For example, the gerund is more common:
 - In AmE than BrE, with *start*,^[20] *begin*,^[21] *omit*,^[22] *enjoy*,^[23]
 - In BrE than AmE, with *love*,^[24] *like*,^[25] *intend*.^[26]

Presence or absence of syntactic elements

- Where a statement of intention involves two separate activities, it is acceptable for speakers of AmE to use *to go* plus bare infinitive. Speakers of BrE would instead use *to go and* plus bare infinitive. Thus, where a speaker of AmE might say *I'll go take a bath*, BrE speakers would say *I'll go and have a bath*. (Both can also use the form *to go to* instead to suggest that the action may fail, as in *He went to take/have a bath, but the bath was full of children*.) Similarly, *to come* plus bare infinitive is acceptable to speakers of AmE, where speakers of BrE would instead use *to come and* plus bare infinitive. Thus, where a speaker of AmE might say *come see what I bought*, BrE speakers would say *come and see what I've bought* (notice the present perfect tense: a common British preference).
- Use of prepositions before days denoted by a single word. Where British people would say *She resigned on Thursday*, Americans often say *She resigned Thursday*, but both forms are common in American usage. Occasionally, the preposition is also absent when referring to months: *I'll be here December* (although this usage is generally limited to colloquial speech). The first of these two examples of omitting prepositions may be seen as yet another German influence on American English (though German would also rather use a preposition: *sie trat am Donnerstag zurück* (this week), *an einem Donnerstag* (historic event) but *donnerstags* (routine)).
- In the UK, *from* is used with single dates and times more often than in the United States. Where British speakers and writers may say *the new museum will be open from Tuesday*, Americans most likely say *the new museum will be open starting Tuesday*. (This difference does not apply to phrases of the pattern *from A to B*, which are used in both BrE and AmE.) A variation or alternative of this is the mostly American *the play opens Tuesday* and the mostly British *the play opens on Tuesday*.
- A few 'institutional' nouns take no definite article when a certain role is implied: for example, *at sea* (as a sailor), *in prison* (as a convict), and *at/in college* (for students). Among this group, BrE has *in hospital* (as a patient) and *at university* (as a student), where AmE requires *in the hospital* and *at the university*. (When the implied roles of patient or student do not apply, the definite article is used in both dialects.) Likewise, BrE distinguishes *in future* ("from now on") from *in the future* ("at some future time"); AmE uses *in the future* for both senses.
- In BrE, numbered highways usually take the definite article (for example "the M25", "the A14") while in America they usually do not ("I-95", "Route 66"). Southern California is an exception, where "the 5" or "the 405" are the standard. A similar pattern is followed for named roads, but in America, there are local variations and older American highways tend to follow the British pattern ("the Boston Post Road").
- AmE distinguishes *in back of* [behind] from *in the back of*; the former is unknown in the UK and liable to misinterpretation as the latter. Both, however, distinguish *in front of* from *in the front of*.
- American legislators and lawyers always use the preposition *of* between the name of a legislative act and the year it was passed, while their British equivalents do not. Compare *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to Disability Discrimination Act 1995*.
- *Dates* usually include a definite article in UK spoken English, such as "the 11th of July", or "July the 11th", while American speakers say "July 11th".
- AmE omits, and BrE requires, the definite article in a few standard expressions such as *tell (the) time*.

