

# The Most Used Word Ever: It's Ok! [B1]

Versatile e popolare come poche altre, questa parola —probabilmente la più usata del pianeta— non ha bisogno di traduzione. Qual è la sua origine e perché si scrive in un modo così particolare? Approfondiamo nella sua storia e nelle sue curiose ambiguità.



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Have you ever [wondered](#) where 'OK', the [most widely used](#) word in the world, comes from? Many origins have been suggested, for example the Louisiana French 'au quai', meaning 'to the [dock](#)', said of cotton that had been approved for [loading](#) on a ship, or the German 'alles korrekt', 'all [accurate](#)', or even the Greek 'olla kalla', 'all good'. Some argue that it evolved from 'okeh', a Choctaw affirmative expression in the native American tribe language. There are also theories that it was derived from the Scottish expression 'och aye', denoting approval.

## MISSPELLING

However, in the 1960s American linguist Allen Walker Read, an English professor at Columbia University, uncovered OK's true origins: the expression is literally a joke dating back to 1839, when the abbreviation "o.k."

first appeared in print in a humorous article in the Boston Morning Post, next to the words “all correct”. Much like modern-day [shortcuts](#) such as [LOL](#) and [OMG](#), an abbreviation [fad](#) flourished in 19th-century America and, in an attempt at humour, cultivated elites intentionally abbreviated words and [misspelled](#) them for [slang](#); so, it wasn’t strange that ‘all correct’ was abbreviated to ‘o.k.’.

## MESSAGE RECEIVED

Abbreviations and misspellings are usually only popular for a short period of time. However, ‘OK’ [stuck around](#) thanks to the invention of the telegraph. By the 1870s it had become the standard way for early telegraph operators to [acknowledge](#) that a message had been received. ‘OK’ soon started to appear in everyday [speech](#), although it was usually only used in business contexts or in fictional dialogues to suggest that a character was uneducated. In the 20th century, ‘OK’ was no longer considered [slang](#) and had steadily [made its way](#) into the everyday [speech](#) of Americans. It soon found its place in many foreign languages too. It was [allegedly](#) the first word spoken on the Moon when, as the [lander touched down](#), Buzz Aldrin exclaimed: “OK, contact light”. With the [advent](#) of computers, ‘OK’ became the common label for confirming actions, and the emoji hand symbol (showing the index finger and thumb touching to make a circle) is today one of the most universally used.

## WHY SO POPULAR?

Whether you [spell](#) it all in [upper case](#) ‘OK’, or ‘O.K.’, all in lower case ‘okay’ or ‘ok’, or a combination of the two, ‘Ok’, (even though the generally accepted form is ‘OK’, [upper case](#), with no [full stops](#)), there is no doubt that it is the most widespread English word on the planet. But how did it conquer the world? Maybe because it’s so... useful! It’s just two letters, it’s easy for most non-English speakers to pronounce and to write, it can fill almost any [gap](#) in conversation, it’s a verbal [thumbs-up](#) to express agreement and it’s a universally good way to say that something is alright, or not bad. Obviously, there are similar words, like ‘yes’, ‘fine’, ‘excellent’, ‘all right’, ‘satisfactory’,

'good' but they are endowed with a stronger sense of affirmation and emotion. 'OK', on the other hand, is the weakest form expressing agreement, somehow just one step above 'no'. OK?

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# Glossary

- **shortcuts** = scorciatoie
- **acknowledge** = riconoscere
- **upper case** = maiuscolo
- **weakest** = più debole
- **accurate** = accurato
- **fad** = moda
- **touched down** = toccare terra
- **loading** = caricare
- **advent** = apparizione
- **LOL** = ridere rumorosamente (laughing out loud)
- **somehow** = in qualche modo
- **lander** = veicolo d'atterraggio
- **endowed** = dotare
- **OMG** = Oh mio Dio! (Oh my God!)
- **misspelled** = sbagliare a scrivere
- **stuck around** = rimanere
- **speech** = parola
- **dock** = molo
- **slang** = gergo
- **spell** = scrivere
- **gap** = vuoto, silenzio
- **thumbs-up** = approvazione (pollice alzato)
- **wondered** = chiedersi
- **most widely used** = più usata
- **made its way** = farsi strada
- **full stops** = punti
- **allegedly** = presumibilmente