VOICEOVER MASTERCLASS

# UK & USA CULTURE DIFFERENCES

Great tips how to fit into society better
in the United Kingdom and the United States

**Peter Baker & Mark Laxton**

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# UK AND USA CULTURE DIFFERENCES

## This PDF is not to be sold separately and is part of the course

## HOW TO SPEAK CLEARER ENGLISH IN 30 DAYS


The Voiceover Masterclass Team



**Mark Laxton**
Founder & Director
www.marklaxton.com



**Peter Baker**
Co-Founder & Instructor
www.voiceovermasterclass.com



**Katy Brody**
Co-Instructor
www.voiceovermasterclass.com




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# HOW TO SPEAK CLEARER ENGLISH IN 30 DAYS!

Video subject for each day

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## 28 – CULTURE DIFFERENCES – THE UK

In this section we going to take a look at the culture and customs of the United Kingdom. This is only a very rough guide, but if you have never visited before, this may give you an essential head start so you get to understand the locals and you don’t get into embarrassing situations!

It's wrong to stereotype of course, and there will be plenty of people you meet who won't fit any of what we're about to say, but you've got to start somewhere haven’t you!

First of all, when you are meeting new people, it is polite to hold out a hand and expect the person to shake it up and down three or four times and then release it. It's acceptable to look into each other’s eyes and smile while you shake hands. After the meeting, or social event that you're at, it's also important to shake hands again as you say goodbye with a friendly greeting.



If you're meeting for a social event, maybe a dinner party in somebody's home, it is acceptable to take a small gift, usually flowers, a box of quality chocolates or a bottle of wine.

What do you wear? Well in the United Kingdom over the last 40 or 50 years there's been a gradual decline in formal wear both in business settings like in offices and in smart public places like restaurants, theatres and when travelling on airlines and cruise ships.

These days, casual wear can be fully acceptable in many situations, as long as it is smart. However, if you are going to a business meeting, and you don't know the people there, it's best to wear a suit and tie for a man or a smart business suit for a woman, at least for the first visit.



What about titles? How do you address new people in the UK? Well, in addition to formal professional titles, such as Reverend, Doctor or Professor, it is polite to refer to men with ‘Mister’ and women as ‘Mrs’ (if they are married) or ‘Miss’ (if unmarried) and then followed by their family name or “surname”. Only use a person’s first name when they invite you to do so, especially in a business setting.

The use of business cards is declining quite a lot in the United Kingdom, and there certainly is no ceremony when handing them over like you may find in Japan for example. Business cards are just used for practical purposes to carry information, and don't be surprised if you find the person you have given your business card writes some notes on it, which of course would not happen in a culture where business cards have much more importance.



When you are invited to a business meeting, make sure you are on time or even a little early. However, if you are invited to a social event, such as visiting someone at their home, it is socially acceptable to be about 10 or 15 minutes late, but never early as that could be embarrassing if your guests are not ready yet.

At someone's home, as you enter the door, smile, shake hands, present your gift and ask if you should take your shoes off before going into the home.



Never smoke or vape in someone's home, and not either in business meetings. Most British companies will have a designated outdoor smoking area you will have to use.

So how do British people communicate? Quite often they are direct, however, before they get to know you, they may seem rather shy or reserved or may even appear a little distant or slightly rude.
There is a wide range of different types of communication style, and you will really have to listen carefully and try to read the mood of the people you are meeting, to find what "type" they are.



Some British people speak in an understated or deliberately downbeat or self-depreciating way, often "mock complaining" about everything, when they don't really mean it. Or they'll use condescending sarcasm, trying to be funny, whereas others are pretty straight talking.

But most people are very friendly, so make the effort to get to know new people, and keep that smile on your face and a big tip - always remember people’s names!



At the dinner table, table manners are “continental”, so the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right hand while eating.

If you are served your food before anybody else, make sure you don't start to eat until everyone on your table has been served their food.

At a formal meal, you may have to enter the room and stand at the table until you are invited to sit down by the host.



“Toasts” are given at formal meals when the host will raise a glass (usually wine but a soft drink is acceptable) and will invite the guests to honour a person or an event such as an anniversary. The guests then raise their glass and repeat the spoken toast before taking a sip of their drink.

Once you are sat at your table, make sure never to rest your elbows on table as this is seen as rude. If you want to take a break from eating during the meal, and you haven't finished your food, place your fork over the knife in a cross shape.

When you have completed eating and don't want any more food, put the fork to the left of the knife facing upwards on your plate.



If invited to a meal at a restaurant, the person who has asked you to come usually pays. Do not argue about the payment at the end; simply offer to buy them a meal at a later time.

With British people, in general friendly conversation, it’s best to avoid talking about religion, politics or to ask people too much about their job at a social event. It’s certainly taboo to ask someone what they earn. However, with sport if you are certain that you know the sports team or players that you new friend supports, it’s fine to ask them about their sporting heroes.

