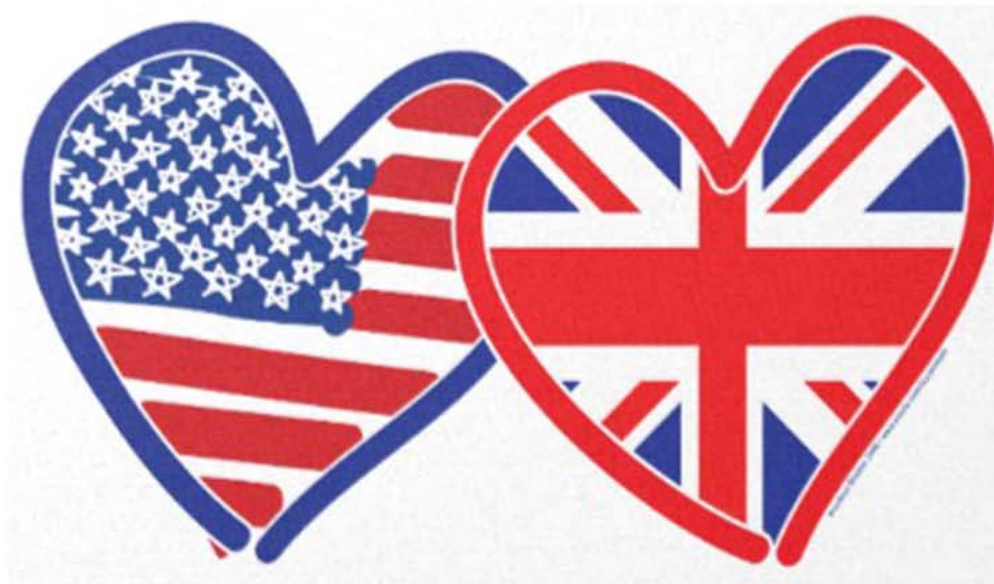


American and British English

Hello and welcome back, in this lesson we will be exploring the main differences between American and British English. We will also look at the similarities and see why changes occur.



Vocabulary

The most noticeable difference between American and British English is vocabulary.

There are hundreds of everyday words that are different.

Brits call the front of a car the *bonnet*, while Americans call it the *hood*.



Americans go *on vacation*, while Brits go *on holidays*, or *hols*.



New Yorkers live in *apartments*; Londoners live in *flats*.



Collective Nouns

There are a few grammatical differences between the two varieties of English. Let's start with **collective nouns**.

We use collective nouns to refer to a group of individuals.



In American English, collective nouns are singular.

staff refers to a group of employees



band refers to a group of musicians



team refers to a group of athletes



Americans would say, “The band **is** good.”

But in British English, collective nouns can be singular or plural. You might hear someone from Britain say, “The team **are** playing tonight” or “The team **is** playing tonight.”

Auxiliary verbs

Another grammar difference between American and British English relates to auxiliary verbs.

Auxiliary verbs, “help” the main verb by adding information about time, **modality** and voice.

Let’s look at the auxiliary verb **shall**. Brits sometimes use *shall* to express the future.



“I shall go home now.”



Americans know what *shall* means, but rarely use it in conversation. It seems very formal.

Americans would probably use



“I will go home now.”



When Americans want to express a lack of obligation,
“You do not need to come to work today.”

Brits = “You needn’t come to work today.”



Past Tense Verbs

You will also find some small differences with past forms of irregular verbs.

The past tense of *learn* in American English is *learned*.

British English has the option of *learned* or *learnt*.

dreamed and *dreamt*



burned and *burnt*



Americans tend to use the *-ed* ending; Brits tend to use the *-t* ending.

Past participle

In the past participle form, Americans tend to use the *-en* ending for some irregular verbs.
For example, an American might say, “I have never **gotten** caught”



whereas a Brit would say, “I have never **got** caught.”



Americans use both **got** and **gotten** in the past participle. Brits only use **got**.



Don't worry too much about these small differences in the past forms of irregular verbs.

People in both countries can easily understand both ways, although Brits tend to think of the American way as incorrect.



Tag Questions



A tag question is a grammatical form that turns a statement into a question.

“The whole situation is unfortunate, isn’t it?”



“You don’t like him, do you?”



The tag includes a pronoun and its matching form of the verb **be**, **have** or **do**.

Tag questions encourage people to respond and agree with the speaker.

Americans use tag questions, too, but less often than Brits.

Spelling

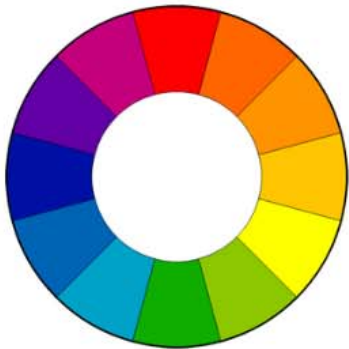
There are hundreds of minor spelling differences between British and American English.

You can thank American **lexicographer** Noah Webster for this.



You can see Webster's legacy in the American spelling of words like:

color (from colour)



honor (from honour)



labor (from labour)



Webster dropped the letter *u* from these words to make the spelling match the pronunciation.

Not so different after all

British and American English have far more similarities than differences. We think the difference between American and British English is often **exaggerated**.
If you can understand one style, you should be able to understand the other style.



With the exception of some regional dialects, most Brits and Americans can understand each other without too much difficulty.

We watch each other's TV shows, sing each other's songs, and read each other's books.
We even make fun of each other's accents.