

AMERICAN ENGLISH VS. BRITISH ENGLISH

In a simpler world, English would be written the same way everywhere. However, when Noah Webster created an American English dictionary in the early 1800's, he did more than just add new words to British English: he also revised the spelling of many common words to eliminate what he saw as unnecessary letters. His new spellings were adopted in the United States but not the UK, and these spelling differences remain to this day.

The list below is intended to provide an overview of the most common spelling differences between American and British English. The words beginning each list are intended to establish overall patterns, whereas the words in *italics* toward the end of the lists are examples of deviations from the rule. If you have questions about any other terms that aren't on this list, please contact us at AskAnExpert@aje.com. Best wishes!

-ize/-se (-yze/yse)

AMERICAN:

characterize
prioritize
specialize
analyze
catalyze
size
exercise

BRITISH:

characterise
prioritise
specialise
analyse
catalyse
size
exercise

American: The products of the **catalyzed** reaction were **characterized** using **specialized** equipment.

British: The products of the *catalysed* reaction were **characterised** using **specialised** equipment.

-or/-our

AMERICAN:

behavior
color
favor
contour

BRITISH:

behaviour
colour
favour
contour

American: Because of its **decolorization behavior**, this material is **favored**.

British: Because of its **decolourisation behaviour**, this material is **favoured**.

-er/-re

AMERICAN:

center
fiber
liter
parameter

BRITISH:

centre
fibre
litre
parameter

American: Five **milliliters** of the mixture containing the **fibers** was pipetted on the **center** of the slide.

British: Five **millilitres** of the mixture containing the **fibres** was pipetted on the **centre** of the slide.

-e/(-ae or -oe)

AMERICAN:

ameba
anesthesia
diarrhea
esophagus
leukemia
cesium

BRITISH:

amoeba
anaesthesia
diarrhoea
oesophagus
leukaemia
caesium

American: The **leukemia** patient was given **anesthesia** before the procedure.

British: The **leukaemia** patient was given **anaesthesia** before the procedure.

-se/-ce

AMERICAN:

defense
practice (noun
and verb)
license (noun
and verb)
defensive
advice (noun)/
advise (verb)

BRITISH:

defence
practice (noun)/
practise (verb)
licence (noun)/
license (verb)
defensive
advice (noun)/
advise (verb)

American: The **defense** attorney had **practiced** law for over thirty years.

British: The **defence** attorney had **practised** law for over thirty years.

-/e, -og/-ogue

AMERICAN:

aging
acknowledgment
judgment
analog
dialog
dying (die)/
dyeing (dye)

BRITISH:

ageing
acknowledgement
judgement
analogue
dialogue
dying (die)/
dyeing (dye)

American: The **aging analog**-to-digital converter is slowly dying.

British: The **ageing analogue**-to-digital converter is slowly dying.

-l/-ll or -ll/-l

AMERICAN:

fulfill
enroll
skill, skillful
labeled
signaling
propelled
revealing

BRITISH:

fulfil
enrol
skill, skilful
labelled
signalling
propelled
revealing

American: The **skillful** student noted that the drop in **enrollment** may be **signaling** a problem with the study design.

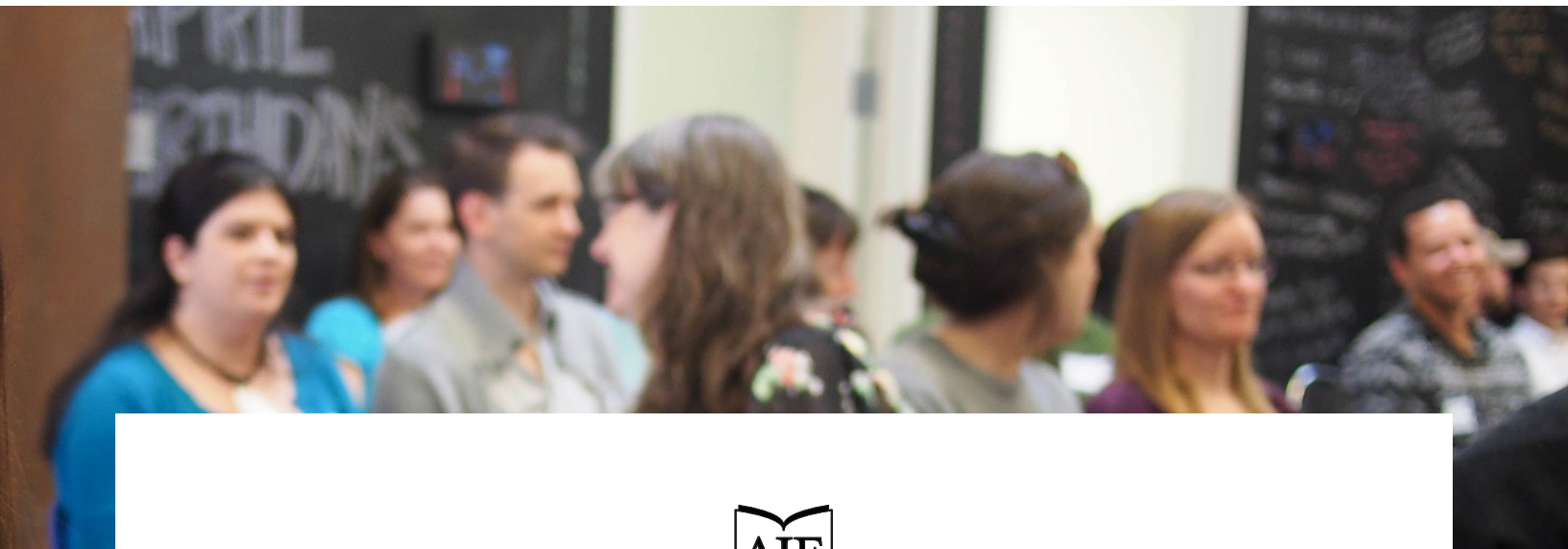
British: The **skilful** student noted that the drop in **enrolment** may be **signalling** a problem with the study design.

We hope that this introduction to differences in American and British English will make the process of writing your next manuscript a little easier! Remember that you can choose between “English (U.S.)” and “English (U.K.)” in Microsoft Word when setting the language for your document. This change allows the spell check to help catch these differences in spelling



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ms. Newell received her BA from Colby College in Chemistry and Russian Language and Literature and then proceeded directly into a PhD program at MIT. At MIT, she studied acoustic spectroscopy and physical chemistry, specifically the use of terahertz radiation to study proton-coupled electron transfer.



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