

# English

English

*English or english in Wiktionary, the free dictionary. English usually refers to: English language English people English may also refer to: English,*

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English is a West Germanic language that emerged in early medieval England and has since become a global lingua franca. The namesake of the language is the Angles, one of the Germanic peoples that migrated to Britain after its Roman occupiers left. English is the most spoken language in the world, primarily due to the global influences of the former British Empire (succeeded by the Commonwealth of Nations) and the United States. It is the most widely learned second language in the world, with more second-language speakers than native speakers. However, English is only the third-most spoken native language, after Mandarin Chinese and Spanish.

English is either the official language, or one of the official languages, in 57 sovereign states and 30 dependent territories, making it the most geographically widespread language in the world. In the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, it is the dominant language for historical reasons without being explicitly defined by law. It is a co-official language of the United Nations, the European Union, and many other international and regional organisations. It has also become the de facto lingua franca of diplomacy, science, technology, international trade, logistics, tourism, aviation, entertainment, and the Internet. English accounts for at least 70 percent of total native speakers of the Germanic languages, and Ethnologue estimated that there were over 1.4 billion speakers worldwide as of 2021.

Old English emerged from a group of West Germanic dialects spoken by the Anglo-Saxons. Late Old English borrowed some grammar and core vocabulary from Old Norse, a North Germanic language. Then, Middle English borrowed vocabulary extensively from French dialects, which are the source of approximately 28 percent of Modern English words, and from Latin, which is the source of an additional 28 percent. While Latin and the Romance languages are thus the source for a majority of its lexicon taken as a whole, English grammar and phonology retain a family resemblance with the Germanic languages, and most of its basic everyday vocabulary remains Germanic in origin. English exists on a dialect continuum with Scots; it is next-most closely related to Low Saxon and Frisian.

English units

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English units were the units of measurement used in England up to 1826 (when they were replaced by Imperial units), which evolved as a combination of the Anglo-Saxon and Roman systems of units. Various standards have applied to English units at different times, in different places, and for different applications.

Use of the term "English units" can be ambiguous, as, in addition to the meaning used in this article, it is sometimes used to refer to the units of the descendant Imperial system as well to those of the descendant system of United States customary units.

The two main sets of English units were the Winchester Units, used from 1495 to 1587, as affirmed by King Henry VII, and the Exchequer Standards, in use from 1588 to 1825, as defined by Queen Elizabeth I.

In England (and the British Empire), English units were replaced by Imperial units in 1824 (effective as of 1 January 1826) by a Weights and Measures Act, which retained many though not all of the unit names and redefined (standardised) many of the definitions. In the US, being independent from the British Empire decades before the 1824 reforms, English units were standardized and adopted (as "US Customary Units") in 1832.

## English Wikipedia

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The English Wikipedia is the primary English-language edition of Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia. It was created by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger on 15 January 2001, as Wikipedia's first edition.

English Wikipedia is hosted alongside other language editions by the Wikimedia Foundation, an American nonprofit organization. Its content, written independently of other editions by volunteer editors known as Wikipedians, is in various varieties of English while aiming to stay consistent within articles. Its internal newspaper is The Signpost.

English Wikipedia is the most read version of Wikipedia, accounting for 48% of Wikipedia's cumulative traffic, with the remaining percentage split among the other languages. The English Wikipedia has the most articles of any edition, at 7,045,410 as of August 2025. It contains 10.8% of articles in all Wikipedias, although it lacks millions of articles found in other editions. The edition's one-billionth edit was made on 13 January 2021 by editor Steven Pruitt.

English Wikipedia, often as a stand-in for Wikipedia overall, has been praised for its enablement of the democratization of knowledge, extent of coverage, unique structure, culture, and reduced degree of commercial bias. It has been criticized for exhibiting systemic bias, particularly gender bias against women and ideological bias. While its reliability was frequently criticized in the 2000s, it has improved over time, receiving greater praise in the late 2010s and early 2020s, having become an important fact-checking site. English Wikipedia has been characterized as having less cultural bias than other language editions due to its broader editor base.

## British English

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British English is the set of varieties of the English language native to the United Kingdom, especially Great Britain. More narrowly, it can refer specifically to the English language in England, or, more broadly, to the collective dialects of English throughout the United Kingdom taken as a single umbrella variety, for instance additionally incorporating Scottish English, Welsh English, and Northern Irish English. Tom McArthur in the Oxford Guide to World English acknowledges that British English shares "all the ambiguities and tensions

[with] the word 'British' and as a result can be used and interpreted in two ways, more broadly or more narrowly, within a range of blurring and ambiguity".

Variations exist in formal (both written and spoken) English in the United Kingdom. For example, the adjective *wee* is almost exclusively used in parts of Scotland, north-east England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, and occasionally Yorkshire, whereas the adjective *little* is predominant elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is a meaningful degree of uniformity in written English within the United Kingdom, and this could be described by the term *British English*. The forms of spoken English, however, vary considerably more than in most other areas of the world where English is spoken and so a uniform concept of *British English* is more difficult to apply to the spoken language.

Globally, countries that are former British colonies or members of the Commonwealth tend to follow *British English*, as is the case for English used by European Union institutions. The United Nations also uses *British English* with Oxford spelling. In China, both *British English* and *American English* are taught. The UK government actively teaches and promotes English around the world and operates in over 100 countries.

