# Britain ranks second globally in written swearing despite long-term decline in casual use



Britain's reputation for a robust swearing culture has once again been confirmed, with recent research placing it as the second-most prolific user of profanities globally, trailing only behind the United States. The comprehensive study, conducted by researchers at the University of Queensland in Australia, examined the written usage of vulgarities across 20 English-speaking nations. British written content exhibits 0.025 per cent of vulgar language, a figure that underscores the country's ongoing fascination with swearing.

In stark contrast, Americans lead the charge with a striking 0.036 per cent of their written output comprising swear words. The study revealed that common terms vary significantly across cultures; for instance, while 'c***' reigns as Britain's favourite expletive, Americans predominantly favour 'a***\*\*e', and 'feck' is a noteworthy term among Irish speakers. Such distinctions highlight the cultural influences that shape how swearing manifests in English literature, blogs, and casual online conversations.

Notably, the dataset that informed this analysis boasts over 1.7 billion words from diverse sources, including blogs and articles. This breadth of data allowed researchers not only to quantify offensive language but also to explore linguistic creativity. Dr Martin Schweinberger, the study's lead author, remarked on the playful nature of vulgarities, suggesting that swearing serves as a unique outlet for linguistic expression. He noted the regional variations in preferences for certain terms, illustrating the diverse linguistic landscape of the English-speaking world.

Despite the expansion of online profanity, contrasting trends surface in Britain regarding swearing practices over the decades. According to data from Aston University, swearing in casual British English has reportedly declined by over a quarter since the 1990s, with a 27.6 per cent decrease observed between 1994 and 2014. This shift suggests evolving social attitudes toward vulgar language, wherein new generations may prefer more subdued forms of expression as norms surrounding decency adapt to contemporary values.

While the frequency of swearing in the UK appears to be waning, other research highlights a notable rise in vulgarity in American literature. A longitudinal study examining nearly one million books published between 1950 and 2008 indicated a substantial increase in the prevalence of swear words, reflecting a broader cultural acceptance of self-expression and diminishing taboos surrounding explicit language in the United States.

Interestingly, the nuanced nature of swearing reveals differing patterns among genders and social classes within Britain. Research indicates that men are more inclined to use the f-word compared to their female counterparts, while working-class individuals tend to employ such language with greater frequency than those from higher social strata. This variance underscores the impact of socio-economic factors on language use and highlights the role of context in determining appropriateness.

Additionally, while Australians generally adopt a foul-mouthed persona, an analysis reveals that their online swearing figures are surprisingly low relative to their American and British peers. On average, Australians reportedly swear 14 times a day, a figure notably less than the 21 times per day recorded in the US, yet above the UK average of 10. Researchers speculate that Australians may reserve more extensive swearing for informal face-to-face interactions as opposed to their written communications.

This latest research not only affirms Britain's place in the global swearing league but also invites reflection on the changing landscape of language itself. Understanding these shifts can prove essential for language learners and immigrants adjusting to new cultures, where the subtleties of vulgarity can significantly impact interpersonal relationships. The evolving role of swearing in communication exemplifies not just linguistic diversity, but also cultural dynamics that shape how societies express their emotional and social realities.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14743627/UK-comes-second-global-swearing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14743627/UK-comes-second-global-swearing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.aston.ac.uk/latest-news/use-swear-words-declines-more-quarter-uk-1990s-new-research)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/08/shocking-figures-us-academics-find-dramatic-growth-of-swearing-in-books), [[4]](https://swearing.info/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://theconversation.com/we-swear-by-it-but-were-hardly-world-leaders-in-getting-to-grips-with-the-f-word-49676)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://preply.com/en/blog/au-cities-that-swear-most/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/12/221205203251.htm)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14743627/UK-comes-second-global-swearing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.aston.ac.uk/latest-news/use-swear-words-declines-more-quarter-uk-1990s-new-research> - Aston University researchers have found that the use of swear words in Britain has declined by more than a quarter since the 1990s. Dr. Robbie Love analysed casual British English conversation between 1994 and 2014, revealing a 27.6% decrease in swearing frequency. The study also indicates that the f-word has overtaken 'bloody' as the UK's most popular curse word. The research highlights changing social attitudes towards swearing and its evolving role in communication.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/08/shocking-figures-us-academics-find-dramatic-growth-of-swearing-in-books> - A study led by Jean Twenge analysed nearly one million books published between 1950 and 2008, finding a significant increase in the use of swear words over the past six decades. Words like 'motherfucker' and 'shit' appeared much more frequently in recent publications compared to earlier ones. The researchers suggest that this trend reflects a cultural shift towards valuing individual self-expression and weaker social taboos in American society.
4. <https://swearing.info/> - An online survey conducted by linguist Tony McEnery gathered responses from 2,788 participants across 69 nationalities to assess perceptions of offensive language. The study found that swear words are generally perceived as more offensive by women than men. Additionally, the research revealed that certain sounds, known as approximants, are less likely to appear in swear words, suggesting a universal pattern in the phonetics of profanity across different languages.
5. <https://theconversation.com/we-swear-by-it-but-were-hardly-world-leaders-in-getting-to-grips-with-the-f-word-49676> - Lancaster University's Tony McEnery conducted research using the British National Corpus to study the usage of the f-word in British English. The findings indicate that the f-word is more prevalent in men's speech than women's and is more common in working-class speech compared to middle or upper-class speech. The study also highlights that the f-word is used more frequently in natural conversation than in institutional talk or written forms.
6. <https://preply.com/en/blog/au-cities-that-swear-most/> - A study by Preply surveyed 1,503 Australian residents to determine which cities have the highest frequency of swearing. The results revealed that Australians swear more than the British but less than Americans, with the average Australian swearing 14 times per day compared to 10 times in the UK and 21 times in the US. The study also compared swearing patterns across different Australian cities, providing insights into regional variations in the use of profanity.
7. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/12/221205203251.htm> - Research published in the journal Psychonomic Bulletin & Review suggests that swear words across different languages tend to lack certain sounds, known as approximants, such as l, r, and w. This common pattern indicates that these sounds may appear less offensive to listeners. The study involved participants from five unrelated languages and found that words without approximants were more likely to be perceived as swear words, suggesting a universal bias in the phonetics of profanity.