Prepositions and adverbs

- In the United States, the word *through* can mean "up to and including" as in *Monday through Friday*. In the UK *Monday to Friday*, or *Monday to Friday inclusive* is used instead; *Monday through to Friday* is also sometimes used. (In some parts of Northern England the term *while* can be used in the same way, as in *Monday while Friday*, whereas in Northern Ireland *Monday till Friday* would be more natural.)
- British athletes play *in a team*; American athletes play *on a team*. (Both may play *for* a particular team.)
- In AmE, the use of the function word *out* as a preposition in *out the door* and *out the window* is standard. In BrE, *out of* is preferred in writing, but *out* is more common in speech.^[27] Several other uses of *out of* are peculiarly British (*out of all recognition*, *out of the team*; cf. above);^[28] all of this notwithstanding, *out of* is overall more frequent in AmE than in BrE (about four times as frequent, according to Algeo^[29]).
- The word *heat* meaning "mating season" is used with *on* in the UK and with *in* in the U.S.
- The intransitive verb *affiliate* can take either *with* or *to* in BrE, but only *with* in AmE.
- The verb *enroll* usually takes *on* in BrE and *in* in AmE (as in "to enroll on/in a course") and the *on/in* difference is used when *enrolled* is dropped (as in "I am (enrolled) on the course that studies...").
- In AmE, one always speaks of the street *on* which an address is located, whereas in BrE *in* can also be used in some contexts. *In* suggests an address in a city street, so a service station (or a tourist attraction or indeed a village) would always be *on* a major road, but a department store might be *in* Oxford Street. Moreover, if a particular place on the street is specified then the preposition used is whichever is idiomatic to the place, thus "*at the end of Churchill Road*", and thus also the lyric "our house, in the middle of our street" from "Our House" by the British band Madness, whose intended meaning is "halfway along our street" but is confusing to many Americans—in AmE, the lyric suggests that the house is literally in the middle of the *roadway* (<http://www.mcsweeneys.net/2005/2/3moe.html>).
- BrE favours the preposition *at* with *weekend* ("at (the) weekend(s)"); the constructions *on*, *over*, and *during (the) weekend(s)* are found in both varieties but are all more common in AmE than BrE.^[30] See also *Word derivation and compounds*.
- Adding *at* to the end of a question requesting a location is common in AmE (especially in the Midwest), for example, "where are you *at*?", but would be considered superfluous in BrE.
- After *talk* American can use the preposition *with* but British always uses *to* (that is, *I'll talk with Dave / I'll talk to Dave*). The American form is sometimes seen as more politically correct in British organisations, inducing the ideal of discussing (with), as opposed to lecturing (to). This is, of course, unless talk is being used as a noun, for example: "I'll have a talk with

single form of English. Though the use of a British word would be acceptable in AmE (and vice versa), most listeners would recognize the word as coming from the other form of English, and treat it much the same as a word borrowed from any other language. For instance, an American using the word *chap* or *mate* to refer to a friend would be heard in much the same way as an American using the Spanish word *amigo*.

Words mainly used in British English

See also: List of British words not widely used in the United States

Some speakers of AmE are aware of some BrE terms, such as *lorry*, *queue*, *chap*, *bloke*, *loo*, and *shag*, although they would not generally use them, or may be confused as to whether someone intends the American or British meaning (such as for *biscuit*). They will be able to guess approximately what some others, such as "driving licence", mean. However, use of many other British words such as *naff* (unstylish, though commonly used to mean "not very good"), risks rendering a sentence incomprehensible to most Americans.

Words mainly used in American English

See also: List of American words not widely used in the United Kingdom

Speakers of BrE are almost certain to understand most AmE terms, examples such as *sidewalk*, *gas* (gasoline/petrol), *counterclockwise* or *elevator*, without any problem although they would generally not use them. Even terms which are heard less frequently in the UK, such as *semi* (articulated lorry), *stroller* (pram/pushchair) or *kitty-corner/catty-corner* (diagonally opposite) are highly unlikely to render the sentence incomprehensible to most BrE speakers.

Words with differing meanings

See: List of words having different meanings in British and American English

Words such as *bill* (AmE "paper money", BrE and AmE "invoice") and *biscuit* (AmE: BrE's "scone", BrE: AmE's "cookie") are used regularly in both AmE and BrE, but mean different things in each form. As chronicled by Winston Churchill, the opposite meanings of the verb *to table* created a misunderstanding during a meeting of the Allied forces; in BrE to table an item on an agenda means to *open it up* for discussion, whereas in AmE, it means to *remove* it from discussion.

