



French Origin Words

Some words are pronounced differently in American and British English variations. Although the meanings are exactly the same and, generally, these words are used in the same way, the stress within the word is in a different position.

When words originate from the French language, British English speakers tend to stress the first syllable whilst American English speakers tend to stress the second/last syllable. Below are some examples of words that follow this pattern.

British Stress (First Syllable)	American Stress (Second Syllable)	Definition
Adult	Adult	(Noun) A person who is over the age of 18 and has fully grown
Ballet	Ballet	(Noun) A classical dance
Bandeau	Bandeau	(Noun) A small piece of material used to hold somebody's hair
Barrage	Barrage	(Noun) A heavy military attack focused on one small area
Baton	Baton	(Noun) A stick used for hitting
Beret	Beret	(Noun) A typical French-style hat
Bidet	Bidet	(Noun) A piece of equipment in a bathroom used for washing
Blasé	Blasé	(Adjective) To be unimpressed with something
Bouffant	Bouffant	(Noun) A hairstyle where all the hair is collected in a round shape on top of the head
Brasserie	Brasserie	(Noun) A restaurant in a French style

British Stress (First Syllable)	American Stress (Second Syllable)	Definition
Brochure	Brochure	(Noun) A leaflet of information, usually used as a promotional tool
Brûlée	Brûlée	(Noun) A dessert made of custard with burnt sugar on the top
Buffet	Buffet	(Noun) A selection of food where you can choose what you would like and add it to your plate
Café	Café	(Noun) A local shop where you can have drinks and food, typically coffee
Caffeine	Caffeine	(Noun) A substance found in coffee, tea, chocolate and some fizzy drinks
Chagrin	Chagrin	(Noun) Irritation
Chalet	Chalet	(Noun) A wooden house typically found in the Alps
Chauffer	Chauffer	(Noun) A private driver who takes you from A to B
Chiffon	Chiffon	(Noun) A silk or nylon material
Cigarette	Cigarette	(Noun) A paper tube of tobacco that people smoke
Cliché	Cliché	(Noun) Something that is the norm and very typical, therefore not surprising or interesting
Collage	Collage	(Noun) A collection of materials put together, usually photographs
Cornet	Cornet	(Noun) A brass musical instrument, similar to a trumpet
Crochet	Crochet	(Noun) A craft where yarn is intertwined to create a large piece of fabric
Croissant	Croissant	(Noun) A French pastry that can be sweet or savoury, traditionally eaten for breakfast
Croquet	Croquet	(Noun) A game played on a grass where you must hit balls through hoops with a mallet
Debris	Debris	(Noun) Pieces of something that has been destroyed
Debut	Debut	(Noun) The first time somebody does something, normally a performance

British Stress (First Syllable)	American Stress (Second Syllable)	Definition
Décor	Décor	(Noun) Short for decoration, meaning the style of a place
Detail	Detail	(Noun) Specific information about something
Figurine	Figurine	(Noun) A small porcelain statue that looks like a person
Filet	Filet	(Noun) A piece of meat with no bones
Flambé	Flambé	(Adjective) Something that has been set on fire
Frappé	Frappé	(Noun) A drink that has been cooled down with ice or chilled
Frontier	Frontier	(Noun) A border separating two or more countries
Garage	Garage	(Noun) A room attached to a house where the car is kept
Gâteau	Gâteau	(Noun) A sweet cake normally filled with cream and various fruits
Glacé	Glacé	(Adjective) Something is stored in sugar
Gourmet	Gourmet	(Adjective) Food that is delicious and to a very high standard
Massage	Massage	(Noun) A technique where somebody rubs the muscles and joints to relieve tension
Matinée	Matinée	(Noun) A performance or event that takes place in the afternoon, typically in the theatre
Mirage	Mirage	(Noun) An optical illusion
Montage	Montage	(Noun) A collection of images
Negligée	Negligée	(Noun) A dressing gown, typically for women, that is made of a very light material
Nonchalant	Nonchalant	(Adjective) Casual, relaxed and confident
Nouveau	Nouveau	(Adjective) Modern
Parfait	Parfait	(Noun) A cold dessert made with cream, eggs and fruit
Parquet	Parquet	(Noun) A wooden floor where the blocks are arranged in a pattern

British Stress (First Syllable)	American Stress (Second Syllable)	Definition
Pastel	Pastel	(Adjective) A soft tone of colour e.g. pastel green
Pâté	Pâté	(Noun) Food in the form of a paste, typically meat or fish
Plateau	Plateau	(Noun) A large area of flat ground that is high
Protégé	Protégé	(Noun) A person who is provided with guidance by an experienced person. The protégé normally takes over from the experienced person eventually.
Purée	Purée	(Noun) Food in the form of a smooth liquid, typically fruit or vegetables
Risqué	Risqué	(Adjective) Dangerous
Sachet	Sachet	(Noun) A packet normally made of paper or plastic that contains something e.g. salt, ketchup
Salon	Salon	(Noun) A beauty shop where you can get your hair or nails done
Sauté	Sauté	(Adjective) Food that is fried
Soirée	Soirée	(Noun) A social event normally held in the evening
Sorbet	Sorbet	(Noun) Water, sugar and flavouring mixed together and frozen
Soufflé	Soufflé	(Noun) A sponge dessert
Tableau	Tableau	(Noun) A freeze-frame of people acting a scene
Touché	Touché	(Expression) Used when somebody responds to you with an intelligent point and you acknowledge that this is a good point and you don't have any argument against it
Triage	Triage	(Noun) A medical term used to organise patients by order of severity of illness
Vaccine	Vaccine	(Noun) Short for vaccination, which is a substance given to somebody to prevent them from getting a disease
Valet	Valet	(Noun) A clothes attendant for a male

There are a few words that have a French origin, but they don't follow this pattern. In this case, the British speaker would stress the last syllable whilst the American speaker would stress the first syllable.

British Stress (Last Syllable)	American Stress (First Syllable)	Definition
Address	Address	(Noun) Information about a location
Artisan	Artisan	(Noun) A person who makes something by hand e.g. bread, ceramics, clothes
Esquire	Esquire	(Noun) The title used for unmarried men
Limousine	Limousine	(Noun) An extremely long car
Magazine	Magazine	(Noun) A document with pictures and stories about a specific topic
Moustache	Moustache	(Noun) Body hair that grows, normally on men, above their mouths and below their noses
Princess	Princess	(Noun) A woman who is a member of the royal family, daughter of the monarch
Shallot	Shallot	(Noun) Similar to an onion
Tirade	Tirade	(Noun) A long speech of anger

There are also a few French words that have a different word stress in the British and American variations and don't follow the patterns above.

British Stress (Last Syllable)	American Stress (First Syllable)	Definition
Advertisement	Advertisement	(Noun) Something used to attract the attention of a potential customer
Aristocrat	Aristocrat	(Noun) A member of the highest class of society
Artisanal	Artisanal	(Adjective) To describe something that has been made by hand
Fiancée	Fiancée	(Noun) A person who is engaged to be married
Financier	Financier	(Noun) A person who manages money on behalf of another person or organisation

British Stress (Last Syllable)	American Stress (First Syllable)	Definition
Liaison	Liaison	(Noun) Communication
Premier	Premier	(Noun) First and, therefore, most important
Renaissance	Renaissance	(Noun) The period of time between 14 th and 16 th centuries. In particular, this is used to talk about art and culture
Sommelier	Sommelier	(Noun) A wine waiter
Urinal	Urinal	(Noun) A piece of equipment in a male toilet