

Differences between US and UK English

When writing your dissertation, research paper or essay you have to consistently follow the conventions of a specific style of English. The most commonly used forms are American English, British English and Australian English. Although these dialects follow many of the same rules, they also have some important differences in spelling, punctuation and word choice.

Spelling

As the table below shows, the difference between UK and US spelling usually relates to just one or two letters.

US	UK	Australia
uses -ize, -yze (e.g. <i>quantize, analyze</i>)	prefers -ise, -yse (e.g. <i>quantise, analyse</i>), almost always but is flexible	uses ise, yse
-er (e.g. <i>center, meter, etc.</i>)	-re (e.g. <i>centre, metre, etc.</i>)	British usage
uses -or (e.g. <i>honor, color, splendor</i>)	uses -our (e.g. <i>honour, colour, splendour</i>)	British usage
uses -ction (e.g. <i>connection</i>)	acceptable to use -xion (e.g. <i>connexion</i>), American usage but this is increasingly rare	
often drops -e for word modifications (e.g. <i>judge</i> to <i>judgment</i> , <i>live</i> to <i>livable</i>)	generally keeps e for word modifications keeps - (e.g. <i>judge</i> to <i>judgement</i> , <i>live</i> to <i>liveable</i>) e (e.g. <i>judgement</i>), like British; but sometimes drops -e (e.g. <i>livable</i>)	
usually prefers -e to -oe or -ae (e.g. <i>pediatrician, leukemia</i>)	uses -oe and -ae (e.g. <i>paediatrician, leukaemia</i>)	British usage

The following cheat sheet outlines the *preferred* spelling of some words that are commonly used in academic writing.

Verbs

US	UK	Australia
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Verbs

US	UK	Australia
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analyze	analyse	analyse
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apologize	apologise	apologise
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capitalize	capitalise	capitalise
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categorize	categorise	categorise
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characterize	characterise	characterise
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colonize	colonise	colonise
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endeavor	endeavour	endeavour
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enroll	enrol	enrol
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fulfill	fulfil	fulfil
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globalize	globalise	globalise
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honor	honour	honour
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hypothesize	hypothesise	hypothesise
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inquire	enquire	enquire
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install	instal	install
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legalize	legalise	legalise
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Verbs

US	UK	Australia
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maneuver	manoeuvre	manoeuvre
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maximize	maximise	maximise
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minimize	minimise	minimise
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mold	mould	mould
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neutralize	neutralise	neutralise
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optimize	optimise	optimise
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paralyze	paralyse	paralyse
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plow	plough	plough
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privatize	privatise	privatise
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randomize	randomise	randomise
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realize	realise	realise
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recognize	recognise	recognise
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past-tense verbs

us	uk	australia
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canceled	cancelled	cancelled
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past-tense verbs

us uk australia

channeled channelled channelled

labeled labelled labelled

modeled modelled modelled

traveled travelled travelled

nouns

us uk australia

acknowledgment acknowledgement (either)

aluminum aluminium aluminium

artifact artefact artefact

behavior behaviour behaviour

caliber calibre calibre

center centre centre

color colour colour

cooperation co-operation (either)

councilor councillor councilor

nouns

us	uk	australia
counselor	counsellor	counselor
defense	defence	defence
estrogen	oestrogen	oestrogen
fetus	foetus	foetus
fiber	fibre	fibre
flavor	flavour	flavour
humor	humour	humour
judgment	judgement	judgement
labor	labour	labour
leukemia	leukaemia	leukaemia
license	licence	licence
liter	litre	litre
meter	metre	metre
neighbor	neighbour	neighbour
organization	organisation	organisation

nouns

us	uk	australia
paleontology	palaeontology	palaeontology
program	programme <i>(but program if computer-related)</i>	program
sulfur	sulphur	sulphur
theater	theatre	theatre
tire	tyre	tyre
vapor	vapour	vapour

Adjectives

US	UK	Australia
aging	ageing	ageing
favorite	favourite	favourite
gray	grey	grey
livable	liveable	livable
movable	moveable	moveable
orthopedic	orthopaedic	orthopaedic

Adjectives

US	UK	Australia
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salable	saleable	Saleable
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skeptical	sceptical	sceptical
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somber	sombre	sombre
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Punctuation

The main punctuation differences relate to single and double quotation marks and where to place other punctuation in relation to quotations.

US	UK	Australia
Double quotation marks ("x"), but alternate with single for quotations within quotations (e.g. <i>She said, "This model has been called 'the best."</i>)	Single quotation marks ('x'), but alternate with double for quotations within quotations (e.g. <i>She said, 'This model has been called "the best"</i> .)	UK usage
Punctuation appears within quotation marks (e.g. <i>"The best there is," she said.</i> or <i>She said, "the best there is."</i>) except when punctuation emphasizes the writer's (e.g. <i>Did she say, "the best there is"?</i> or <i>She told them we are "the best there is"!</i>)	Punctuation appears outside quotation marks, except when the punctuation is part of the original quotation (e.g. <i>'The best there is', she said.</i> but <i>She said, 'the sentence</i> rather than the speaker's quotation <i>best there is.'</i> ; also, <i>Did she say, 'the best</i> (e.g. <i>Did she say, "the best there is"?</i> or <i>She told them we are "the best there is"!</i>)	UK usage

Verb conjugation

There are some differences in subject-verb agreement with collective nouns (nouns referring to a group of individual things as a unified whole) and in past tense verb forms.

US	UK	Australia
Tends to treat collective nouns as	Tends to treat collective nouns as	US us

US	UK	Australia
singular (e.g. <i>The team is going to win, the staff has decided</i>)	plural (e.g. <i>The team are going to win, the staff have decided</i>)	age
Verbs take -ed endings for simple past tense and past participles (e.g. <i>compel</i> to <i>compelled</i> , <i>spell</i> to <i>spelled</i> , <i>learn</i> to <i>learned</i>), with the exception of common irregular verbs (e.g. <i>take</i> to <i>took</i> , <i>hear</i> to <i>heard</i>)	Verbs take -ed endings for simple past tense and UK us past participles, but with more exceptions (e.g. <i>compel</i> to <i>compelled</i> but <i>spell</i> to <i>spelt</i> , <i>learn</i> to <i>learnt</i>); irregular verbs are conjugated the same	age

Abbreviations

There is also disagreement over how to use periods in abbreviations.

US	UK	Australia
Most title abbreviations take a period (e.g. <i>Doctor</i> to <i>Dr.</i> , <i>Mister</i> to <i>Mr.</i> , <i>Honorabl e</i> to <i>Hon.</i> , <i>Drive</i> to <i>Dr.</i>)	Title abbreviations take a period only if the abbreviation does not end on the last letter of the full word (e.g. <i>Doctor</i> to <i>Dr.</i> , <i>Mister</i> to <i>Mr.</i> , but <i>Honourab le</i> to <i>Hon.</i> , <i>Drive</i> to <i>Dr.</i>)	UK usage

Consistency is key

Most importantly, each individual word must be spelled the same throughout your document. However, it's also best to avoid mixing different styles of English.

Examples:

- The **defense** minister first travelled to China in 2013. (**US English/UK English**)
- The **defense** minister first traveled to China in 2013. (**US English**)
- The defence minister first travelled to China in 2013. (**UK English**)

In addition, the same spelling should generally be used for all forms of a word.

Examples:

- The **organization** is headquartered in Osaka, but it usually **organizes** workshops in Tokyo. (**US English**)
- The colours of the samples varied greatly, but the smallest sample was the most colourful. (**UK English**)

