

What other English-speaking countries do you know apart from the UK, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand?

Can you name at least one English-speaking country in each of Africa, Asia and South or Central America?

What do you know about those countries?

What connects most of the countries that use English as an official or common language? Why do they use English?















MATURITA CARD OTHER ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

English is an official or majority language in more than 90 countries and territories around the world (most of them being former British colonies). Let's take a closer look at some of them.

India

India was part of the British Empire until 1947, and because of this English has historically been used in government, higher education and business, though the Hindu nationalist movement is trying to change this. India still has the second-largest number of English speakers in the world (after the US), but most of its 200 million speakers (15–20% of the population) know English as a second or third language. India has 22 official languages, 122 major languages and hundreds more minority languages, so English can function as a shared language or to denote status.

South Africa

In South Africa English is the dominant language in government and the media. There are 12 official languages, and dozens without this status. The most common first languages are Zulu, Xhosa (one of southern Africa's famous "click languages", which include sounds made by clicking the tongue on the top of the mouth) and Afrikaans (a variant of Dutch spoken by the Boers, colonial farmers of Dutch heritage). English is the fourth most common first language: about 10% of people speak English as a first language and 33% know it as a second language, mostly in urban areas. South Africa changed hands between British and Dutch control several times in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Nigeria

The former British colony of Nigeria has the third-most English speakers in the world. Almost 20% of Nigerians speak English as their first language, and another 30-40% speak it as a second language. However, this includes speakers of Nigerian Pidgin, a simplified and localised form of English that is used among speakers of many different languages. Nigerian Pidgin has so many speakers (over 100 million) that the BBC News website is available in the language.

Central and South America

There is only one officially Anglophone (= English-speaking) country in Central America, Belize, and one in South America, Guyana. Both are former British colonies. Belize has a very diverse population: 50% Mestizo (mixed Hispanic heritage), 25% Creole (mixed African descent due to the history of slavery), 10% indigenous Maya and many other ethnicities. Most people speak three languages: English, Spanish and Kriol (an English-based mixed language). In Guyana, most people have African or Indian heritage, as the British colonialists exploited both enslaved people from Africa and "servants" from India. English is the official language, but most people speak an English-based creole (mixed language) called Creolese or Gayiniiz.

The Anglophone Caribbean

Around 25 island nations and territories in the Caribbean are either majority English speaking or have English as an official language. Ten of these, including Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Bahamas, were once part of the British Empire and are now part of the Commonwealth of Nations. Several, such as the Cayman Islands and Anguilla, are current British territories. Others have English as an official language for other reasons. For example, the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico is a US territory and its people are American citizens.

Singapore

Singapore in south-eastern Asia was a British colony from 1819 until 1965 (with a short break during WWII when it was occupied by the Japanese). When it gained independence, the Singaporean government decided to keep English as the main language to maximise economic prosperity. Almost all Singaporeans can speak it, and half the country have English as their first language. There are, however, two main forms: Singaporean English, which is a variant of British English, and the mixed language Singlish, which is spoken on the streets.

An island in the Med

The little European island of Malta is the world's tenth-smallest country, but also its fourth-most densely populated. It was a British colony from 1815 and was used as headquarters for the British navy in the Mediterranean. It declared independence (but with the British monarch as head of state) in 1964 and ten years later became a republic. Its official languages are Maltese, which comes from medieval Sicilian Arabic, and English. Almost 90% of Maltese are fluent English speakers, but only 10% have it as their first language.