



# Canadian English

## Overview

Pronunciation is the most striking difference between British English and the English in the U.S. and Canada, but there are also a number of differences in vocabulary and spelling, as well as slight differences in grammar. Yet on the whole, speakers of **American, Canadian and British** English have little or no difficulty understanding each other.

**Canadian** spelling of the English language combines British and American rules. Most notably, in Canada French-derived words that in American English end with **-or** and **-er**, such as **color** or **center**, usually retain British spellings i.e. **colour** and **centre**. In other cases, Canadian and American spelling differs from British spelling in words such as **realize** and **recognize**, which in British English are spelled **realise** and **recognise**; i.e. usually spelled with **-ize** rather than **-ise**.

Canadian spelling rules can be partly explained by Canada's trade history. For instance, the British spelling of the word **cheque** probably relates to Canada's once-important ties to British financial institutions (American spelling: **check**). Canada's automobile industry, on the other hand, has been dominated by American firms from its inception, explaining why Canadians use the American spelling of **tire** (British spelling: **tyre**), and American terminology for the parts of automobiles, e.g. **the hood** of a car as opposed to **the bonnet**.

There are some words and expressions that are unique to Canadian English, such as the word **washroom**. This is used by most Canadians, whereas Americans more commonly use **restroom** or **bathroom**, and the British use **toilet**. Examples of other distinctive Canadianisms are: a **double-double** which is a cup of coffee with two creams and two sugars, and the word **hydro** which is a common synonym for electrical service e.g. "The hydro bill is due on the fifteenth." Many Canadian provincial electric companies generate power from hydroelectricity, i.e. by damming rivers and tapping the power of water falls such as Niagara Falls. Canadian English reflects Canada's historical ties with Britain and its geographical proximity to the United States. This blending continues to evolve, so be aware of the differences, be consistent, and remember to set your computer language default to **Canadian English**

*Source: McCarthy, M., O'Dell, F., Shaw, E., (2006) Vocabulary In Use: Upper -Intermediate. Cambridge University Press.*

## Common English Word Comparisons

Here are some common Canadian and American English words along with their British English equivalents:

| Canadian English       | American English       | British English |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Apartment              | Apartment              | Flat            |
| Elevator               | Elevator               | Lift            |
| Faucet/Tap             | Faucet                 | Tap             |
| Freeway/Highway        | Freeway/Highway        | Motorway        |
| Garbage                | Garbage                | Rubbish         |
| Gas                    | Gasoline               | Petrol          |
| Holiday                | Vacation               | Holiday         |
| Line up                | Line up                | Queue up        |
| Parking Lot            | Parking Lot            | Car Park        |
| Sidewalk/Pavement      | Sidewalk               | Pavement        |
| Subway                 | Subway                 | Underground     |
| Tights                 | Pantyhose              | Tights          |
| To call (by telephone) | To call (by telephone) | To ring         |
| Truck                  | Truck                  | Lorry           |
| Trunk (of a car)       | Trunk (of a car)       | Boot (of a car) |
| Washroom               | Bathroom / Restroom    | Toilet, WC      |

## Practice Exercise

**Exercise 1:** Which of the following sentences use Canadian English? (Yes/No)

- The artist used bold colors in many of her pictures.
- The bathroom is upstairs and on the left.
- My tanks almost empty - I've really got to find a gas station.
- The lift is out of order, so we had to take the stairs.

**Exercise 2:** Think of words that end in **-our / -re / -ize**

- E.g. colour, centre, centralize

**Exercise 3:** Think of some more unique Canadian words.

## Answers

**Exercise 1:** a) No (colors) b) No (bathroom) c) Yes (gas) d) No (lift)

**Exercise 2:** harbour, labour, neighbour; theatre; urbanize, industrialize

**Exercise 3:** Mounties, chesterfield, loonie, toonie, reeve, First Nations, Francophone