

ABBREVIATION

Definition of *abbreviation* (according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

1: a shortened form of a written word or phrase used in place of the whole word or phrase

"Amt" is an *abbreviation* for "amount".

"USA" is an *abbreviation* of "United States of America".

2: the act or result of abbreviating something: ABRIDGMENT

I know you would not be satisfied with an *abbreviation* of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporary interest to the writer
...— Anne Brontë

Synonyms for *abbreviation*: abridgment (or abridgement), bowdlerization, condensation, digest

WHAT IS AN ABBREVIATION?

An *abbreviation* is a shortened form of a written word or phrase. Abbreviations may be used to save space and time, to avoid repetition of long words and phrases, or simply to conform to conventional usage.

The styling of abbreviations is inconsistent and arbitrary and includes many possible variations. Some abbreviations are formed by omitting all but the first few letters of a word; such abbreviations usually end in a period: *Oct.* for *October*, *univ.* for *university*, and *cont.* for *continued*. Other abbreviations are formed by omitting letters from the middle of the word and usually also end in a period: *govt.* for *government*, *Dr.* for *Doctor*, and *att.* for *attorney*. Abbreviations for the names of states in the U.S. are two capitalized letters, e.g., *AR* for *Arkansas*, *ME* for *Maine*, and *TX* for *Texas*.

Acronyms are abbreviations formed from the initial letters of an expanded phrase and usually do not include periods: *PR* for *public relations*, *CEO* for *chief executive officer*, and *BTW* for *by the way*. Some acronyms are pronounced as words: *FEMA* for *Federal Emergency Management Agency* and *NATO* for *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. Although some people assert that all acronyms not pronounced as words, such as *EPA* for *Environmental Protection Agency*, be referred to as *initialisms*, the term *acronym* is in fact applied to both.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ABBREVIATION AND AN ACRONYM?

Some people are unsure of whether to call *ASAP* or *appt* abbreviations or acronyms. Both *abbreviation* and *acronym* are used to refer to a shortened form, but an acronym is a shortened form of a phrase and is usually made up of the initial letters of that phrase. For example, *NATO* comes from "North Atlantic Treaty Organization," and *ASAP* comes from "as

soon as possible.” Abbreviations, on the other hand, can be shortened forms of words or phrases, and need not necessarily be made up of the initial letters of either. *ASAP* and *appt* (for *appointment*) are both considered abbreviations, but only *ASAP* is an acronym. Acronyms are a type of abbreviation.

INITIALISM

Definition of *initialism* (according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

An abbreviation formed from initial letters

Acronym is a fairly recent word, dating from the 1940s, although acronyms existed long before we gave them that name. The term was preceded in English by the word *initialism*, meaning an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of a phrase, and which has been in use since the late 19th century.

Some people feel strongly that *acronym* should only be used for terms like *NATO*, which is pronounced as a single word, and that *initialism* should be used if the individual letters are all pronounced distinctly, as with *FBI*. However, research shows that *acronym* is commonly used to refer to both types of abbreviations.

DEFINITION OF INITIALISM BY IVY WIGMORE

An initialism is an abbreviation formed from the first letter -- the initial -- of each of the words in a term.

Initialisms are very common in information technology. API (for application-program interface), BCI (for brain-computer interface) and CAE (for computer-aided engineering) are just a few of the many examples.

The term *initialism* is often used as a synonym for acronym. However, although initialisms can be acronyms (and vice-versa) there are some abbreviations that belong in just one category or the other.

Strictly speaking, an acronym can be pronounced as a word. By that definition, GUI (for graphical user interface), which is usually pronounced as *gooey*, is an acronym as well as an initialism but GPU (for graphics processing unit) is just an initialism.

Similarly, some acronyms are made from the parts of multiple words rather than initials, which means that they don't qualify as initialisms.

Although some authorities, including Merriam-Webster, maintain that the terms can be used interchangeably, others insist that they be differentiated.

ACRONYM

Definition of acronym (according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

A word (such as *NATO*, *radar*, or *laser*) formed from the initial letter or letters of each of the successive parts or major parts of a compound term.

An **acronym** is a word or name formed from the initial components of a longer name or phrase. Acronyms are usually formed from the initial letters of words, as in *NATO* (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*), but sometimes use syllables, as in *Benelux* (short for *Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg*). They can also be a mixture, as in *radar* (*RAdio Detection And Ranging*).

Acronyms can be pronounced as words, like *NASA* and *UNESCO*; as individual letters, like *FBI*, *TNT*, and *ATM*; or as both letters and words, like *JPEG* (pronounced *JAY-peg*) and *IUPAC*.

The broader sense of *acronym*—the meaning of which includes terms pronounced as letters—is sometimes criticized, but it is the term's original meaning and is in common use. Dictionary and style-guide editors are not in universal agreement on the naming for such abbreviations, and it is a matter of some dispute whether the term *acronym* can be legitimately applied to abbreviations which are not pronounced "as words", nor do these language authorities agree on the correct use of spacing, casing, and punctuation.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ACRONYM AND AN INITIALISM?

Both acronyms and initialisms are made up of the first letter or letters of the words in a phrase. The word *acronym* typically applies when the resulting thing can be read as a word; for example, *radar* comes from "radio detection and ranging" and *scuba* comes from "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus." The word *initialism* only applies when the resulting thing is read as an abbreviation; for example *DIY*, which comes from "do it yourself," is pronounced by saying the names of the letters. Note that the word *acronym* is also sometimes used to mean "initialism."

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ACRONYM AND AN ABBREVIATION?

An acronym is a kind of abbreviation. Abbreviations can be shortened forms of any kind. For example, *appt* is an abbreviation of *appointment*, and *ASAP* is an abbreviation of *as soon as possible*. *ASAP*, however, also qualifies as an acronym because it is made up of the initial letters of the phrase it comes from: *as soon as possible*.

IS OK AN ACRONYM?

OK is technically an acronym. It comes from the phrase "oll korrekt," a humorous alteration of "all correct."