Word choice

- In the UK, the word *whilst* may be used as a conjunction (as an alternative to *while*, especially prevalent in some dialects), but *while* is used as a noun. In AmE only *while* is used in both contexts. For example, *I will be a while* versus *whilst/while you were out, your friend called*. To Americans the word *whilst*, in any context, seems very archaic or pretentious or both. In some regions of England, the word *while* is used to mean "until", so *whilst* may be used in spoken English to avoid confusion.
- In the UK, generally the term *fall* meaning "autumn" is obsolete. Although found often from Elizabethan to Victorian literature, continued understanding of the word is usually ascribed to its continued use in America.
- In the UK, the term *period* for a full stop is now obsolete. For example, Tony Blair said, "Terrorism is wrong, full stop", whereas in AmE, "Terrorism is wrong, period."^[33]
- *Fitted* is used in both conventions as an adjective (*fitted sheets are the same size as the mattress*) and as the past tense of *fit* ("to suffer epilepsy", for example, "Leavitt fitted" in *The Andromeda Strain*); however *fit* and *fitting* do not denote epileptic seizure in ordinary British use (though that usage is common within medical circles), as the same effect is achieved by *to have a fit* or *to throw a fit*.
- Media domination has seen American vocabulary encroaching on British in recent decades, so that (for example) *truck* is now increasingly heard in the UK instead of *lorry*, and *line* is used as well as *queue* – so that the verb *queue up* or *queue* is now sometimes replaced with *stand in line*.

Numbers

See also: Names of numbers in English

When saying or writing out numbers, the British will typically insert an *and* before the tens and units, as in *one hundred and sixty-two* and *two thousand and three*. In America, it is considered correct to drop the *and*, as in *two thousand three*; however, this is rarely heard in everyday speech, *two thousand and three* being much more common.

Some American schools teach students to pronounce decimally written fractions (e.g. .5) as though they were longhand fractions (*five tenths*), such as *five hundred thirteen and seven tenths* for 513.7. This formality is often dropped in common speech. It is steadily disappearing in instruction in mathematics that is more advanced and science work as well as in international American schools. In the UK, 513.7 would generally be read *five hundred and thirteen point seven*, although if it were written $513\frac{7}{10}$, it would be pronounced *five hundred and thirteen and seven tenths*.

In counting, it is common in both varieties of English to count in hundreds up to 1,900 – so *1,200* may be *twelve hundred*. However, Americans use this pattern for much higher numbers than is the norm in British English, referring to twenty-four hundred where British English would most often use two thousand and four hundred. Even below 2,000, Americans are more likely than the British are to read numbers like 1,234 as *twelve hundred thirty-four*, instead of *one thousand two hundred and thirty-four*.

In the case of years, however, *twelve thirty-four* would be the norm on both sides of the Atlantic for the year 1234. The year 2000 and years beyond it are read as *two thousand, two thousand (and) one* and the like by both British and American speakers. For years after 2009, they are frequently said *twenty ten*, *twenty twelve* etc. by the BBC.

For the house number (or bus number, etc.) 272, British people tend to say *two seven two* while Americans tend to say *two seventy-two*.

There is also a historical difference between billions, trillions, and so forth. Americans use *billion* to mean one thousand million (1,000,000,000), whereas in the UK, until the latter part of the 20th century, it was used to mean one million million (1,000,000,000,000). It is believed that Margaret Thatcher started the change on advice from the Bank of England. The British prime minister, Harold Wilson, in 1974, told the House of Commons that UK government statistics would now use the short scale; followed by the Chancellor, Denis Healey, in 1975, that the treasury would now adopt the US billion version. Although historically such numbers were not often required outside of mathematical and scientific contexts. One thousand million was sometimes described as a *milliard*, the definition adopted by most other European languages. However, the "American" version has since been adopted for all published writing, and the word *milliard* is obsolete in English, as are *billiard* (but not *billiards*, the game), *trilliard* and so on. However, the term *yard*, derived from *milliard*, is still used in the financial markets on both sides of the Atlantic to mean "one thousand million". All major British publications and broadcasters, including the BBC, which long used *thousand million* to avoid ambiguity, now use *billion* to mean thousand million.

Many people have no direct experience with manipulating numbers this large, and many non-American readers may interpret *billion* as 10^{12} (even if they are young enough to have been taught otherwise at school); also, usage of the "long" billion is standard in some non-English speaking countries. For these reasons, defining the word may be advisable when writing for the public. See long and short scales for a more detailed discussion of the evolution of these terms in English and other languages.