Finally, here’s a big tip for both business and leisure meetings with new people, do not be overly familiar with people you do not know well.

Good luck in the UK!



## 29 – CULTURE DIFFERENCES – THE US

Yesterday, we looked at the culture and customs of the people of the United Kingdom and how British people like to be addressed, and how to meet them, and things to avoid discussing when you are in their company. Today will look at the meeting of people from the United States.

In the United States, people use similar types of name titles as they do in the United Kingdom, but usually things are a little bit more informal. Men are still called “Mister”, married women are still “Mrs”, and unmarried women are misses, and when someone has a honorary title such as Professor, it's best to use it all the time, calling them “Professor Smith” or whatever every time you need to, and not just when you first meet them.



By the way, if you have a title yourself, it's best not to use this yourself when you are first introducing yourself to other people. It looks like you may be showing off. However, many people think that “showing off” is a definite American trait!

Many Americans tend to look you in the eye and tell you exactly what they think, without thinking about subtleties like your possibly hurt feelings. They are not often being deliberately rude though, it's just the American way of learning to be very open and transparent, without hiding anything. Its best therefore, for you to be direct and open as well in conversations with Americans. Particularly in a business negotiation, don't be vague or you look like you may be hiding something, and of course don’t lie or double cross people in any business deal. If you want them to know something, tell them the full facts and the details and be as open as they may well be with you.



At a business meeting, when you meet somebody, shake hands like you would in the United Kingdom, however instead of just smiling, you need to say some sort of pleasant and short greeting as well while shaking hands such as “pleased to meet you”, or “hi, how are you?”

By the way, if you’re asked a question like “How are you?”, it’s just an expression, you don’t need to answer every detail of your current medical condition! Just say, “Fine”, or ignore the question and just say “Hiya!”. After introductions, Americans will soon be calling you by your first name without any title, and if you are handing out your business card to people, don’t be offended if they shove it in their top pocket and don’t even look at it. Business card etiquette is a strong oriental custom but in the USA the cards are just a means to get information to someone else.



In a SOCIAL situation, it's usually best these days not to shake hands at all, but to simply nod, smile, and say “hello!” or “hi!” You might like to raise a hand while you say this. In fact, it's best not to have any physical contact at all, until you get to know people better. And try and keep your social distancing. Don’t “get in someone’s face” as it’s called!

When you are leaving a business situation, sometimes it's customary to shake hands again, sometimes it’s not, especially if the business meeting has not gone well. You really need to see what other people are doing. Interestingly, on departure, many Americans say things they don't mean in practical terms. Something like, “see you later!” And you may get confused by hearing this thinking that you do have an agreed timed appointment to meet them again later that day, but it's just an expression that does not mean anything has been arranged. They may also say something like “see you around!” or “Have a good day!” Your reply could be something like, “You as well!” or “Great! Be seeing you!”



When are you meeting businesspeople, do not take any gift with you, unless it is a genuine sample of the merchandise that you are trying to sell, as America has very strict anti-bribery laws.

However, if you are going to a social gathering, such as a party, or you are invited to somebody's house for a meal, it’s customary to take along wine, a pack of quality beers, flowers or chocolates or a small household object like an ornament.

At a meal, American food is generally served “family style” with big plates handed round the table for you to take what you like as it passes you, rather than everyone being given ready plated-up meals from the kitchen. This is a good system as you can avoid taking what you don’t like or food that you know you have a digestion problem with without upsetting the hosts. Just make sure you don’t take a portion of food too big without leaving enough for everybody else, and certainly don’t start eating your meal until everyone is ready.



As in the UK, it’s very rude to lean your elbows on the table and you mustn’t smoke or vape at somebody’s house without being offered the opportunity. In a restaurant, it is illegal to smoke inside in most US states as well as illegal to smoke in workplaces.

By the way, if you are invited to a restaurant, the person who invited you has therefore agreed to pay for you. It’s rude to argue to pay your share at the end of the meal; just say thank you and offer to pay next time.

If you're visiting someone’s home, always go to the front door and not to the side or garage door, which may not be tidy or clean, and make sure you are on time or no more than 10 minutes late.



If you are going to be later than this, it's good etiquette to call and apologise and say when you WILL be arriving. If on the invitation there is a finish time as well as a start time, make sure you observe this and leave by the time the event is meant to finish.

In conversation with people at a social event in America, do not discuss controversial subjects such as race, religion, politics and certainly not the rights and wrongs of abortion laws.

Be wary of using humour until you are sure you know the type of people you are meeting, and certainly don’t swear unless you’re sure it won’t cause offence. We hope this is useful to you! Good luck!




## DAY 15 - AMERICAN ENGLISH DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS

If you want to sound like a native in America, there are many words which are pronounced differently than in British English.

