Examples of non-standard usage

**1. I can do that quicklier than you**

In English a comparative is formed from an adjective by either adding "more" **[difficult > more difficult]** or adding the suffix "er" **[fast > faster**]. In the case of "the quicker and the slower runner" the adjective would be "quick" and the comparative "quicker".  
In the example above however the key word is not the adjective "quick" but the adverb "quickly." Adverbs take "more" never "er."   
Whether we choose to add "more" or to add the suffix "er" to an adjective depends mainly on the length of the word - so the monosyllable "quick" becomes "quicker" while the polysyllable "difficult" takes "more difficult".

**2. Then he jumped off of the wall**

The "of" is redundant here although the use is common in some dialects. "jumped off" is a phrasal verb using a preposition to supplement the verb. "of" is possessive and is grammatically redundant.

**3. If he hadn't've gone to the match he wouldn't of been late**

There is confusion in some listeners who hear the contraction "'ve" (abbreviated from "have") and hear it as "of". This example shows the contraction with the first verb and the use of "of" in the second verb. However the first verb is made unnecessarily complex, as "if he had not gone" contracted to "if he hadn't gone" would be correct Standard English grammar.

**4. I ain't never done nothin' like that**

Multiple negation is not acceptable in Standard English but is common in Cockney and elsewhere and was common in the writing of Chaucer. Standard English speakers sometimes argue that multiple negation works on mathematical principles, so that two negatives create a positive, however dialect forms use multiple negation to intensify and enhance as in the example above. Standard English would be "I have done nothing ..." or "I have never done anything ..."

**5. How much Easter eggs do you have?**

While French uses "combien" for how much or how many, English distinguishes between countable and non countables. So "how much sugar" and "how many bags of sugar". Eggs are countable so take the word "many." This is a typical issue for non-native English speakers.

**6. That's the swing we swinged on**

Two common ways of creating a simple past tense verb form are - adding an "ed" suffix and changing the central vowel. Older verbs may change the vowel eg swim > swam > swum or hang >hung but others simply add the suffix walk > walked or hang > hanged ( referring specifically to an execution). In the example above the verb should be "swung".

**7. We're waitin' of it comin' in, pet**

The phrasal verb "waiting for" is part of Standard English but "waiting of" is common in Newcastle dialect. The meaning is the same.

**8. You'ze lot 've got a lot to learn**

Standard English has identical second person pronouns so in "you are guilty" we cannot tell whether the subject is singular or plural. However Geordie, Northern Irish, Scots and others do have a second person plural pronoun (yous). Here there is also an intensifier "lot" used for emphasis.

**9**. [James aged 3 after poking his ear]  
**Look mummy. My itch is gone and I got a wak out of it**

James has heard "wax" as the plural form of \*wak. By back formation he has created a new word. This is a "virtuous error" as it demonstrates that he has grammatical awareness (even though he was wrong in this case.)

**10. [Mother] Don't argue**

**[Hugh aged 3] I don't argme!**

Similar to the previous example. Hugh has heard "arg you" and has used his grammatical knowledge to generate what is logical to him.

**Slang**

One form of non-standard language is [slang](http://teflpedia.com/Slang). It is especially common in pop, rock, jazz and rap music, as well as in films, all of which tend to have international audiences, and many foreign speakers who have learnt more formal registers are sometimes surprised when they hear expressions like: “I gotta go!” (I have to go now). In certain regions, certain dialects may have this non-standard language incorporated into “normal” speech.

* C’mon! = Come on!
* cop = policeman
* ’cos = because (first recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1828[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4))
* cuppa = cup of tea
* don’t = doesn’t – He don’t love me.
* dunno = don't know (first recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1842[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4))
* gimme = give me – Gimme my bag!
* kinda = kind of
* lemme = let me – Lemme see that book!
* lil’ = little – He’s gotta nice lil’ house in the country.
* lotta = a lot of – He’s gotta lotta money!
* ma = mama
* OK = all right. Originally a deliberate misspelling of "all correct" *(oll korrect)*.
* ol’ = old
* yeah = yes
* wotcha = What are you ...? – Wotcha gonna do when you get there?

