

- Writers in the US utilize the spelling “color.”
- British and Commonwealth writers use “Colour.”
- Both spellings are correct depending on the location of you and your readers.
- Color and colour use different spellings because of the divergence between US and British cultures.
- Some countries use a hybrid approach to this spelling. For example, Canada uses the Commonwealth spelling but pronounces the word closer to the American-esque dialect.

With slight variations, most dialects of English fall into one of two categories: American English and Commonwealth English. American English represents the speaking and writing style in the US and those in its sphere of influence. This includes locations like the Philippines and Samoa and among L2 English users in Latin America and East Asia. In contrast, Commonwealth English is the style in the UK and those in its realm, such as Australia, Canada, South Africa, and L2 English users in Europe and South Asia.

While the variance between the two is more pronounced in the spoken language, each also possesses distinct spellings. One excellent example of this lies in the difference between color vs. colour. Read on to learn why the two differ, how to pronounce them, and how to use them.

Definition and pronunciation of color and colour

The main difference between color and color is the spelling. Both styles represent distinct dialects from distinct spheres of power in the Anglo world. However, there is no difference in the meaning between the two. Both color and color refer to the visual perception of light in different wavelengths, such as red, blue, or green. The word is used to describe hues, pigments, and shades.

From a grammatical perspective, writers in both dialects use the word in two distinct ways:

- As a noun, color refers to the attributes of things that cause them to be perceived visually in different hues.
- As a verb, it means to apply color to something or to change something's color (e.g., "She decided to color the drawing using crayons.").

Given that the written form is dictated by the culture of the person using it, so is the pronunciation. Those from the US and associated areas pronounce it "KULL-er," while those from the UK and associated areas pronounce it "KULL-uh." There are some exceptions to this rule. For example, those from most provinces of Canada utilize the commonwealth spelling while speaking the US pronunciation.

Why are *color* and *colour* spelled differently?

Color and colour are spelled differently today due to a purposeful effort by the Americans to diverge from British traditions. However, to understand how that occurred, it's important to first understand how and why Commonwealth English includes the “U.”

English began as a hybrid of French and Germanic dialects, which had solidified into one cohesive language by the early 17th century. In general, English kept the basis of its Germanic influences (such as syntax and pronunciation) while incorporating large amounts of French vocabulary and spelling. The French influence is evident in the “U” in *colour*.

At the time of the revolution, British English utilized many of the same features we recognize as American today. This includes longer vowels and softer consonant sounds, such as the rhotic “r” sound. British English eventually moved away from this approach, mostly thanks to the Great Vowel Shift. This movement led to the Received Pronunciation dialect we associate with British English today.

When did *colour* become *color* in American English?

Following the American Revolution and the establishment of the US as an independent entity, US culture purposefully evolved away from the British. Academics also sought to implement changes to the language to accommodate this mandate. The definitive document of this effort was Noah Webster’s “American Dictionary of the English Language.”

Noah Webster was inspired by the burgeoning society around him and wanted to simplify the language for immigrants while creating a unique linguistic identity. Some of the adverbs set forth by his work include:

- New Spellings: Webster swapped the spellings of words like “defence” with alternate versions, such as “defense.”
- Phonetic Pronunciation: To make the language easier to pronounce, Webster changed the spellings of some words to make them more in line with everyday pronunciation, evidenced in the “Color” vs. “Colour” difference.
- New Words: Words like “skunk” and “squash” reflected concepts unique to the American experience and were canonized in his documentation.

Here’s a tip: Want to make sure your [writing](#) shines? Grammarly can [check your spelling](#) and save you from [grammar](#) and [punctuation](#) mistakes. It even [proofreads](#) your text, so your work is extra polished wherever you write.

Is it Color or Colour?

If, at this point, you are confused about whether to use Color or Color, the short answer is “both.” Your audience determines which one to use. You should use “color” if you and your readers live in:

- The US
- A US colony
- A former US colony
- East Asia
- Latin America

In contrast, you should use “colour” if you and your readers live in:

- The UK
- A member of the Commonwealth
- A former UK colony or Commonwealth
- Europe
- South Asia

If you are dealing with an audience that spans both communities, feel free to use the form you are comfortable with. Above all, maintaining consistency within your writing is more important than the form you use in this specific context.

Examples in common use

Because the only difference between the two concerns spelling, you can use either interchangeably, depending on the conventions of the place you use it. Here are some examples:

- **American English:** “The color catches the eye.”
- **Commonwealth English:** “The colour catches the eye.”
- **American English:** “They did a great job of coloring within the lines.”
- **Commonwealth English:** “They did a great job of colouring within the lines.”
- **American English:** “Does the car come in a different color?”
- **Commonwealth English:** “Does the car come in a different colour?”

Other forms of *color* and *colour*

Given that color is both a noun and a verb, it’s important to understand alternate forms of the words determined by conjugation, use, and location. Use this chart to help you navigate these decisions:

<i>Color vs. Colour</i>	
American English spelling	British English spelling
color	colour
colors	colours
colorful	colourful
colored	coloured
coloration	colouration

coloring	colouring
colorless	colourless
colorist	colourist
multicolored	multicoloured
Canada	
Generally uses <i>colour</i> in formal writing, education, and government documents. However, <i>color</i> is increasingly common in informal contexts or those under American influence, such as software and media.	
Australia	
<i>Colour</i> is the standard form in Australian English, as British spellings are deeply ingrained in education, media, and official documents, with little variation.	

Conclusion

While the decision to use color vs. colour reveals a rich historical legacy of the two languages, the actual differences between the two are minimal. So long as you consider the linguistic conventions of you and your readers' locations and maintain consistency throughout your writing, you should be able to delight your readers without breaking the rules.

Color vs. colour FAQs

Is color or colour the correct spelling?

Both color and colour are the correct spelling depending on the location of you and your readers. Color is preferred in the US, US colonies, former US colonies, East Asia, and Latin America. Colour is preferred in the UK, the Commonwealth, former UK Colonies and Commonwealths, Europe, and South Asia.

Are color and colour pronounced the same way?

Color and Colour are pronounced the same. This is evident in countries such as Canada that utilize the Commonwealth spelling but mostly speak with an American-derived accent.

Should you use color or colour for international audiences?

You should use the form of Color/Colour that most likely aligns with your audience's preferences. For example, if you are writing for Nigerians, consider using "colour" as opposed to the American form.

Should you use color or colour for international audiences?

If you are writing for an international audience, use the form that is comfortable for you, but be consistent throughout the piece. Also, consider that there are more Commonwealth speakers than American speakers.

Why does American English use simplified spellings for words like color?

Americans purposefully decided to diverge from British culture following the revolution, including in language. Academics such as Noah Webster sought to create an American form of the language that crafted a new identity, accommodated new immigrants, and described concepts unique to the American landscape.