This is of course on top of the overall accent which is different in America then in the United Kingdom.

In very simple terms, and this is highly unfair to say, but usually the British accent can come over as rather “posh” and stuffy.

The American accent can be interpreted as more casual and nasal.

In this course, when we consider an “American accent”, we are talking about a General American, or “GenAm” accent, because the USA is a massive place, with many different types of accent throughout the various States and regions.

Don't worry too much about this though, unless you are wanting to do any formal acting work where you accent has to be region specific.

To be understood in general conversation, a British English accent is perfectly acceptable, and often can be much clearer for people from different areas of America to understand, as long as you are speaking clearly.

However, it is really worthwhile learning where certain words almost always have a different emphasis part, or where a word sounds completely different, UK vs US.

This is on top of the list of American words which are changed completely which we will look at in the next section.

Check out the video where Peter says the word on screen as a British person would say it, followed by the American way, and there’ll be a gap after each word for you to repeat what you hear.

| | BRITISH | AMERICAN |
|---|---|---|
| **Advertisement** | uhd-VER-tis-muhnt | AD-ver-ties-muhnt |
| **Amen** | Ah-MEN | Ay-MEN |
| **Basil** | Bah-suhl | Bay-suhl |
| **Clique** | cleek | clik |
| **Dynasty** | DIN-uh-stee | DIE-nuh-stee |
| **Either** | eye-thuh | ee-thuhr |
| **Evolution** | ee-vuh-LOO-shun | eh-vuh-LOO-shun |
| **Falcon** | FORL-cuhn | FAL-cuhn |
| **Leisure** | LEZH-uh | LEE-zhuhr |
| **Mischievous** | MIS-chiv-us | mis-CHEEV-ee-us |
| **Missile** | MIS-eye-ul | MIS-uhl |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mobile** | MOH-bye-ul | MOH-buhl |
| **Neither** | NIGH-thuh | NEE-thuh |
| **Niche** | neesh | nitch |
| **Nissan** | nis-an | nees-arn |
| **Patent** | PAY-tuhnt | PAT-uhnt |
| **Patronise** | PAT-ruhn-eyez | PAY-truhn-eyez |
| **Privacy** | PRIV-uh-see | PRAI-vuh-see |
| **Progress (noun)** | PROH-gress | PROG-ress |
| **Project (noun)** | PROH-ject | PROJ-ect |
| **Route** | ROOT | ROUT |
| **Schedule** | SHED-jool | SKED-jool |
| **Semi** | SEM-ee | SEM-eye |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Stance** | starns | stans |
| **Tomato** | tuh-MAR-toe | tuh-MAY-toe |
| **Vase** | varz | vays |
| **Vitamin** | VIT-uh-min | VAI-tuh-min |
| **Wrath** | roth | rath |
| **Zebra** | ZEB-ruh | ZEE-bruh |




## DAY 16 - AMERICAN ENGLISH – DIFFERENT WORDS

In the last section, we listed a whole load of common American words which are pronounced differently than in the United Kingdom.

By the way, it may be that you have already been trained in American English, and need to convert the other way round as you are going to working in Britain, so this section and the previous one may be just as useful, but looking at it in reverse!

Wasn't it George Bernard Shaw who said, "The United States and Great Britain are two countries separated by a common language." English connects—and all too often divides—the U.S. and the UK.

Be aware that sometimes Americans and British people use the same word for something, but it means something different. For example, if you have a writer friend who said their new book “bombed”, in Britain, that means that it made a big impact and was generally positively received. However in the United States, saying something has bombed generally means that it was a disaster!

A “rubber” in the UK is used to erase pencil marks, but in the US it is a nickname for a condom!

In the UK “pants” mean underwear, but in the US, “pants” means trousers! In the UK you may wear “trainers” on your feet, but in US you would be talking about gym or physical fitness experts.

We’ll have more differences between countries and cultures later on in the course.

So here are various words starting with the British version, and what the word is generally known in America.

| BRITISH | AMERICAN |
|---|---|
| Aerial | Antenna |
| Autumn | Fall |
| Bank holiday | Legal holiday |
| Banknote | Bill |
| Restaurant Bill | Restaurant Check |
| Sweet Biscuit | Cookie |

| | |
|---|---|
| Savoury Biscuit | Cracker |
| Bonnet | Hood |
| Boot | Trunk /rear deck |
| Break | Recess |
| Car park | Parking lot |
| Chemist’s shop | Drug store / Pharmacy |
| Chest of drawers | Bureau |
| Chips | French fries |
| Cinema | Movie house/ theater |
| City Business District | Downtown |
| Clothes peg | Clothes pin |
| Cooker | Stove |
| Corporation | City |
| Cotton | Thread |
| Crisps | Chips |
| Cupboard | Closet |
| Curtains | Drapes |
| District | Precinct |
| Drain | Sewer pipe |
| Drawing pin | Thumbtack |
| Dressing gown | Bathrobe |

