



Guide to UK and US English

Good writers avoid confusing UK and US English. This guide will set you straight – it outlines the main differences in spelling, grammar, punctuation and some vocabulary.

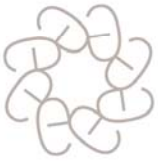
Spelling

	UK English	US English	Notes
-re or -er	Many words from French, Latin or Greek still end in -re, eg centre, fibre, metre, litre, lustre, spectre, theatre, calibre, sombre.	The ending -er is almost always used instead. The few exceptions include: acre, lucre, mediocre, massacre, ogre and cadre.	US spelling tends to be simpler and more phonetic. They also drop the silent 'e' or 'ue' from the ends of words such as catalogue, and replace composite vowels from words such as anaesthetic with a single 'e' (see 'miscellaneous', below).
-ise or -ize -yse or -yze	The Oxford English Dictionary recognises both 's' and 'z' as correct in words such as organise, recognise, analyse and realise. So officially it is a question of style. Where there's a choice, use 'ise' and 'yse'.	US spelling replaces 's' with 'z' in almost all cases. There are some exceptions. They include: advertise, advise, comprise, compromise, devise, excise, franchise, improvise, incise, merchandise, revise, supervise and surprise.	-ize endings are more common in scientific writing and by many international organisations.

© Emphasis Training Ltd. All rights reserved.



-our or -or	UK spelling usually uses -our, eg colour, behaviour, flavour, neighbour, armour, honour, savour, rumour, humour.	US spelling usually drops the 'u', especially where the syllable is unstressed eg color, behavior. Where stress is on the syllable, it keeps the 'u', eg contour, paramour.	
-ce or -se	With nouns that end in -ce, the verb form of the word will often end in -se, eg licence becomes (to) license; practice becomes (to) practise; advice – (to) advise.	Where the pronunciation of both noun and verb are the same, both are spelled the same. So practice is always with a 'c'; license, always an 's'. Some other nouns also take the -se ending, in contrast to the UK forms: defense, offense, pretense.	
-t or -tt	When a suffix is added to a word (-ed, -ing), the final consonant is only doubled if the final stress falls on the final vowel, eg 'benefited', but 'regretted'.	The same rule applies, but there is a preference to double-up the final consonant in 'benefitted'.	
-ll or -l	When words ending 'l' are given a suffix, the 'l' is doubled when the suffix begins with a vowel (-able, -ed, -ing, -ous), eg travelled. When the suffix begins with a consonant (-ful, -fully, -ment), no extra 'l' is added, eg 'fulfilment'. Words ending with a double 'l' usually lose an 'l' when a suffix starting with a consonant is added, eg 'skilful', 'wilful'.	When adding a suffix, the final 'l' is doubled only if the main stress of the word falls on the final vowel, eg 'annulled', but 'traveling'. Words ending in double 'l' usually remain intact when a suffix beginning with a consonant is added, eg 'fulfillment', 'skillful'.	



Spelling – miscellaneous

	UK English	US English	Notes
	aluminium	aluminum	
	anaesthetic	anesthetic	
	analogue	analog	
	artefact	artifact	
	axe	ax	
	benefited	benefitted	
	catalogue	catalog	
	cheque	check	
	furor	furor	
	grey	gray	
	kerb (pavement)	curb	
	manoeuvre	maneuver	
	mould	mold	
	moustache	mustache	
	oestrogen	estrogen	
	plough	plow	
	polythene	polyethylene	
	programme	program	
	sceptic	skeptic	
	skilful	skillful	
	speciality (but for medicine: specialty)	specialty	
	travelling	traveling	
	tyre	tire	
	titbit	tidbit	



Grammar

	UK English	US English	Notes
Collective nouns	May be treated as singular or plural, depending on whether it is about an organisation acting as a unit or referring to individual members. Some companies may make the style choice to always refer to themselves in the plural.	More likely to treat as singular, eg the staff is generally satisfied. May depend on context.	
Past participles	Got Proved Fitted UK English favours -t endings in the past tense, eg burnt, learnt, leapt. Some use of -ed ending (as above).	Gotten Proven or proved Fit US English more likely to use -ed ending, or sometimes the infinitive, eg quit, sweat, fit (as above).	While 'gotten' is often seen as an unwelcome Americanism, it can actually be traced back to England at around the time of Shakespeare.
Prepositions	At or during the weekend Different from or to An office in Queen's Road Named after She'll write to you	On the weekend Different from or than An office on Queen's Road Named for or after She'll write you [no preposition]	
Suffixes	Towards Forwards	Toward Forward	



Punctuation

	UK English	US English	Notes
Quotation marks	The most common method is single quotation marks for direct speech, and double for speech within speech. Punctuation is inside the quotation marks only if it is part of the quote or when something is quoted in its entirety.	Uses double quotation marks, and single for quotes within quotes. Has a slightly less logical approach to punctuation around quotes: commas and full stops are always inside the final quotation mark. All other punctuation is placed according to whether it forms part of the quote.	Some British publications with an international audience use double quotation marks, for example, <i>The Economist</i> , the <i>Guardian</i> and <i>The Times</i> .
Commas before final 'and' in a list (the serial or 'Oxford' comma)	Generally only used to avoid ambiguity, eg 'The sandwiches were egg, cheese, egg and cress, and ham and tomato.'	Usually employs the Oxford comma regardless.	
Dashes	Uses the en-dash (–) with a space on each side.	Uses the longer em-dash (—) with no space on either side.	
Colons	No capital letter after a colon.	May have a capital letter after the colon if it introduces a full sentence or question.	
Full stops (in US English, 'periods')	Usually used when an abbreviation is the first part of a word (abbr., co., Prof.), but not when the last letter is included (Mr, Mrs, Dr).	With some exceptions, uses periods at the end of both abbreviations and contractions.	These rules may be adapted according to the organisation's style. The main rule is to be consistent.



Hyphens	Quite consistently uses hyphens in compound adjectives before a noun, eg writing-skills training, man-eating lion. Will often use hyphens to indicate pronunciation, eg pre-empt.	More likely to create compound words without hyphens, which UK English would hyphenate or separate, eg holdup, printout.	
---------	---	--	--

Vocabulary – miscellaneous

	UK English	US English	Notes
	accelerator	gas (pedal)	
	autumn	fall	
	bank holiday	public holiday	
	banknote	bill	
	(bank) clerk	teller	
	British Summer Time (BST)	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	
	car bonnet/boot/exhaust	hood/trunk/muffler	
	chemist	pharmacy, drugstore	
	coach	bus	
	current account	checking account	
	debtors	receivables	
	doctor	physician	
	dual carriageway	four-lane/divided highway	



	from...to...	through	
	full stop	period	
	gearbox	transmission	
	ground floor	first floor	
	high street	main street	
	Inland Revenue	Internal Revenue	
	lift	elevator	
	post, post box	mail, mailbox	
	public school, private school	private school	
	queue	line (up)	
	ring road	beltway	
	shares	stock	
	solicitor	attorney	
	state school	public school	
	stock	inventory	
to table	to put (the motion) forward	to put (the motion) aside, to shelve	
	toilet	bathroom, restroom	
	turnover	revenues	
	unit trust	mutual fund	
	upmarket	upscale	
	value-added tax (VAT)	sales tax	