

INFOGRAPHIC

English: One Language, Many Flavors – Or Is It Flavours?

Created by the British, reshaped by the Americans, English is now the global language. Spoken by over **1.4 billion people**, it's the language of **business, technology, travel, music, TV, and film.**

But which version do you use? While native speakers debate which strain reigns supreme, non-native users are left wondering whether it's *soccer* or *football*, a *biscuit* or a *cookie*. These differences can confuse even fluent speakers.

Let's break down the key differences to help non-native speakers navigate English's competing forms.

THE CORE ANGLOSPHERE

Only **six countries** have a majority of native English speakers: **United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland.** Everywhere else, English is either an official language or widely spoken as a second language—but *it's not the mother tongue* for most of the population.



BRITISH VS AMERICAN ENGLISH

The two most dominant forms of English are the **British** and **American** versions.

In **international business** and **tech communication**, *American English* is the most widely used, especially in **digital contexts**. *British English* remains prevalent across **Commonwealth countries*** and is still widely used in **academia** and **formal writing**.

* A political association of 50+ countries, mostly former British colonies.

LOCATIONS & QUALIFICATIONS

In Europe, learners typically follow the **CEFR** (Common European Framework of Reference) and prepare for exams like **Cambridge B2 First** or **IELTS**—both aligned with **British English**.

In the Americas and much of Asia, **TOEFL** (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is more common. It's based on **American English** and widely accepted by universities and employers.

Your location often shapes which variant and testing standard you'll encounter.



VOCABULARY

You Say Crisps, I Say Chips

There are words that differ entirely—or mean different things depending on who’s saying them. Here are some common examples:

	
Trousers	→ Pants
Flat	→ Apartment
Boot (car)	→ Trunk
Bonnet (car)	→ Hood
Crisps	→ Chips
Chips	→ French fries
Jumper	→ Sweater
Trainers	→ Sneakers
Fizzy drink	→ Soda
Holiday	→ Vacation
Lorry	→ Truck
Biscuit	→ Cookie
Tap	→ Faucet
Nappy	→ Diaper
University	→ College <i>or</i> School
Chemist	→ Drugstore <i>or</i> Pharmacy



SOME HISTORY...

After American colonies gained independence from Britain in the late 18th century, education and lexicography figures like **Noah Webster** pushed for spelling reforms to establish a **distinct identity**.

Over time, each variant evolved separately due to differing influences, societal changes, and standardization efforts.

These factors led to variations in vocabulary, grammar, and spelling, reflecting the broader national identities and historical paths of the US and the UK.

GRAMMAR GAPS

Have You Ever? Did You Ever?

Even the mechanics of the language—like verb tenses—can differ between variants. Let’s take a look at some key differences.



			
Verb tense	I’ve just eaten	→	I just ate
Prepositions	at the weekend	→	on the weekend
	in hospital	→	in the hospital
Past participles	He’s got much thinner	→	He’s gotten much thinner
Collective nouns	My team are winning	→	My team is winning



SPELLING

Recognise or Recognize?

Many words are spelled differently in each variant. Common spelling shifts between British and American English include:



			
-our becomes -or	Colour	→	Color
-ise becomes -ize	Organise	→	Organize
-re becomes -er	Centre	→	Center
-ce becomes -se	Defence	→	Defense
-t becomes -ed	Dreamt	→	Dreamed
-ll becomes -l	Travelled	→	Traveled
BUT!			
-l becomes -ll in certain verbs	Enrol	→	Enroll
Some of the most common variations:	Behaviour	→	Behavior
	Metre	→	Meter
	Licence	→	License
	Cancelled	→	Canceled
	Catalogue	→	Catalog
	Learnt	→	Learned

DIALECTS AND ACCENTS

One Language, Many Accents: How English Changes as It Travels

Clearly, the British sound different from the Americans, Australians, or Irish. Why and how these variations developed is a big topic—one for a white paper.

In fact, there's no such thing as just "British" or "American" English.

In the UK, Received Pronunciation (RP)—aka "The Queen's English"—is spoken by fewer than 2% of people. A Scouser from Liverpool sounds as different from RP as a Dubliner does.

American accents range from Southern drawls to New York snaps to Californian upspeak.

Regional differences shape pronunciation, vocabulary, and rhythm—even within one country.



Resources: David Crystal, *The Stories of English*, 2004; David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 2nd Edition, 2003; Peter Trudgill & Jean Hannah, *International English: A Guide to the Varieties of Standard English*, 6th Edition, 2017; British Library, *Sounds Familiar?* Project, 2006–present



PRONUNCIATION PATTERNS

A Vowel Divide: To Schwa or Not to Schwa?

The schwa /ə/ is English's most common vowel sound—an unstressed, neutral “uh,” like the **a** in *about* or the **o** in *lemon*. Can you hear it? British English often ends words with a **schwa**, giving speech a smoother sound. American English, by contrast, tends to pronounce “-on” endings more clearly:

		
Amazon	Amaz/ ə n/	→ Amaz/ ɑː n/
Marathon	Marath/ ə n/	→ Marath/ ɑː n/
Python	Pyth/ ə n/	→ Pyth/ ɑː n/

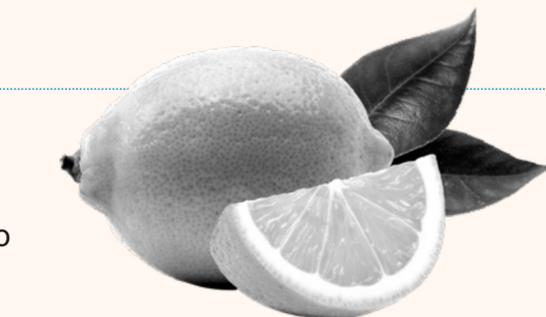
British English favors /ə/ endings, while American English prefers /ɑːn/.

Are You Stressed?

The place you put the stress in a word can also change.

Americans often stress the first syllable: **cigarette**, **magazine**, **olive** oil, **ice** cream, **frustrating**, **good**-looking. Conversely, the British typically stress the **last syllable** or word.

That said, American stress patterns are becoming increasingly common in British English, especially among younger generations.



...Don't Flap!

Another feature in American English is “flapping,” where a T between vowels sounds like a soft D:

	
water	→ <i>wader</i>
better	→ <i>bedder</i>
city	→ <i>cidy</i>

British English retains a clearer T sound in these cases.

THE CASE AGAINST (AND FOR) AMERICAN ENGLISH

Some critics argue that American English **oversimplifies**, prioritizes pop culture over tradition, and **lacks the nuance** found in other variants.

Others see these very traits as strengths. It's **modern, global**, and well suited to fast-moving industries like tech. It simplifies complexities and **adapts quickly** to real-world usage.

In short: American English may have lost some “u”s, but it's gained a lot of influence.

MIND THE EXPRESSIONS

Say It Here, Not There

A lot of American idioms have made it across the pond, thanks to TV, film, and business jargon.

	Touch base	Check in or make contact briefly
	Bite the bullet	Accept something unpleasant but necessary
	Ballpark figure	Rough estimate
	But British idioms don't always travel so well in the opposite direction:	
	Bob's your uncle	And there you have it
	Chuffed to bits	Very pleased
	Gutted	Extremely disappointed

Try using these in the US and expect a few blank stares.

FINAL THOUGHT

Whether you speak British or American English, the key is **consistency** and **knowing your audience**.

British English is standard in Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Elsewhere, American English is more common.

Whichever you use, small differences—like an extra “l” or a missing “u”—rarely get in the way of being understood.

Did you even notice which variant of English this infographic was written in?