



US / UK Spelling

UK and US English often differ in spelling and there are few hard-and-fast rules. This can make things tricky for learners. The key is consistency. Choose either UK or US spelling and apply it consistently throughout your work.

Neither system is "better" or "more correct" – it's a style choice. That said, it is usually best to follow the version used in the country where you are studying. If you are at a university in the UK, use British English. If you are in the US, use American English. When in doubt, check your institution's preferred style guide.

Below are some of the most commonly confused spellings between UK English and US English.

British English	American English
Colour	Color
Favourite	Favorite
Behaviour	Behavior
Centre	Center
Theatre	Theater
Catalogue	Catalog
Programme	Program
Traveller	Traveler
Defence	Defense
Cheque (noun)	Check (noun)
Plough	Plow

Grey	Gray
Licence	License
Ageing	Aging
Enrol	Enroll
Jewellery	Jewelry
Mould	Mold
Pyjamas	Pajamas
Tyre	Tire

Although these tips shouldn't be treated as strict rules, you'll notice some common patterns:

-our vs. -or

In UK English, many words end in -our; in US English, the same words usually drop the u and end in -or.

Example: flavour (UK) — flavor (US)

-ence vs. -ense

Words ending in -ence in UK English often take -ense in US English.

Example: pretence (UK) — pretense (US)

Oxford Style (Oxford Spelling): Use -ize, not -ise

A much misunderstood aspect of British spelling is the -ize vs. -ise ending. The Oxford University Press (and many academic publishers) recommend -ize for certain verbs, even in British English.

Examples: organize, realize, prioritize

Why -ize? The Greek Connection

The -ize ending comes from the Greek suffix -ίζειν (-izein), which passed into Latin (-izare) before entering English via French or Latin.

Example: organize ← Latin organizzare ← Greek organon + -izein

Oxford style prefers -ize because it reflects this historical and linguistic origin. It is not an Americanism.