When referring to the numeral 0, British people would normally use *nought*, *oh*, *zero* or *nil* in instances such as sports scores and voting results. Americans use the term *zero* most frequently; *oh* is also often used (though never when the quantity in question is nothing), and occasionally slang terms such as *zilch* or *zip*. Phrases such as *the team won two–zip* or *the*

<i>see the wood for the trees</i>	<i>see the forest for the trees</i>
<i>throw a spanner (in the works)</i>	<i>throw a (monkey) wrench (in the works)</i>
<i>tuppence worth</i> also <i>two pennies' worth, two pence worth, two pennyworth, two penny'th, two penn'orth, two pen'th</i> or (using a different coin) <i>ha'penn'orth</i>	<i>two cents' worth</i>
<i>skeleton in the cupboard</i>	<i>skeleton in the closet</i>
<i>a home from home</i>	<i>a home away from home</i>
<i>blow one's trumpet</i>	<i>blow (or toot) one's horn</i>
<i>a drop in the ocean</i>	<i>a drop in the bucket</i>
<i>storm in a teacup</i>	<i>tempest in a teapot</i>
<i>flogging a dead horse</i>	<i>beating a dead horse</i>
<i>haven't (got) a clue</i>	<i>have no clue</i>
<i>a new lease of life</i>	<i>a new lease on life</i>

In some cases, the "American" variant is also used in BrE, or vice versa.

Education

In the UK, a student is said to *study*, or, at Oxford and Cambridge, to *read* a subject (*read* is now more commonly being used in reference to other universities). In the U.S., a student *studies* or *majors in* a subject (although *concentration* or *emphasis* is also used in some U.S. colleges or universities to refer to the major subject of study). *To major in* something refers to the student's principal course of study, while *to study* may refer to any class being taken. Students may also *major* in a subject in the UK as a part of degrees with two subjects, one major and the other minor; this usage is rarely required since examples of such a situation are uncommon in the UK (the majority of degree courses either do not incorporate study outside of a single subject area, or include two subjects on an equal basis).

At the tertiary or university level in BrE, a *module* is taught by a *lecturer* (whose job title may nonetheless be *professor*), while in AmE, a *class* is generally taught by a *professor* (at some institutions, *professor* is reserved for tenure-track faculty with other members of the faculty referred to as *lecturers* or *instructors*, more closely corresponding to the BrE usage). At the primary and secondary levels, the term *teacher* is used instead in both BrE and AmE. The term *lecturer*, in an educational context, would be perceived in AmE as denoting anyone, professor or special guest, giving an actual lecture before a class.

BrE:

"She studied history at Bristol."
"She read history at Oxford."

AmE:

"She majored in history at Yale."
"He majored in Elementary Education at the University of Minnesota."

The word *course* in American use typically refers to the study of a restricted topic (for example, *a course in Early Medieval England, a course in Integral Calculus*) over a limited period of time (such as a semester or term) and is equivalent to a *module* at a British university. In the UK, a *course of study* is likely to refer to a whole program of study, which may extend over several years, and made up of any number of *modules*.

In the UK, a student is said to *sit* or *take* an exam, while in the U.S., a student *takes* an exam. The expression *he sits for* an exam also arises in BrE, but only rarely in AmE; American lawyers-to-be *sit for* their bar exams, and American master's and doctoral students may *sit for* their comprehensive exams, but in nearly all other instances, Americans *take* their exams. When preparing for an exam, students *revise* (BrE)/*review* (AmE) what they have studied; the BrE idiom *to revise for* has the equivalent *to review for* in AmE.

Examinations are supervised by *invigilators* in the UK and *proctors* (or *exam supervisors*) in the U.S. In the UK, a teacher *sets* an exam, while in the U.S., a teacher *writes* or *gives* an exam.

BrE:

"I sat my Spanish exam yesterday."
"I plan to set a difficult exam for my students, but I haven't got it ready yet."

AmE:

"I took my exams at Yale."
"I spent the entire day yesterday writing the exam. I'm almost ready to give it to my students."

