

# CANADIAN ENGLISH

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Canada has its own political, cultural, historical, and geographical realities and has its own words to describe these realities. It has two official languages, English and French, but in the 2001 census 18% of the population reported having a mother tongue, other than one of the official languages, Chinese being the third most common mother tongue. Canadian English is spoken as a first or second language by over 25 million people. Most of the Canadians who speak French live in the province of Quebec although forty percent of the population of the province of New Brunswick is also francophone. Canada was founded as a union of British colonies, some of which had earlier been under French control. It is a federal dominion with ten provinces and three territories obtained its sovereignty from the United Kingdom in a process beginning in 1867. Canada defines itself as a bilingual and multicultural nation.

The English vocabulary used does not differ enormously from the vocabulary used in other parts of the world, but some words have different connotations in different English speaking countries. The bulk of the words used are common to all English speakers, but there are, a number of words that are peculiar to Canada. Canadian English spelling is a mixture of American, British, and unique Canadianisms. Canadian vocabulary is similar to American English, but with key differences and local variations. Generally speaking, there are no grammatical features that are distinctly Canadian. There are, however, slight differences between American English and British English, and since Canadians are influenced by both, Canadian English is a mixture of both American and British features. In general, Canadian pronunciation is almost identical to American pronunciation, but there are regional differences.

## Distinctive Canadian Vocabulary

Canadian English includes words borrowed from other languages which do not appear in other varieties of English. The country's name comes from the Iroquoian word *Kanata* meaning "community". Most of these borrowed words refer to features in the flora, fauna, geography and topography. The native Aboriginal peoples, the British and French settlers, more recent arrivals and occupations in the different regions have all contributed to making Canadian English unique.

Some distinctive Canadian terms include: .

Allophone	A resident of Quebec who speaks a first language other than English or French
Anglophone	Someone who speaks English as a first language.
Biffy	An outdoor toilet usually located over pit or a septic tank
Chesterfield	A sofa, couch, or loveseat (also used in Northern California and Britain)
Click	Slang for kilometre.
Concession road	In southern Ontario and southern Quebec, one of a set of roads laid out by the colonial government as part of the distribution of land in standard lot sizes. The roads were laid out in squares as nearly as possible equal to 1,000 acres (that is, one and a quarter miles square). In Ontario, many roads are still called

	lines.
Eavestroughs	Grooves or channels that attach to the underside of the roof of a house to collect rainwater. Known to Americans as a <a href="#">gutter</a>
Francophone	Someone who speaks French as a first language
Garburator	A garbage disposal unit located beneath the drain of a kitchen sink.
Humidex	A term referring to the combined effect of heat and humidity on temperature
Joe job	A lower-class, low-paying job
Keener	An enthusiastic student, not necessarily a positive term
Loonie or loony	This is a colloquialism for Canada's dollar coin. The plural is loonies. The nickname comes from the loon on the coin.
Muskeg	A sphagnum bog, an usually thick deposit of partially decayed vegetable matter of wet boreal regions
Off side	From the hockey term offside, meaning that a player has raced too far ahead of the puck, this phrase is often used in Canada to mean someone is not on board.
On side	Used frequently in Canada to mean that you're in agreement, this term may come from hockey, where players can be offside.
Parkade	A parking garage
Pogey	This is a mildly pejorative Canadian word for welfare or, occasionally, unemployment insurance.
Poutine	A Canadian delicacy made of French fries covered in cheese curds and gravy.
Pure laine	From the French words for pure wool, this expression refers to French Canadians whose roots go back to colonial New France. It also connotes racial purity, and as such is mildly offensive.
Runners	Running shoes; sneakers
Ski-Doo	A brand name now used generically to refer to any snowmobile Can also be used as a verb
Sniggler	Someone who takes the parking spot you wanted, or who otherwise does something perfectly legitimate, but which nonetheless inconveniences or annoys you.
Sook or suck	A crybaby. The adjective is sookie or suckie. Sook rhymes with hook. For some reason, you can get away with using sook in polite company, but never suck.
Toboggan	A long flat-bottomed light sled, usually made of thin boards curved up at one end with low handrails at the sides
Tuque	A knit winter hat that covers the head and ears (rhymes with kook).
Utilidor	Short for utility corridor , this term is used mostly in the Canadian North.

