**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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO) (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*), but sometimes use syllables, as in [*Benelux*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benelux) (short for *Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg*). They can also be a mixture, as in [*radar*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radar) (*RAdio Detection And Ranging*).

Acronyms can be pronounced as words, like [*NASA*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NASA) and [*UNESCO*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO); as individual letters, like [*FBI*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Bureau_of_Investigation), [*TNT*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TNT), and [*ATM*](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ATM); or as both letters and words, like [*JPEG*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JPEG) (pronounced [*JAY-peg*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Pronunciation_respelling_key)) and [*IUPAC*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Union_of_Pure_and_Applied_Chemistry).

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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_(punctuation)), [casing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_case), and [punctuation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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 "*ra*dio *d*etection *a*nd *r*anging" and *scuba* comes from "*s*elf-*c*ontained *u*nderwater *b*reathing *a*pparatus." The word *initialism* only applies when the resulting thing is read as an abbreviation; for example *DIY*, which comes from "*d*o *i*t *y*ourself," 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: *a*s *s*oon *a*s *p*ossible.

**IS *OK* AN ACRONYM?**

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

**INITIALISM**

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

**A**n abbreviation formed from [initial](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/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*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/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**](https://www.techtarget.com/contributor/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](https://www.techtarget.com/searchapparchitecture/definition/application-program-interface-API) (for application-program interface), [BCI](https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/brain-computer-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](https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/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](https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/GUI) (for graphical user interface), which is usually pronounced as *gooey*, is an acronym as well as an initialism but [GPU](https://www.techtarget.com/searchvirtualdesktop/definition/GPU-graphics-processing-unit) (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.

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| **Acronym** | **Initialism** | **Abbreviation** |
| An acronym is a type of abbreviation that shortens a phrase by combining the first letter (or letters) of each word in the phrase to form a new pronounceable word. Here are some acronym examples:   * **NASA**, which stands for National Aeronautical and Space Administration. To form the acronym NASA, you take the first letter of each of the words in the phrase “National Aeronautical and Space Administration” and then pronounce the collection of letters as a new word—we pronounce the term as “nah-suh” and not the individual letters “N-A-S-A.” * **FOMO**, which stands for “fear of missing out” * **LASER**, which stands for “light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation” * **RADAR**, which stands for Radio Detection And Ranging | An initialism is another type of abbreviation similar to an acronym—but not exactly the same.  Initialisms also use the first letter of each word in the phrase, but instead of combining the letters to form a new word, you pronounce each letter individually. Here are some examples:   * **VIP**, which stands for “very important person” * **DVD**, which stands for “digital versatile disc” * [**AM and PM**](https://www.rd.com/article/what-does-am-and-pm-stand-for/), which stand for “ante meridiem” and “post meridiem” * ATM: Automated Teller Machine * DND: Do Not Disturb * UFO: Unidentified Flying Object * ASAP: As Soon As Possible * HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus * DIY: Do it Yourself * IQ: Intelligence Quotient * SOS: Save Our Souls * FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation * DOB: Date Of Birth | An abbreviation is **any** shortened or contracted form of a word or phrase. Many common abbreviations tend to shorten the word being referenced by literally shortening the word but not creating a new one. Here are some abbreviation examples:   * **Ave**., which is an abbreviation for “avenue” * **Dec**., which is an abbreviation for “December” * **Etc**., which is an abbreviation for “et cetera” * **Photo**, which is an abbreviation for “photograph” * **Exam**, which is an abbreviation for “examination” * Col.: colonel * Geog.: geography * Govt.: government * Lit.: literary, literature * Ref.: reference * Subj.: subject * Univ.: university * Vocab.: vocabulary |
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