

Differences between UK and US English

Generally speaking, American English is simpler and more logical than British English. Here are the major differences:

1. Spelling

Many words are spelled differently in the USA compared to the UK. The differences are not problematic, because it (usually) affects only written words. Also, software packages, such as MS Office, can identify language versions to help you spell correctly. Here are some examples:

British English	American English
cheque	check
favourite	favorite
fulfil	fulfill
grey	gray
jewellery	jewelry
mum	mom
plough	plow
pyjamas	pajamas
traveller	traveler
tyre	tire

British: colour favour honour humour labour neighbour
American: color favor honor humor labor neighbor

British: realise authorise privatise standardise
American: realize authorize privatize standardize

British: centre kilometre theatre fibre
American: center kilometer theater fiber

British: analogue catalogue dialogue prologue
American: analog catalog dialog prolog

British: offence defence licence practice vice
American: offense defense license practise vise

2. Vocabulary - Different Words for the Same Concept

Perhaps more problematic is that English variants sometimes have different words for the same concept. Here are some examples:

British English	American English
aluminium	aluminum
aubergine	eggplant
autumn	fall
bill	check
biscuit	cookie
bonnet (of a car)	hood (of a car)
boot (of a car)	trunk (of a car)
cashier	teller
chemist	drugstore



chips	fries / french fries
cinema	movies / movie theater
courgette	zucchini
curtains	drapes
dummy	pacifier
estate agent	realtor
film	movie
flat	apartment
football	soccer
garden	yard
holiday	vacation
jug	pitcher
lift	elevator
lift	ride
lollipop	popsicle
lorry	truck
minced meat	ground beef
mobile phone	cell phone
motorway	freeway / highway
nappy	diaper
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gasoline / gas
post	mail
postcode	zipcode
queue	line
railway	railroad
rubbish / litter	trash / garbage
rubbish bin / litter bin	trash can / garbage can
shop	store
shopping centre	shopping mall
spirit	liquor
stretcher	gurney
sweets	candy
tap	faucet
taxi	cab
toilet	restroom / bathroom
torch	flashlight
trousers	pants
underground / tube	subway
wardrobe	closet

Funny video: <https://www.instagram.com/reels/DPdxNcPkcJL/> (3 mins)

3. Vocabulary - Same Words with Different Meanings

Sometimes a word has different meanings in different countries. This can lead to some misunderstandings. Here are some examples:

	British English	American English
chips	= batata frita	= batata chips (tipo Ruffles)
cookie	= biscoito com chocolate	= biscoito
first floor	= 1º andar	= térreo
football	= futebol	= futebol americano
pants	= cueca	= calça
public school	= escola independente (paga)	= escola financiada pelo estado
rubber	= borracha	= camisinha

4. Pronunciation and Stress

Although not a big problem, different accents and stressed syllables can sometimes interfere with understanding. Here are some examples:

American English	British English
<u>address</u>	ad <u>dress</u>
ad <u>vertis</u> ement	ad <u>vertis</u> ement
aunt (aa <u>nt</u>)	aunt (á <u>rn</u> t)
bath (<u>baa</u> ath)	bath (<u>bá</u> th)
con <u>tro</u> versy	con <u>tro</u> versy
cro <u>iss</u> ant (<i>kwasson</i>)	cro <u>iss</u> ant (<i>krusaant</i>)
<u>e</u> conomics (<i>économics</i>)	<u>e</u> conomics (<i>eeconomics</i>)
era (<u>é</u> ra)	era (<u>e</u> era)
<u>for</u> midable	<u>for</u> midable
<u>fr</u> agile (<i>frájl</i>)	<u>fr</u> agile (<i>frajail</i>)
gar <u>a</u> ge (<i>garárji</i>)	gar <u>a</u> ge (<i>gárijj</i>)
herb (<u>er</u> b)	herb (<u>er</u> b)
<u>h</u> ostile (<i>hóstl</i>)	<u>h</u> ostile (<i>hostail</i>)
<u>l</u> eisure (<i>leezure</i>)	<u>l</u> eisure (<i>lézure</i>)
<u>m</u> obile (<i>móbl</i>)	<u>m</u> obile (<i>mobail</i>)
rou <u>t</u> e (<i>raut</i>)	rou <u>t</u> e (<i>root</i>)
tom <u>a</u> to (<i>tomaito</i>)	tom <u>a</u> to (<i>tomáto</i>)
<u>v</u> itamin (<i>vaitamin</i>)	<u>v</u> itamin (<i>vítamin</i>)
<u>v</u> olatile (<i>vólatl</i>)	<u>v</u> olatile (<i>vólatail</i>)
<u>w</u> ater (<i>wuder</i>)	<u>w</u> ater (<i>water</i>)

Video suggestions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXR-4e3Ouns> (16 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-axgs3tkOaU> (02:00 – 02:20)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy-bd5AC-Ms> (3 mins)

5. Verbs

American English has changed some irregular verbs to regular, and today, both forms of past conjugations are generally accepted. Here are some examples:

Verb	Simple Past - UK	Simple Past - USA
to burn	burnt	burned
to dream	dreamt	dreamed
to fit	fit	fitted
to grind	ground	grinded
to kneel	knelt	kneeled
to lean	leant	leaned
to leap	leapt	leaped
to learn	learnt	learned
to smell	smelt	smelled
to spell	spelt	spelled
to spill	spilt	spilled
to spoil	spoilt	spoiled

Video suggestion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnnA4XgcWj8> (17 mins)

6. Prepositions

	British English	American English
weekend	at the weekend	on the weekend
Monday-Friday	Monday to Friday	Monday through Friday

7. Verb tenses (Present Perfect vs the Past Simple)

To describe recent events, the Americans prefer to use the Past Simple, while the British people prefer to use the Present Perfect. For example:

British English	American English
I've eaten a lot today!	I ate a lot today!
Have you eaten already?	Did you eat already?

Video suggestions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRXv3taXkAg> (15 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOVIR6E2zjg> (13 mins)

Song suggestion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dg2HKMFsers> (4 mins)

Port vs Brazilian Port: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MhxaWldVEU> (4 mins)

Culture differences: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krEO7nGknwl> (5 mins)