

# Ask about English

Learned or Learnt?



# BBC WORLD SERVICE LEARNING ENGLISH



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## BBC Learning English – Ask about English

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**Martin in Singapore asks:**

Could you kindly explain how to use the following word appropriately? I have read a few magazines; different writers use this word in different ways.

1. I have LEARNED / LEARNT to drive a truck in the army.
2. I LEARNED / LEARNT to cook when I was little.
3. I LEARNED / LEARNT of his illness from his mother.

I'm really confused. Thank you.

**Karen Adams answers:**

Thank you for your question Martin – it's a really interesting question, and I'm afraid there's no simple answer to this one. Because basically either form is correct. I learned – ed – or I learnt to drive a truck in the army. Either one is correct.

But how can this be? Well, the ed form of the past tense is the regular form - I learned to drive a truck – I learned to cook – and very many past tenses end in this “ed”. And you will find there is a tendency for verbs to become more regular as time goes on. This is a feature of language change. Originally, in British English, everyone would have spelt the past tense of learn with T – I learnt to drive, I learnt to cook, but you'll find more and more people in the UK now using the ed ending.

The same is true of verbs such as spell – as in I spelt it incorrectly – with a T at the end. But now you'll find more and more people using - I spelled it incorrectly – with an ed at the end. This is probably due to the influence of American English coming into Britain because in the US the ed is used for learn, for spell, for dream for example - I dreamed it with an ed at the end. And you'll find that this US spelling is starting to replace the original British spelling in British English.

The main thing to remember is that both of these forms are correct. However, the important thing for you to do is to choose which one you would like to use, and to use that one consistently. So try to avoid mixing the ed and the t endings. Try to use just the one, but it's up to you to decide which one you want to use.

I hope that helps

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