Another source of confusion is the different usage of the word *college*. (See a full international discussion of the various meanings at college.) In the U.S., this refers to a post-high school institution that grants bachelor's degrees, while in the UK it refers primarily to an institution between secondary school and university (normally referred to as a *Sixth Form College* after the old name in secondary education for Years 12 and 13, the *6th form*) where intermediary courses such as A Levels or NVQs can be taken and GCSE courses can be retaken. College may sometimes be used in the UK or in Commonwealth countries as part of the name of a secondary or high school (for example, Dubai College. It should be noted, however, that in the case of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Durham universities, all members are also members of a college, for example, one is a member of St. Peter's College, Oxford and hence the University).

In both the U.S. and UK, *college*

can refer to some division within a university such as the "college of business and economics". Institutions in the U.S. that offer two to four years of post-high school education often have the word *college* as part of their name, while those offering more advanced degrees are called a *university*. (There are exceptions, of course: Boston College, Dartmouth College and The College of William and Mary are examples of colleges that offer advanced degrees.) American students who pursue a *bachelor's degree* (four years of higher education) or an *associate degree* (two years of higher education) are *college students* regardless of whether they attend a college or a university and refer to their educational institutions in formally as *colleges*. A student who pursues a master's degree or a doctorate degree in the arts and sciences is in AmE a *graduate student*; in BrE a *post-graduate student* although *graduate student* also sometimes used. Students of advanced professional programmes are known by their field (*business student, law student, medical student*, the last of which is frequently shortened to *med student*). Some universities also have a residential college system, the details of which may vary from school to school but generally involve common living and dining spaces as well as college-organized activities.

"Professor" has different meanings in BrE and AmE. In BrE, it is the highest academic rank, followed by Reader, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer. In AmE "Professor" refers to academic staff of all ranks, with (Full) Professor (largely equivalent to the UK meaning) followed by Associate Professor and Assistant Professor.

Webster was a strong proponent of spelling reform

for reasons both philological and nationalistic. Many other spelling changes proposed in the U.S. by Webster himself, and, in the early 20th century, by the Simplified Spelling Board never caught on. Among the advocates of spelling reform in England, the influences of those who preferred the Norman (or Anglo-French) spellings of certain words proved decisive.

Subsequent spelling adjustments in the UK had little effect on present-day U.S. spelling, and vice versa. While, in many cases, AmE deviated in the 19th century from mainstream British spelling; on the other hand, it has also often retained older forms.

Punctuation

- Full stops/Periods in abbreviations:** Americans tend to write *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *St.*, *Dr.* etc., while British will most often write *Mr*, *Mrs*, *St*, *Dr*, etc., following the rule that a full stop is used only when the last letter of the abbreviation is not the last letter of the complete word; this kind of abbreviation is known as a *contraction* in the UK. Many British writers would tend to write other abbreviations without a full stop, such as *Prof.*, *etc.*, *eg.*, and so on (so recommended by some Oxford dictionaries). However, the "American" usage of periods after most abbreviations is also widely used in the UK. In either case, it is incorrect to put a stop / period after unit symbols such as *kg* or *Hz*; however, in non-scientific contexts, the unit for "inch" is often written *in.*, as it would be ambiguous without the period.
- It is sometimes believed that BrE does not hyphenate multiple-word adjectives (e.g. "a first class ticket"). The most common form is as in AmE ("a first-class ticket"), but some British writers omit the hyphen when no ambiguity would arise.
- Quoting:** Americans start with double quotation marks (") and use single quotation marks (') for quotations within quotations. In general, this is also true of BrE, but can be the opposite when used in book publishing, for example. In journals and newspapers, quotation mark double/single use depends on the individual publication's house style.
- Contents of quotations:** Americans are taught to put commas and periods inside quotation marks (except for question marks and exclamation points that apply to a sentence as a whole), whereas British people will put the punctuation inside if it belongs to the quotation and outside otherwise. With direct speech, both styles retain punctuation inside the quotation marks, with a full stop changing into a comma if followed by explanatory text.
 - Carefree means, "free from care or anxiety." (American style)
 - Carefree means, "free from care or anxiety". (British style)
 - "Hello, world," I said. (Both styles)

The American style was established for typographical reasons, a historical holdover from the days of the handset printing press. It also eliminates the need to decide whether a period or comma belongs to the quotation. However, many people find the usage counterintuitive. *Hart's Rules* and the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* call the British style "new" or "logical" quoting; it is similar to the use of quotation marks in many other languages (including Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, Catalan, Dutch, and German). For this reason, the more "logical" British style is increasingly used in America, although formal writing still generally calls for the "American" style. In fact, the British style is often the *de facto*

standard among Americans for whom formal or professional writing is not a part of their daily life; many are in fact unaware that the normative American usage is to place commas and periods within the quotation marks.

