



*Tips and tools*  
FOR THE WRITING WORLD

# British Spelling and Grammar Conventions

Does Harry Potter live in or on Privet Drive? Would you rather be cosy in your favourite woollen pyjamas or be cozy in your favorite woolen pajamas? Do you prefer biscuits or cookies?

English may be a universal language, but there are many nuanced differences between US and British English. Here's a quick guide to some of the most common distinctions.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS US	COLLECTIVE NOUNS UK
Collective nouns generally take a singular verb when they refer to a group as a unit: <i>Our team is playing really well today.</i>	Collective nouns can take plural or singular, but plural is more common: <i>Our team are playing really well today.</i>
Company names/ organizations are commonly treated as singular nouns: <i>Dragonfly Editorial is working on a new project.</i>	Company names/ organizations are commonly treated as collective nouns: <i>Dragonfly Editorial are working on a new project.</i>

PREPOSITIONS US	PREPOSITIONS UK
Different: than (or from) <i>Spain is very different than Italy.</i>	Different: to (or from) <i>Spain is very different to Italy.</i>
Expressions of time: on (or over) <i>I will see a movie on the weekend.</i>	Expressions of time: at <i>I will see a movie at the weekend.</i>
School: in <i>She studied math in school.</i>	School: at <i>She studied maths at school.</i>
Street names: on <i>I live on Privet Drive.</i>	Street names: in <i>I live in Privet Drive.</i>
Until: <i>The shop stays open until midnight.</i>	Till: <i>The shop stays open till midnight.</i>
Years: in <i>I haven't been there in years!</i>	Years: for <i>I haven't been there for years!</i>

HYPHENS US	HYPHENS UK
Words with prefixes or suffixes are often written as one word: <i>coworker, reengineer</i>	Some words are hyphenated where US English would not hyphenate, particularly where there is a collision of vowels or consonants: <i>co-worker, re-engineer</i>

QUOTATIONS US	QUOTATIONS UK
Double quotation marks: <i>"Let it be"</i>	Single quotation marks: <i>'Let it be'</i>
Embedded quotes: single quotation marks. <i>"And then she said, 'Let it be.'"</i>	Embedded quotes: double quotation marks. <i>'And then she said, "Let it be.'"</i>
Commas and periods always appear inside quotation marks: <i>I was disappointed by his awful "performance."</i>	Commas and periods appear outside quotation marks unless punctuation is part of the quote: <i>I was disappointed by his awful 'performance'.</i>

SPELLING RULES US	SPELLING RULES UK
-e- <i>(maneuver, anemia)</i>	-oe- / -ae- <i>(manoeuvre, anaemia)</i>
-ed in past tense <i>(learned, spelled)</i>	-t in past tense <i>(learnt, spelt)</i>
-ense ( <i>defense, license</i> )	-ence ( <i>defence, licence</i> )
-er ( <i>center, liter</i> )	-re ( <i>centre, litre</i> )
-iza- ( <i>organization</i> )	-isa- ( <i>organisation</i> )
-ize ( <i>organize</i> )	-ise ( <i>organise</i> )
-izi- ( <i>organizing</i> )	-isi- ( <i>organising</i> )
Single L: -el- ( <i>marvelous</i> ) -ling- ( <i>modeling</i> )	Double L: -ell- ( <i>marvellous</i> ) -lling ( <i>modelling</i> )
Double L: -ll at the end ( <i>enroll</i> ) -llful ( <i>skillful</i> ) -llment ( <i>fulfillment</i> )	Single L: -l at the end ( <i>enrol</i> ) -lful ( <i>skilful</i> ) -lment ( <i>fulfilment</i> )
-m ( <i>program</i> )	-mme ( <i>programme, but computer program</i> )
-ment ( <i>judgment</i> )	-ement ( <i>judgement</i> )
-or ( <i>favorite, rumor</i> )	-our ( <i>favourite, rumour</i> )
-yze ( <i>analyze</i> )	-yse ( <i>analyse</i> )



WORDS LIST US	WORDS LIST UK
afterward	afterwards
airplane	aeroplane
aluminum	aluminium
amid, among, while	amidst, amongst, whilst
annex	annexe
around: hang around, lie around	about: hang about, lie about
apartment	flat
ATM	cashpoint
ax	axe
candidacy	candidature
centennial	centenary
check (bank)	cheque
checkered	chequered
chili	chilli
chips (potato)	crisps
college	university
cookie	biscuit
cozy	cosy
curb	kerb
custom-made	bespoke
dispatch	despatch
draft	draught
drugstore	chemist
elevator	lift
expiration	expiry
flashlight	torch
French fries	chips
gray	grey
hood (of a car)	bonnet
inquire / inquiry	enquire / enquiry
jewelry	jewellery
kidnapper	kidnaper
licorice	liquorice
mailbox	postbox
mold	mould
mustache	moustache
mutual fund	unit trust
normalcy	normality

orient (verb)	orientate
pajamas	pyjamas
pants	trousers
parking lot	car park
percent	per cent
plow	plough
phony	phoney
polyethylene	polythene
practice (verb)	practise (verb)
pudgy	podgy
raise (in pay)	rise
resume	curriculum vitae (CV)
retirement fund	superannuation
sequester	sequestrate
skeptic / skepticism	sceptic / scepticism
smolder	smoulder
sneakers	trainers
soccer	football
specialty	speciality (but specialty in medicine, chemicals, steel)
story (building floor)	storey
sulfur	sulphur
sweater	jumper
table (verb): to postpone deliberation or consideration	table (verb): to put something forward for consideration
toward	towards
truck	lorry
trunk (of a car)	boot
woolen	woollen
vacation	holiday
yogurt	yoghurt

<sup>1</sup> Additional resources: See Chapter 21 in *New Hart's Rules: The Oxford Style Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2014), which summarizes the differences between US and British English. The [Cambridge Essential British English Dictionary](#) is an excellent online dictionary, and PerfectIt offers settings for British and Australian spelling.