Other words have different meanings in Canada, the United States and Britain. Examples include:

Canadian English	American English	British English
ABM	ATM	Cashpoint, cashdispenser
bachelor apartment	efficiency	bedsit
Billion - a thousand million (1,000,000,000)	Billion - a thousand million (1,000,000,000)	Billion - a million million (1,000,000,000,000).
bus depot	bus station	coach station
Canadian bacon	back bacon	

Canadian English	American English	British English
child benefit, baby bonus	child tax benefit	family allowance
coin laundry	Laundromat	launderette
depanneur	convenience store	corner shop
driver's permit	driver's license	driving licence
Elevator	Elevator	Lift
fire hall	firehouse	fire station
flat tire	flat	flat tyre, puncture
funeral chapel	funeral home	funeral parlour
gas	gas	petrol
main floor	first floor	ground floor
offence	offense	attack
phone, call (v)	call	phone
puckster	hockey player	ice hockey player
railways	Railroads	Railways
Revenue Canada, RevCan	International Revenue Service, IRS	Inland Revenue
riding	district	constituency
Serviette	Table napkin	Serviette
statutory holiday	legal holiday	bank holiday
tap	faucet	tap
university	college	university
vacation	vacation	holiday
washroom	ladies' room, men's room	Ladies, Gents
Z - pronounced zed	Z - pronounced zee	Z - pronounced zed

## Pronunciation

In general, Canadian pronunciation is almost identical to American pronunciation, especially in Ontario. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, there is a strong Scottish influence and in the Ottawa Valley there is an Irish influence. The pronunciation of people living near, or working with French-Canadians is greatly influenced by French and the island of Newfoundland has its own distinctive English dialect.

The most famous difference between Canadian and American pronunciation is the *ou* sound in words like *house* and *out*, which sound to American ears like *hoose* and *oot*. (Some say the words sound more like *hoase* and *oat*). Canadians also

tend to pronounce *cot* the same as *caught* and *collar* the same as *caller*. Keen ears will hear a Canadian distinction in certain vowels: the *i* comes out differently in *knife* and in *knives*, in *bite* and in *bide*, and in *price* and in *prizes*. Many Canadians also will turn *t* sounds into *d* sounds, so the name of the capital sounds like "Oddawa."

## Spelling

The main difference between Canadian English and that of the US and Britain is the spelling. Canadian spelling combines British and American rules, but the rules for Canadian spelling are not clearly defined. There are regional variations, and differences of opinion exist among editors. The official Canadian spelling is that used in the [Hansard](#) transcripts of the [Parliament of Canada](#). The government style guide says that editors should consult the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* and go with the word used first. Many Canadian editors use the [Canadian Oxford Dictionary](#), 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), and [Editing Canadian English: The Essential Canadian Guide](#), 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000).

In 1984 the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada (now called the Editors' Association of Canada) surveyed publishers, academics, PR people, editors and writers about their spelling preferences to get a better idea of what was the more common use. Some of the results are summarized below:

**WORDS WITH -OUR/-OR:** 75% of the sample preferred the use of -our such as *colour*, rather than *color* and *favourite* rather than *favorite*.

**WORDS ENDING IN -RE/-ER:** 89% of the sample preferred -re endings such as *centre* and *theatre* .

**WORDS ENDING IN -SE/-CE:** 80% of the sample preferred -ce over -se in nouns such as *defence*, *practice* and *pretence*, but let -se stand when such words were used as verbs, such as *to practise the piano lesson*.

**DIPHTHONG:** 75% used the diphthong (ae or oe) in such words as *aesthetic*, *archaeology* and *manoeuvre*.

**WORDS ENDING IN -IZE/-ISE:** Canadian editors rejected the British -ise endings, such as *organise*, preferring -ize endings.

**DOUBLING FINAL CONSONANTS:** Up to 90% liked the double *L* in such words as *enroll*, *fulfill*, *install*, *marvelled*, *marvellous*, *signalled*, *skillful*, *traveller* and *woollen*.

## References:

**Dave VE7CNV's Truly Canadian Dictionary of Canadian Spelling -**  
<http://www.luther.ca/~dave7cnv/cdnspelling/cdnspelling.html>

**Cornerstone's Canadian English Page**  
<http://www.cornerstoneword.com/misc/cdneng/cdneng.htm>

**Proper Treatment: Canadian vs American vs British**  
<http://canadianenglish1.narod.ru/>