(This rule of placing all punctuation inside quotation if and only if it belongs to the quotation is expressly prescribed by some American professional organisations such as the American Chemical Society; see *ACS Style Guide*.) According to the Jargon File, American hackers have switched to using "logical" British quotation system, because including extraneous punctuation in a quotation can sometimes change the fundamental meaning of the quotation. More generally, it is difficult for computer manuals, online instructions, and other textual media to accurately quote exactly what a computer user should see or type on their computer if they follow American punctuation conventions.

In both countries, the "British" style is used for quotation around parentheses, so in both nations one would write:

"I am going to the store. (I hope it is still open.)"

But:

"I am going to the store (if it is still open)."

- Letter-writing:** American students in some areas have been taught to write a colon after the greeting in business letters ("Dear Sir:") while British people usually write a comma ("Dear Sir,") or make use of the so-called *open punctuation* ("Dear Sir"). However, this practice is not consistent throughout the United States, and it would be regarded as a highly formal usage by most Americans.

Titles and headlines

Use of capitalisation varies.

Sometimes, the words in titles of publications, newspaper headlines, as well as chapter and section headings are capitalised in the same manner as in normal sentences (sentence case). That is, only the first letter of the first word is capitalised, along with proper nouns, etc.

However, publishers sometimes require additional words in titles and headlines to have the initial capital, for added emphasis, as it is often perceived as appearing more professional. In AmE, this is common in titles, but less so in newspaper headlines. The exact rules differ between publishers and are often ambiguous; a typical approach is to capitalise all words other than short articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. This should probably be regarded as a common stylistic difference, rather than a linguistic difference, as neither form would be considered incorrect or unusual in either the UK or the U.S. Many British tabloid newspapers (such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Sport*, *News of the World*) use fully capitalised headlines for impact, as opposed to readability (for example, BERLIN WALL FALLS or BIRD FLU PANIC). On the other hand, the broadsheets (such as *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Independent*) usually follow the sentence style of having only the first letter of the first word capitalised.

Dates

Dates are usually written differently in the short (numerical) form. Christmas Day 2000, for example, is 25/12/00 or 25.12.00 (dashes are occasionally used) in the UK and 12/25/00 in the U.S., although the formats 25/12/2000, 25.12.2000, and 12/25/2000 now have more currency than they had before the Year 2000 problem. Occasionally other formats are encountered, such as the ISO 8601

2000-12-25, popular among programmers, scientists, and others seeking to avoid ambiguity. The difference in short-form date order can lead to misunderstanding. For example, 06/04/05 could mean either June 4, 2005 (if read as U.S. format), 6 April 2005 (if seen as in UK format), or even 5 April 2006 if taken to be an older ISO 8601-style format where 2-digit years were allowed.

A consequence of the different short-form of dates is that in the UK many people would be reluctant to refer to "9/11", although its meaning would be instantly understood. On the BBC, "September the 11th" is generally used in preference to 9/11. However, 9/11 is commonplace in the British press to refer specifically to the events of September 11, 2001. For the sake of clarity, 11/9 is occasionally, yet deliberately, used to emphasise the distinction between September 11, 2001, and September 11 of any other year.

Phrases such as the following are common in Britain and Ireland but are unknown in the U.S: "A week today", "a week tomorrow", "a week on Tuesday", "a week Tuesday", "Tuesday week", "Friday fortnight", "a fortnight on Friday" and "a fortnight Friday" (these latter referring to two weeks after "next Friday"). In the US, the standard construction is "a week from today", "a week from tomorrow" etc. BrE speakers may also say "Thursday last" or "Thursday gone" instead of "last Thursday".