| | |
|---|---|
| Dustbin | Garbage can |
| Estate agent | Realtor |
| Estate car | Station wagon |
| Face flannel | Wash cloth |
| Filling Station | Gas station |
| Film | Movie |
| Flat | Apartment |
| Flyover | Overpass |
| Football | Soccer |
| Footpath | Sidewalk |
| Fortnight | Two weeks |
| Full stop | Period |
| Gallery | Balcony |
| Garden | Yard |
| Geyser | Water heater |
| Ground floor | First floor |
| Hairgrip | Bobbie pin |
| Holiday | Vacation |
| Hoover | Vacuum cleaner |
| Icing sugar | Powdered sugar |
| Label | Tag |

| | |
|---|---|
| Lift | Elevator |
| Lorry | Truck |
| Lounge suite | Business suit |
| Motorway | Freeway / superhighway |
| Nappy | Diaper |
| News agent | News dealer |
| Nought or “Oh” | Zero |
| Number plate | License plate |
| Packed lunch | Sack lunch |
| Parcel | Package |
| Pavement | Sidewalk |
| Penknife | Pocket knife |
| Petrol | Gasoline |
| Pillar-box | Mailbox |
| Post | Mail |
| Postal Code | Zip Code |
| Postman | Mailman |
| Pram | Baby carriage<br>Baby buggy |
| Pushchair | Stroller |
| Queue | Line |
| Receptionist | Desk Clerk |

| | |
|---|---|
| Return ticket | Round trip ticket |
| Ring up | Call |
| Road surface | Pavement |
| Roundabout | Traffic circle |
| Rubber | Eraser |
| Rubbish | Garbage |
| Saloon car | Sedan |
| Shop assistant | Sales clerk |
| Silencer | Muffler (car) |
| Single ticket | One way ticket |
| Solicitor | Lawyer /attorney |
| Stalls | Orchestra seats |
| Sweets | Candy |
| Take-away | Take-out |
| Tap | Faucet |
| Tea trolley | Tea cart |
| Telegram | Wire |
| Term | Semester |
| Time-table | Schedule |
| Tin | Can |
| Toilet | Restroom |

| | |
|---|---|
| Torch Flashlight | |
| Train Driver Engineer | |
| Trousers Pants | |
| Van Truck | |
| Vest Undershirt | |
| Waistcoat Vest | |
| Wallet Billfold | |
| Wash your hands Wash up | |
| Windcheater Windbreaker | |
| Windscreen Windshield | |

So today's homework is for you to go to YouTube and find obvious examples – obvious to you - of a strong British accent and a strong American accent. Then do as we suggested before; play sentences from both examples and pause the videos while you repeat what you have heard.

Can you feel in the way you are using your vocal equipment, and in particular the emphasis syllables and the mouth and tongue, the differences you are doing to sound "more British" or "more American"?

You may find that for the British accent, you are having to open your mouth more and with larger movements, and moving the mouth less so for American and with the sound coming from the back of your throat and forcing sound up your nose to sound more nasal.



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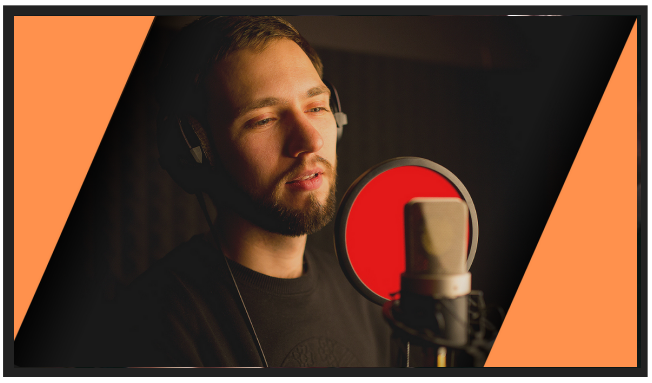
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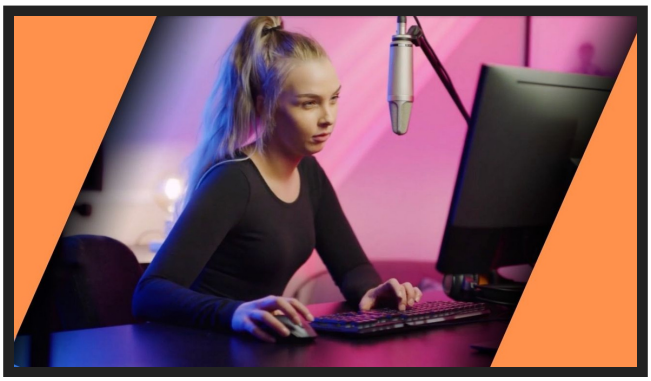


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