



BLOOMSBURY INTERNATIONAL

British English And American English



British English and American English

If you are planning a trip to America but you've been [studying British English](#) (or vice versa), you could have a few problems on your trip. For example, imagine one day that you really fancy eating this->



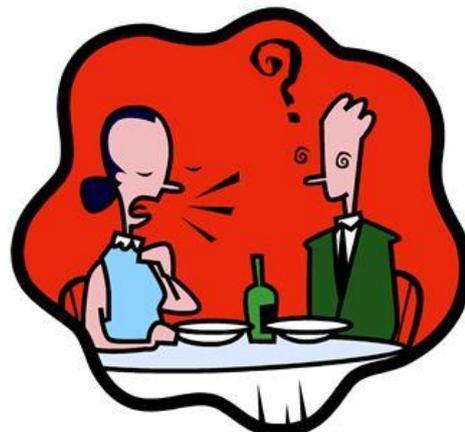
If you ask someone in the UK where you can buy 'chips' from, they'll probably send you to a local chippy (fish and chips shop) or to MacDonald's. However, if you ask someone in America the same question, they will probably tell you to go to a supermarket, thinking you want this ->



Although technically we all speak the same language (English), there are many differences between British English and American English:

Pronunciation – Although the word might be spelt the same, it is possible that people from the UK and America pronounce it differently. E.g. the word 'tomato' is pronounced 'tom-ah-to' in the UK but 'tom-ay-to' in the USA and the word 'mobile' is pronounced 'mow-bile' in the UK but 'mow-bl' in the USA.

Spelling – There are a few major spelling differences between British and American English. This is because British English has generally kept the spelling of words that it has taken from other languages but American English has changed the spelling to look more like how the word actually sounds when you say it.

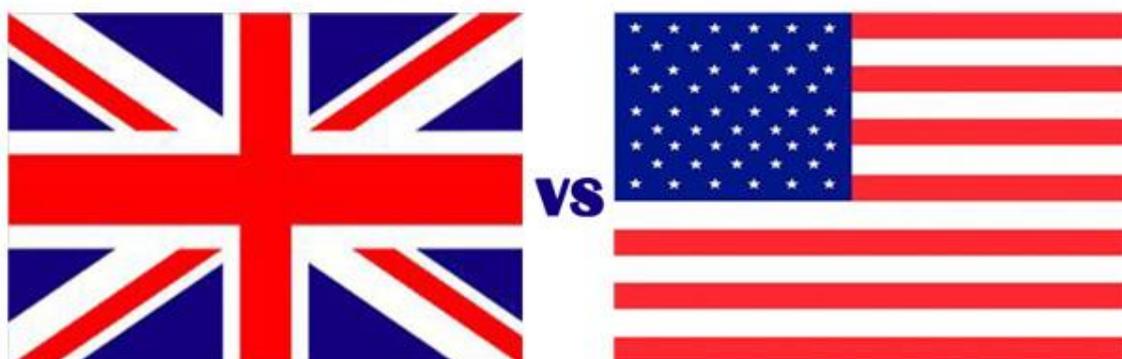


For example:

British English	American English
colour	color
centre	center
organise	organize
travelling	traveling
licence	license
programme	program

Grammar – There are many grammatical differences between American and British English. For example, if someone asks if you are hungry but you have just finished your lunch, in British English you would need to use the present perfect tense, “No, I’ve eaten already”, but in American English you can use the past tense, “No, I ate already” (this would be incorrect in British English).

Vocabulary – As you can see, there are many differences between British English and American English. However, the most complicated for English language learners is probably the differences in vocabulary, including idioms and phrasal verbs. Below you will see a few of the main vocabulary differences between British and American English:



British English	American English
anti-clockwise	counter-clockwise
autumn	fall
boot (of a car)	trunk
chips	fries or French fries
crisps	potato chips
dustbin or bin	garbage can or trash can
film	movie (or film)
flat (to live in)	apartment
garden	yard
holiday	vacation
lift	elevator
motorway	freeway or expressway
nappy	diaper
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gas or gasoline
postcode	zip code
queue	line
sweets	candy
torch	flashlight
trousers	pants (or trousers)
tube or underground	subway
zip	zipper

As you can see, there are many differences between American English and British English but don't worry about it too much. Most Americans and Britons know many of the differences so you shouldn't find yourself in too much trouble when you go on holiday! The most important thing to remember is try to be consistent (especially when you are writing English) – decide which type of English you are going to use and stick with it.

It is also useful to decide which type of English you want to work on – if you want to learn British English, it is a good idea to study at a [school in the UK](#) (or the USA for American English) or check where the teachers are from before you [book a course](#) in your country.



Have fun with English!

Look at these pairs of words below. From the meaning or spelling, can you guess if they are British English or American English?

1. Aeroplane – airplane
2. Car park – parking lot
3. Theatre – theater
4. Drugstore – chemist
5. Aluminium – aluminum
6. Soccer – football
7. Lorry – truck
8. Cell phone – mobile phone
9. Trainers – sneakers
10. Defense – defence

Aeroplane (BE) – airplane (AE), Car park (BE) – parking lot (AE), Theatre (BE) – theater (AE),
Drugstore (AE) – chemist (BE), Aluminium (BE) – aluminum (AE), Soccer (AE) – football (BE),
Lorry (BE) – truck (AE), Cell phone (AE) – mobile phone (BE), Trainers (BE) – sneakers (AE),
Defense (AE) – defence (BE)

Answers: