

# Guide to the differences between British and American English

As translators who render various languages into English, we almost always find ourselves at a crossroads with which variation of English to use when a client does not specify their preferences, or is simply open to any variation being used. While many may think that this surely isn't a big deal when starting a project - as supposedly the multiple variations of English are more or less the same across the board -, this couldn't be further from the truth.

In fact, when producing translations to an editorial standard, it is essential that translators understand and recognise the slightest nuance between the variations of English, as a lack of consistency can cause a project to be rejected at the publisher level. As such, we have collated a list of examples to outline the differentiation that exists between the two variations of English that we translate into the most here at englishpanish; British and American English (*note*: variations such as Canadian English and Australian English follow their own conventions, however, including them would be outside the scope of this article).

We hope that this guide serves as a go-to reference for not only translators but also anyone undertaking the valiant process of learning English. This post may also prove to be useful for native English speakers who, themselves, are trying to improve their writing and linguistic skills.

British English	American English
<b>Formatting</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Date</u></b></p> <p>In British English, the formatting of dates usually follows the convention of DD/MM/YY, with there being no punctuation separating the written form. When the days of the week are used, there is also no separation with a comma.</p> <p><b><u>DD/MM/YY</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23 October 2021 = <u>23/10/21</u></li> <li>• Thursday 23 October 2021</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Date</u></b></p> <p>In American English, the formatting of dates usually follows the convention of MM/DD/YY, with there being a comma separating the day from the year in the written form. When the days of the week are present, a comma is used to separate.</p> <p><b><u>MM/DD/YY</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 23, 2021 = <u>10/23/21</u></li> <li>• Thursday, October 23, 2021</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Number</u></b></p> <p>In British English, no capitalisation is used when writing the abbreviation of 'number'.</p> <p><b><u>No capitalisation for abbreviation of 'number'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no. 625</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Number</u></b></p> <p>In American English, capitalized 'No.' is used for the abbreviation of 'number'</p> <p><b><u>Capitalized 'No' used for abbreviation of 'number'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. 625</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Time</u></b></p> <p>In British English, when writing the time, the hour and minutes are separated by a full stop.</p> <p><b><u>Time separated by a full stop + AM/PM</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12.30PM</li> </ul> <p>* In British English, times such as 10.15, 11.15, 12.15 etc., are expressed by saying 'quarter past'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10.15 = <i>quarter past ten</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Time</u></b></p> <p>In American English, when writing the time, the hour and minutes are separated by a colon.</p> <p><b><u>Time separated by a colon + AM/PM</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12:30PM</li> </ul> <p>* In American English, times such as 10:15, 11:15, 12:15 etc., are expressed by saying '(a) quarter after'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10:15 = <i>(a) quarter after ten</i></li> </ul>
<b>Punctuation</b>	

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Titles</u></b></p> <p>In British English, when writing titles (Mr/Ms/Mx), no punctuation is used to separate the title and the name.</p> <p><b><u>After titles, no punctuation</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Jones / Ms Smith</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Titles</u></b></p> <p>In American English, when writing titles (Mr./Ms./Mx.), a full stop is used to separate the title and the name.</p> <p><b><u>After titles, no punctuation</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Jones / Ms. Smith</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Initialisms and contractions</u></b></p> <p>In British English, there is no punctuation when using contractions or initialisms.</p> <p><b><u>No punctuation with initialisms and contractions</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United Kingdom = UK</li> <li>• Doctor = Dr</li> <li>• European Union= EU</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Initialisms and contractions</u></b></p> <p>In American English, a full stop is used when writing contractions or initialisms.</p> <p><b><u>Full stop used with initialisms and contractions</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United Kingdom = U.K.</li> <li>• Doctor = Dr.</li> <li>• European Union= E.U.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Hyphenation</u></b></p> <p>In British English, a hyphen is used to separate compound adjectives and nouns.</p> <p><b><u>A hyphen to separate compound adjectives and nouns.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth-watering</li> <li>• Last-minute presentation</li> </ul> <p>*In British English, a hyphen is used to separate prefixes from the root word, especially when the final letter of the prefix and the first letter of the root word are the same.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-exist</li> <li>• Pre-eminent</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Hyphenation</u></b></p> <p>In American English, there is no punctuation when joining compound adjectives before a noun.</p> <p><b><u>No hyphen to separate compound adjectives and nouns.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouthwatering</li> <li>• Last minute presentation</li> </ul> <p>*In American English, no hyphen is used to separate prefixes from the root word.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coexist</li> <li>• Preeminent</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Commas, full stops and speech marks</u></b></p> <p>In British English, commas and full stops are positioned outside quotation marks.</p> <p><b><u>Commas and full stops outside quotation marks.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I can’t do it”, she said.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Commas, full stops and speech marks</u></b></p> <p>In American English, commas and full stops are positioned inside quotation marks.</p> <p><b><u>Commas and full stops inside quotation marks.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I can’t do it,” she said.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Em-dash/En-dash</u></b></p> <p>In British English, an en-dash (separated with a space either side) is generally preferred when separating running text.</p> <p><b><u>En-dash separated by spaces either side.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I called my friend – John – to see if he was free”.</li> </ul> <p>* The choice of em-/en- dash may vary from publisher to publisher and, as such, the most important thing to remember is consistency.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Em-dash/En-dash</u></b></p> <p>In American English, an em-dash (with no spaces either side) is generally preferred when separating running text.</p> <p><b><u>Em-dash with no spaces either side.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I called my friend—John—to see if he was free.”</li> </ul> <p>* The choice of em-/en- dash may vary from publisher to publisher and, as such, the most important thing to remember is consistency.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Serial (Oxford) comma</u></b></p> <p>In British English, an Oxford comma is not generally used to separate lists, except in the case that there is ambiguity.</p> <p><b><u>No use of Oxford comma to separate lists.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like to eat bananas, apples and pears.</li> </ul> <p><i>However, The Oxford comma may avoid ambiguity in the following two examples:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Serial (Oxford) comma</u></b></p> <p>In American English, an Oxford comma is generally used to separate lists.</p> <p><b><u>Oxford comma used to separate lists.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like to eat bananas, apples, and pears.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I went out with my brothers, Daniel, and John. <i>(I went out with my brother. However, additionally, Daniel and John came, and they are not my brothers).</i></li> <li>• I went out with my brothers, Daniel and John. <i>(I went out with my brothers who are called Daniel and John).</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Spelling</b>	
<p>There are many general differences in the way some words are spelt between British and American English. Below is a list comparing some of the most common:</p>	
<p><b><u>-RE</u></b> Fibre Theatre Centre</p>	<p><b><u>-ER</u></b> Fiber Theater Center <i>*However, some spellings keep the -re ending when preceded by 'c' or when the word is imported from French:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genre</li> <li>• Double entendre</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>-ISE</u></b> Generalise Colonise Nationalise</p>	<p><b><u>-IZE</u></b> Generalize Colonize Nationalize</p>
<p><b><u>-ISATION</u></b> Organisation Acclimatisation</p>	<p><b><u>-IZATION</u></b> Organization Acclimatization</p>
<p><b><u>-L</u></b> Modeling Fueling Traveling</p>	<p><b><u>-LL</u></b> Modelling Fuelling Travelling</p>
<p><b><u>-OUR</u></b> Harbour Glamour Colour</p>	<p><b><u>-OR</u></b> Harbor Glamor Color</p>

<b><u>-LYSE</u></b> Analyse Paralyse	<b><u>-LYZE</u></b> Analyze Paralyze
<b><u>-CE</u></b> Licence (noun) License (verb) Defence	<b><u>-SE</u></b> License Defense
<b><u>-OE</u></b> Foetus Oesophagus Coeliac	<b><u>-E</u></b> Fetus Esophagus Celiac
<b><u>-AE</u></b> Aetiology Anaemia Anaesthetic	<b><u>-E</u></b> Etiology Anemia Anesthetic
<b><u>-PH</u></b> Sulphate Sulphur	<b><u>-F</u></b> Sulfate Sulfur
<b><u>-OGUE</u></b> Dialogue Analogue Monologue	<b><u>-OG</u></b> Dialog Analog Monolog
<b><u>-WARDS</u></b> Backwards Afterwards Upwards	<b><u>-WARD</u></b> Backward Afterward Upward
<b>Vocabulary</b>	
<p>There are many terminological differences between the USA and the UK; far too many to include in the scope of this guide. As such, we encourage you to take a look at the following link to a site where the main differences are collated into a useful list!</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://www.lexico.com/grammar/british-and-american-terms">https://www.lexico.com/grammar/british-and-american-terms</a></p>	
<b>Grammar</b>	
<b><u>Delexical verbs</u></b>	<b><u>Delexical verbs</u></b>
In British English, the delexical verb 'have' is used when talking about everyday activities.	In American English, the delexical verb 'take' is used when talking about everyday activities.
<b><u>Using the delexical verb 'have'</u></b>	<b><u>Using the delexical verb 'take'</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm going to have a bath</li> <li>• I'm going to have a rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm going to take a bath</li> <li>• I'm going to take a rest</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Use of the auxiliary 'shall'</u></b></p> <p>In British English, it is common to use the word 'shall' to make suggestions.</p> <p><b><u>Using the shall to make a suggestion</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shall I open the window?</li> <li>• Shall we meet at 10.30pm</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Use of the auxiliary 'shall'</u></b></p> <p>In American English, it is quite uncommon to use the word 'shall' to make suggestions. Rather, constructions like 'Should I ...?', 'Can I ...?', 'How about I...?'</p> <p><b><u>No use of shall to make a suggestion</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should I open the window?</li> <li>• How about we meet at 10.30pm</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Have got</u></b></p> <p>In British English, it is common to say 'have got' when referring to possession.</p> <p><b><u>Using 'have got' to refer to possession</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have got a new car</li> <li>• I've got two cats and a dog</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Got</u></b></p> <p>In American English, it is common to say only 'have' when referring to possession.</p> <p><b><u>Using 'have' to refer to possession</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have a new car</li> <li>• I've two cats and a dog</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Past participle of get: got</u></b></p> <p>In British English, the past participle of 'get' is 'got'.</p> <p><b><u>Past participle of 'get' is 'got'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You could have got me a gift!</li> <li>• She's got very tall</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Past participle of get: gotten</u></b></p> <p>In American English, the past participle of 'get' is 'gotten'</p> <p><b><u>Past participle of 'get' is 'gotten'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You could have gotten me a gift!</li> <li>• She's gotten very tall</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Collective nouns</u></b></p> <p>In British English, collective nouns are usually plural as a group is thought of as lots of individuals, but can also be spoken about in singular form.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Collective nouns</u></b></p> <p>In American English, collective nouns are usually singular.</p>



<p><b><u>Using plural/singular agreements with collective nouns</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My family are/is in town for the weekend</li> <li>• The team were/was winning the match</li> </ul> <p>*'The police' is always plural.</p>	<p><b><u>Using a singular agreement with collective nouns</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My family is in town for the weekend</li> <li>• The team was winning the match</li> </ul> <p>*'The police' is always plural.</p>
<p><b><u>Past tense suffix: -t /-ed</u></b></p> <p>In British English, some regular past tense verbs can be spelt with either '-t' or '-ed', with the ending '-t' being the more common.</p> <p><b><u>Spelling of some past tense verbs with '-t' or '-ed'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burnt/Burned</li> <li>• Learnt/Learned</li> <li>• Dreamt/Dreamed</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Past tense suffix: -ed</u></b></p> <p>In American English, all regular past tense verbs are spelt with '-ed'</p> <p><b><u>Spelling of all past tense verbs with '-ed'</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burned</li> <li>• Learned</li> <li>• Dreamed</li> </ul>