## English alphabet

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Modern English is written with a Latin-script alphabet consisting of 26 letters, with each having both uppercase and lowercase forms. The word *alphabet* is a compound of *alpha* and *beta*, the names of the first two letters in the Greek alphabet. The earliest Old English writing during the 5th century used a runic alphabet known as the *futhorc*. The Old English Latin alphabet was adopted from the 7th century onward—and over the following centuries, various letters entered and fell out of use. By the 16th century, the present set of 26 letters had largely stabilised:

There are 5 vowel letters and 19 consonant letters—as well as *Y* and *W*, which may function as either type.

Written English has a large number of digraphs, such as *ch*, *ea*, *oo*, *sh*, and *th*. Diacritics are generally not used to write native English words, which is unusual among orthographies used to write the languages of Europe.

## American English

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American English, sometimes called United States English or U.S. English, is the set of varieties of the English language native to the United States. English is the most widely spoken language in the U.S. and is an official language in 32 of the 50 U.S. states and the de facto common language used in government, education, and commerce in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and in all territories except Puerto Rico. While there is no law designating English as the official language of the U.S., Executive Order 14224 of 2025 declares it to be. Since the late 20th century, American English has become the most influential form of English worldwide.

Varieties of American English include many patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and particularly spelling that are unified nationwide but distinct from other forms of English around the world. Any American or Canadian accent perceived as lacking noticeably local, ethnic, or cultural markers is known in linguistics as *General American*; it covers a fairly uniform accent continuum native to certain regions of the U.S. but especially associated with broadcast mass media and highly educated speech. However, historical and present linguistic evidence does not support the notion of there being one single mainstream American accent. The sound of American English continues to evolve, with some local accents disappearing,

but several larger regional accents having emerged in the 20th century.

## Middle English

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Middle English (abbreviated to ME) is the forms of English language that were spoken after the Norman Conquest of 1066, until the late 15th century, roughly coinciding with the High and Late Middle Ages. The Middle English dialects displaced the Old English dialects under the influence of Anglo-Norman French and Old Norse, and was in turn replaced in England by Early Modern English.

Middle English had significant regional variety and churn in its vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and orthography. The main dialects were Northern, East Midland, West Midland, Southern in England; as well as Early Scots, and the Irish Fingallian and Yola.

During the Middle English period, many Old English grammatical features either became simplified or disappeared altogether. Noun, adjective, and verb inflections were simplified by the reduction (and eventual elimination) of most grammatical case distinctions. Middle English also saw considerable adoption of Anglo-Norman vocabulary, especially in the areas of politics, law, the arts, and religion, as well as poetic and emotive diction. Conventional English vocabulary remained primarily Germanic in its sources, with Old Norse influences becoming more apparent. Significant changes in pronunciation took place, particularly involving long vowels and diphthongs, which in the later Middle English period began to undergo the Great Vowel Shift.

Little survives of early Middle English literature, due in part to Norman domination and the prestige that came with writing in French rather than English. During the 14th century, a new style of literature emerged with the works of writers including John Wycliffe and Geoffrey Chaucer, whose *Canterbury Tales* remains the most studied and read work of the period.

By the end of the period (about 1470), and aided by the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1439, a standard based on the London dialects (Chancery Standard) had become established. This largely formed the basis for Modern English spelling, although pronunciation has changed considerably since that time. In England, Middle English was succeeded by Early Modern English, which lasted until about 1650. In Scotland, Scots developed concurrently from a variant of the Northumbrian dialect (prevalent in Northern England and spoken in southeast Scotland).

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## Old English

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Old English (Englisc or Ænglisc, pronounced [ˈeʔʔliʔ] or [ˈæʔʔliʔ]), or Anglo-Saxon, is the earliest recorded form of the English language, spoken in England and southern and eastern Scotland in the Early Middle Ages. It developed from the languages brought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the mid-5th century, and the first Old English literature dates from the mid-7th century. After the Norman Conquest of 1066, English was replaced for several centuries by Anglo-Norman (a type of French) as the language of the upper classes. This is regarded as marking the end of the Old English era, since during the subsequent period the English language was heavily influenced by Anglo-Norman, developing into what is now known as

## Middle English in England and Early Scots in Scotland.

Old English developed from a set of Anglo-Frisian or Ingvaeonic dialects originally spoken by Germanic tribes traditionally known as the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. As the Germanic settlers became dominant in England, their language replaced the languages of Roman Britain: Common Brittonic, a Celtic language; and Latin, brought to Britain by the Roman conquest. Old English had four main dialects, associated with particular Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: Kentish, Mercian, Northumbrian, and West Saxon. It was West Saxon that formed the basis for the literary standard of the later Old English period, although the dominant forms of Middle and Modern English would develop mainly from Mercian, and Scots from Northumbrian. The speech of eastern and northern parts of England was subject to strong Old Norse influence due to Scandinavian rule and settlement beginning in the 9th century.

Old English is one of the West Germanic languages, with its closest relatives being Old Frisian and Old Saxon. Like other old Germanic languages, it is very different from Modern English and Modern Scots, and largely incomprehensible for Modern English or Modern Scots speakers without study. Within Old English grammar, the nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs have many inflectional endings and forms, and word order is much freer. The oldest Old English inscriptions were written using a runic system, but from about the 8th century this was replaced by a version of the Latin alphabet.

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