It is also quite common to hear words finishing in /ɪŋ/ (written form [-ing](http://teflpedia.com/-ing)) pronounced /ɪn/. The final g is substituted by an [apostrophe](http://teflpedia.com/Apostrophe). Examples include the upper class expression *huntin’, shootin’ and fishin’*, and the lyrics of pop and rock songs: *cryin’* – *drivin’* – *dyin’* – *livin’* – *lyin’* – *rockin’* – *singin’* – *sittin’* – *talkin’* – *walkin’* – etc.

**Examples of non-standard British English**

The verb "to [be](http://teflpedia.com/Be)" is the most complex in English, but some non-standard usages seem to be attempting to regularise it:

* *we was* is used in place of "we were". Especially by footballers, as in "we was robbed."[[1]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-1)
* *if I was you* is used in place of "If I were you".
* *they was waiting for us* is used in place of "they were waiting for us".
* [*ain't*](http://teflpedia.com/Ain%27t) is frequently used - even if in a jocular vein - instead of *(be) not* (and also *(have) not*)
* *innit* = isn’t it? – *It’s cold today, innit?*
* *I be* is is used in place of "I am" in some regional dialects.
* *gotten* is not used in [British English](http://teflpedia.com/British_English) but is very common in [American English](http://teflpedia.com/American_English). It is interesting that *Oxford A-Z of English Usage* somewhat snootily claims that "even there it is often regarded as non-standard"[[2]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-2) while the American *Merriam-Webster* simply notes its existence.[[3]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-3)
* *don’t* for *doesn’t* - as in The Beatles song "Ticket to Ride": "she’s got a ticket to ride and she don’t care."

**Register and "unrecognised" contractions**

Then there is the question of [register](http://teflpedia.com/Register) and unrecognised [contractions](http://teflpedia.com/Contraction). While some contractions such as "isn't" are recognised and acceptable in speech and informal written registers, others are acceptable in speech but frowned on in all written forms of the language, some include:

* *gonna* for *(be) going to*. First recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1913[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4)
* *gotta* for [*have (got) to*](http://teflpedia.com/Have_%28got%29_to). First recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1924[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4)
* *outta* for *out of* – Get outta here!
* *sorta* for *sort of*[[5]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-5) First recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1790[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4)
* *wanna* for *want to*. First recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1896[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4)
* *y’all*. A second-person plural pronoun used informally in the South of the United States.[[6]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-6)

### Deliberate misspellings

Deliberate misspellings can be thought as written slang.

* luv = love (first recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1898[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4))
* wot = what (first recorded in the [*OED*](http://teflpedia.com/OED) in 1829[[4]](http://teflpedia.com/Non-standard_English#cite_note-dc-4))

# Standard vs. Nonstandard Phrases And Words With More Than One Spelling

Below you’ll find a fun list of standard vs. nonstandard phrases. Standard American English is an ever-evolving entity, and experts disagree on many aspects of what is “correct,” and as a result, many of us use slightly different spellings for the same words. Dictionaries and textbooks vary when it comes to standards of usage, and it is often up to the writer to determine which [rules of grammar](http://www.writersrelief.com/post/The-Purist-Debate) to follow.

But when it comes to word choice, should you use toward or towards? Cannot or can not? If you’re like most writers, you turn to the dictionary and discover that towards is listed as a “variant,” which leads you to believe it is “nonstandard.” What does that mean? Is it correct or not? Does that help you to know [how to spell it](http://www.writersrelief.com/post/Spell-It-Right)? Dictionaries list nonstandard words to indicate that they are commonly used but are not necessarily correct.

You’ll also find jargon and colloquialisms in the dictionary, but you wouldn’t use the word “ain’t” in your [personal essay](http://www.writersrelief.com/post/The-Art-of-the-Personal-Essay) just because it’s in the dictionary. (Naturally, you could use it in dialogue.) In other words, err on the side of standard usage.

Standard American English is “substantially uniform and well-established by usage in the speech and writing of the educated and widely recognized as acceptable” according to Merriam-Webster. Based on that definition, we have put together the following list of standard and nonstandard words and phrases.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Standard** | **Nonstandard** |
| a lot | alot |
| all right | alright |
| anyway | anyways |
| considered to be | considered as |
| in comparison to | in comparison with |
| in contrast to | in contrast with |
| somewhat | kind of |
| regarded as | regarded to be |
| regardless | irregardless |
| would have | would of |
| might have | might of |
| in regard to | in regards to |
| should have | should of |
| thus | thusly |
| use | utilize |

