



Tips and tools
FOR CONTENT & DESIGN

Field Guide to Canadian English Usage

Canadian English shares features with British English, American English, Québécois French, and Indigenous languages. This guide highlights some common distinctions between U.S. and Canadian English.¹

MEASUREMENT

Canada officially follows the International Metric System for measurements, but you'll also see Canadians using the Imperial System in some contexts. They might announce a new baby's weight in pounds rather than kilograms, for example, and Canadian railways measure distance and speed in terms of miles rather than kilometres.

PUNCTUATION

Commas

Canadian English punctuation tends to follow the same rules as American English, but less is more when it comes to commas — you won't see Canadian writers use the serial (Oxford) comma very often.

Quotation Marks

British English:

- Quotes appear within single quotation marks: *'Let's have some ketchup chips.'*
- Double quotation marks signal a quote within a quote: *'And then she said, "Let's have some ketchup chips."'*

American English:

- Quotes appear within double quotation marks: *"Let's have some ketchup chips."*
- Single quotation marks signal a quote within a quote: *'And then she said, 'Let's have some ketchup chips.''*

Canadian English:

Both styles are correct and acceptable to use, as long as usage is consistent.

Punctuation with Quotations

Canadians generally follow the American convention of placing all periods and commas within closing quotation marks:

She said, 'Ketchup chips are delicious.'

SPELLING

Canadian English blends British and American spelling conventions — a preference for the American *-ize* (*realize* or *organize*) and the British *-our* (*colour* or *flavour*), for example — but Canadian spelling varies and you may see exceptions to the guidelines below.²

CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
-oe- / -ae- <i>manoeuvre, anaemia, anaesthetist</i>	-e- <i>maneuver, anemia, anesthetist</i>
Canadians are more likely to use -ed forms for the past tense, with a few exceptions: <i>burnt, dreamt, knelt, leapt</i>	-ed in past tense <i>learned, spelled</i> (compare British English <i>learnt, spelt</i>)
-ence <i>defence, licence</i> Exceptions: • <i>defense/offense</i> commonly appear in sports-related contexts • <i>licence</i> (noun) but <i>license</i> (verb) • Canadians use both <i>pretence</i> and <i>pretense</i>	-ense <i>defense, license</i>
-re <i>centre, litre</i> Canadians generally prefer British spelling, but American spelling is not uncommon: <i>fiber, luster, meager, theater</i>	-er <i>center, liter</i>



CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
Generally follows the same spelling rules as American English	-ize <i>organize</i> -iza- <i>organization</i> -izi- <i>organizing</i> -yze <i>analyze</i>
Canadians often double the 'l' before endings (except for -ize): -ell- <i>marvellous, marvelled</i> -lling <i>modelling</i> -ll- <i>traveller</i>	Single 'l': -el- <i>marvelous, marveled</i> -ling <i>modeling</i> -ler <i>traveler</i>
Generally follows British spelling (single 'l'): -l at the end <i>enrol</i> -lment <i>fulfilment</i>	Double 'l': -ll at the end <i>enroll</i> -llment <i>fulfillment</i>
-our <i>favourite, rumour</i>	-or <i>favorite, rumor</i>

WORDS LIST

The following list illustrates common words and phrases that are unique to Canadian English and spellings that tend to differ from American English (though usage varies, and many Canadians may favor American spellings). In fact, much of the language (especially slang) is specific to the country's regional dialects — you might find a gawmoge janny up for mummering in Newfoundland, for instance.

CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
aft (informal)	afternoon
afterwards	afterward
axe	ax
bachelor apartment (a very small bachelor apartment is a bachelorette)	studio apartment
bargoon (slang)	bargain
barley sandwich (slang)	a beer
bespoke or custom	custom-made

CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
book off	stay home from work (esp. when sick)
Canuck	a Canadian
catalogue	catalog
centre (place) center or centre (midpoint)	center (place or midpoint)
cheque (bank draft)	check
chesterfield	couch/sofa
chocolate bar	any candy bar
clicks	kilometres
done like dinner (idiom)	utterly defeated
double-double	coffee with double servings of sugar and cream, esp. at Tim Hortons ("Tim's" or "Timmies"), but also used in other contexts
eavestrough	gutter
fill your boots (idiom)	take as much as you want of something
foodland	farmland
fulfil	fulfill
garburator	garbage disposal
give someone the gears (idiom)	pester, hassle
go snaky (idiom)	lose self-control
grade 1 (2, 3, etc.)	1st grade (2nd, 3rd, etc.)
grey	gray
hydro	electricity/electric utility company
holy jumpin' (slang)	express surprise, disbelief
icing sugar	powdered sugar
Instant Teller (proprietary)	ATM

CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
jeezly (adj., slang)	damned
Johnny Canuck	native, inhabitant, or citizen of Canada; Canadian soldier, esp. during world wars; Canada personified
lieu time	comp time
loonie	Canadian dollar
Maple Leaf	Canadian flag
milk store	convenience store
Molson muscle (slang)	beer belly
mould or mold	mold
moustache	mustache
mug-up	break for a hot drink (usually tea) and snacks
normality or normalcy	normalcy
per cent	percent
phoney or phony	phony
practise (verb)	practice (verb)
pyjamas or pajamas	pajamas
parkade	parking garage
rag the puck (idiom)	waste time intentionally
rangy	restless, uncontrollable, bad-tempered
runners	sneakers
serviette	napkin (for use with meals)
skeptic or sceptic	skeptic
skookum	excellent, impressive
smoulder or smolder	smolder
spinny	crazy, foolish
stag/stagette	bachelor/bachelorette party

CANADIAN USAGE	AMERICAN USAGE
storey (pl. storeys) (building floor)	story (pl. stories)
storm-stayed	snowbound
suite	apartment
sulphur	sulfur
table (verb): to put something forward for consideration (specific to Parliament)	table (verb): to postpone deliberation or consideration
the Great White North or the True North	Canada
toonie	Canadian \$2 coin
towards	toward
tuque or toque	beanie (woolen winter hat)
two-four	case of beer (24 cans/ bottles)
two solitudes	Canada's anglophone and francophone populations — two coexistent but independent cultures
washroom	bathroom
whitener	nondairy creamer (powder) for coffee
woollen	woolen
yogourt	yogurt
Z — pronounced “zed”	Z — pronounced “zee”

¹This field guide is mainly based on Margery Fee & Janice McAlpine, *Guide to Canadian English Usage*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011) and Katherine Barber, *Only in Canada, You Say: A Treasury of Canadian Language* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Additional resources: *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2006); *The Canadian Press Stylebook: A Guide for Writers and Editors*, 19th ed. (2021).

²PerfectIt offers a setting to check for Canadian spelling.