Times

Americans always write digital times with a colon, thus 6:00, whereas Britons often use a point, 6.00, although it is becoming increasingly popular to use a colon. Also, the 24-hour clock (18:00 or 1800), which, in the UK, would be considered normal in many applications (for example, air/rail/bus timetables), is largely unused in the U.S. outside of military or medical applications. Often, in the UK, 18:00 will be written as 1800h, or 06:00 as 0600h - representing the military speak "oh-six-hundred-hours", even if people would usually read it aloud as "six o'clock". This has become popular in text messaging since it is easier to type an "h" than a colon.

Keyboard layouts

See: *British and American keyboards*

See also

- English orthography (spelling)
- The Chicago Manual of Style
- The Queen's English Society
- Canadian English
- South African English
- Regional accents of English speakers
- List of dialects of the English language
- English English
- Hiberno-English
- Scottish English
- Scots language
- Welsh English
- Midlands English
- Southern English dialects
- Southern American English
- The Philadelphia Dialect
- Classification of Germanic Languages
- Anglic languages
- Yinglish

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- ↑ Kirby, Terry (2007-03-28), "Are regional dialects dying out, and should we care if they are?", *The Independent*, <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this_britain/article2398845.ece>
- ↑ For the most part, American vocabulary, phonology, and syntax are used, to various extents, in Canada; therefore, many prefer to refer to *North American English* rather than American English (Trudgill and Hannah, 2002). Nonetheless, Canadian English features also many British English items, and is often described as a unique blend of the two main varieties.
- ↑ Indian English has actually more English language speakers than the total of North American, British, Australian, and New Zealand combined (Crystal, 2005). [2] (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/ling/stories/s1298284.htm>) Indian English speakers typically are learning multiple "first" languages within an English-as-a-foreign-language context which has a decided impact on the phonological structure of Indian English.
- ↑ Peters, p. 23
- ↑ learnenglish.org.uk (http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/grammar/archive/collective_nouns.html)
- ↑ Peters, p. 24
- ↑ Chapman, James A. *Grammar and Composition IV*. 3d ed. Pensacola: A Beka Book, 2002.
- ↑ "The names of sports teams, on the other hand, are treated as plurals, regardless of the form of that name." [3] (<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/plurals.htm#sports>)
- ↑ Peters, pp. 165 and 316.
- ↑ Peters, p. 322.
- ↑ Peters, p. 208.
- ↑ Peters, p. 512
- ↑ prove - Definition from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/prove>)
- ↑ Peters, p. 446.
- ↑ boughten. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000 (<http://www.bartleby.com/61/72/B0417200.html>)
- ↑ Peters, pp. 520 f.
- ↑ [4] (<http://eng.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/31/4/295>) ; Algeo, p. 25.
- ↑ Peters, p. 343.
- ↑ Peters, p. 515.
- ↑ Peters, p. 67.
- ↑ Algeo, p. 248.
- ↑ Algeo, p. 247
- ↑ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7index1a.pl?nav=on&which_entry=021990%23x1%23)
- ↑ Algeo, p. 245.
- ↑ p. 245.
- ↑ Algeo, p. 186; Peters, pp. 400-401.
- ↑ Algeo, p. 186.
- ↑ p. 175.
- ↑ Algeo, pp. 163 f.
- ↑ Peters, p. 50; cf. OALD (http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7index1a.pl?nav=on&which_entry=001546%23x1%23)
- ↑ *Cookbook* is now standard in BrE. [5] (http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7index1a.pl?nav=on&which_entry=008170%23x1%23)
- ↑ PM's Press Conference (<http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page7999.asp>) . 10 Downing Street (26 July 2005). Retrieved on 2007-04-27.
- ↑ BSA changes to cheque writing (http://www.bsa.org.uk/mediacentre/press/cheque_sept.htm) see end of numbered item 9
- ↑ [6] (http://www.bsa.org.uk/mediacentre/press/cheque_sept.htm) see end of numbered item 9

External links

- Proper Treatment: British vs. American (<http://www.digitas.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/wiki/ken/BritishVsAmerican>) (Harvard University)
- List of American and British spelling differences (<http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/us/?view=uk>)
- Map of US English dialects (<http://www.uta.fi/FAST/US1/REF/dial-map.html>)
- The English-to-American Dictionary (<http://english2american.com>) : British words and phrases translated into American English

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Hidden categories: Articles with unsourced statements since December 2007 | Articles needing additional references from February 2007

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