



Homeland Security

Acronyms (and other forms of abbreviation)

Supporting Documents

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Acronym Presentation

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1 A Plain Language Review of Acronyms, Anacronyms, Initialisms (Alphabetisms), Abbreviations, and Symbols

Abbreviation: Arbitrary shortening of a word or words using more than one letter from each word (Television—TV, the German Elektrokardiogramm—EKG), by substituting letters with an apostrophe (received—rec'd), by cutting off letters from the end (General—Gen.) or from the middle (road—Rd.) and adding a period, or, in postal standards, by eliminating most vowels and some consonants (highway—Hwy, boulevard—Blvd).

Acronym: An abbreviation formed by combining the first letters (initials) or syllables of all or select words in a series, resulting in a new grouping of letters that can be pronounced as a word (North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO, Mobile Army Surgical Hospital—MASH, Hazardous Materials--HAZMAT).

Initialism (alphabetism): An acronym pronounced by reciting the individual letters (British Broadcasting Corporation--BBC, Digital Video Disc--DVD, Portable Document Format--PDF, Hypertext Markup Language—HTML, Magnetic Resonance Imaging—MRI, Automatic Teller Machine--ATM), or idiosyncratic pronunciation (N double A C P).

Note: All acronyms and initialisms are abbreviations, but not all abbreviations are acronyms or initialisms. And acronyms and initialisms differ only in the way they are pronounced. (Then there is ASAP, which is used as both.)

Acronym-initialism hybrids: Pronunciation includes a letter and acronym word (Joint Photographic Experts Group—JPEG, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries—OPEC, Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network--C-SPAN).

Anacronym: Coined to describe acronyms whose original word string has been widely forgotten (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus—scuba, Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation—laser, Radio Detecting and Ranging—radar, Geheime Staats-Polizei--Gestapo).

Pseudo-acronym: A catchall for variations and embellishments, such as creating an acronym from other acronyms (IT Acquisition Center—ITAC) or mixing abbreviations and acronyms (deoxyribonucleic acid--DNA) and ignoring words in a series just to make a pronounceable word (Princeton University Institute for the Science and Technology of Materials--PRISM), or pronouncing vowels that are not there (Guantanamo—GTMO, pronounced Gitmo) to coin a word.

Symbols: An acronym exchanged for a picture (fish for the Greek ichthys) or one that contains numerals (Y2K) for the purpose of branding (World Wide Web—www), trademarking (facsimile abbreviated to FACS and morphed into FAX, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company—3M), or avoiding repetition (Command, Control and Communications—C3).

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2 USAGE

- Consider the ultimate audience, which is usually unforeseen and could include historians one hundred years from now. Many acronyms have short lives and may become meaningless after only a few years.
- Also consider audience perception. It did not take long for the Privacy Office to realize that PRI would not be a good acronym for them, so they went with PRIV.
- Use few or no acronyms in documents with international readers. A harmless English acronym might be obscene in another language.
- Always spell out acronyms the first time they appear in a document. If the document is large, repeat the spell out at regular intervals (each chapter or every ten pages).
- Try to limit use to well known acronyms or those whose spell out is so long and so often used (more than a dozen times in a document). Avoid unfamiliar acronyms and those of only temporary significance. If you have to attach a long list because there are so many and they are so unfamiliar, you probably shouldn't be using most of them at all.
- If the entity appears only a few times in the entire document, do not abbreviate at all. There are other descriptive ways to refer to the program or organization again with key words instead of repeating the phrase or using an acronym.
- When referring to an entity by its acronym, do not put "the" in front of it.
- Uppercase acronyms, including all Federal Departments for consistency.
- Punctuation: Periods after each word initial of an acronym have largely been eliminated or have become optional (ante meridiem--AM, post meridiem—PM—or is that Prime Minister?, Before Christ--BC, Anno Domini—AD). Exceptions are because of tradition (Postscript—P.S., Bachelor of Arts—B.A., the Latin Medicinæ Doctor—M.D.), reverence (United States—U.S.) or style (id est—i.e., exempli gratia—e.g.) and others retain periods to make clear the letters stand for something else (Key Atomic Benefits Organization of Mankind--K.A.B.O.O.M., United Network Command for Law Enforcement—U.N.C.L.E.).
- Plurals and Possessives: An apostrophe is used for possessive (the CD's label) but not for plural (return the CDs to me).

Enforcement

- The Executive Secretariat Lexicon Program Section edits as many documents and glossaries as possible, checking all conflicts, applying all rules, making appropriate changes and notifying the offenders. The Lexicon contains a list of "official acronyms" that should be checked before new ones are created.
- Once in awhile, a newsletter article or all points bulletin are issued, such as when a moratorium was called on ALL acronyms for a month after the new Secretary arrived back in 2005 (which, in itself, belies the reader disregard and presumption of prolific usage).

3 The DHS Lexicon acronym challenge

Our first big job for the DHS Lexicon Project was to gather all pre-existing glossaries from all the Components that came together to form DHS and put them in a specially designed data base. These contained words and phrases with definitions, and acronyms with spell outs, all of which are slowly being dup checked, coded for ownership and outlets, while attempting to reconcile any conflicts.

We are simultaneously managing lists in the data base, those not yet in the data base, and lists from homeland security partners that are being used as reference only.

At the same time, proliferation of new and emerging terminology and acronyms are being gathered daily from official documents, releases, remarks and reports.

As this process unfolds, we are writing rules that will ultimately be compiled and enforced, and I will review a draft list of those here today. Along the way, we paused to resolve obvious or urgent conflicts. For acronyms, some have been:

- Dueling acronyms: CERT and CERT, two new and highly visible DHS programs in 2004 (Computer Emergency Readiness Team, Community Emergency Response Team) and FAST, four very public programs (Field Assessment Team, Freight Assessment System, Free and Secure Trade Initiative, and Future Attribute Screening Technology)
- HAZMAT, HazMat, Hazmat, hazmat (unanimously concurrence on HAZMAT)
- DQD versus DoD (the definition of acronym and the need for consistency rules, instead of what we were told was some consultant's idea for breakaway branding) and the debate goes on within the Pentagon
- TREAS (in June of 2006 we asked the Treasury Executive Secretariat to make a decision between the two common versions TRES and TREAS, the latter winning)
- CISO (Citizenship and Immigration Ombudsman vs. Chief Information Security Officer)—Security made the stronger case for precedence and the Ombudsman was glad to change to CISOMB
- REAL ID Act of 2005 regarding drivers licenses—no one could come up with a spell out for REAL (as in USA PATRIOT Act—Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism)—turns out there is none, so we've shifted to Real ID
- FAST (FEMA's Field Assessment Team, TSA's Freight Assessment System, CBP's Free and Secure Trade Initiative, and S&T's Future Attribute Screening Technology)
- FEMA acronyms, Abbreviations and Terms (FAAT) List (5,100 records that include thousands of "regional" terms)
- Ongoing battling with the "O" Rule (to be discussed later)

4 Rules for Creating New DHS Acronyms, Abbreviations and Initialisms

The following rules are for guidance when DHS is creating new acronyms. DHS cannot tell other Federal agencies they can't use ones they've been using for a long time, but DHS can be an example in curtailing potential confusion in a time of crisis by using uncommon restraint in the creation and usage:

- **Avoid two-letter acronyms.** Some have as many as 300 spell outs, and the risk of confusion or misunderstanding, especially in a time of crisis, is too great. An exception would be “IT.” Though there are 80 possible spell outs for it in the private sector, limit its use at DHS to “Information Technology,” and spell out all others such as “individual training.” It is best not to even allow limited internal usage, because the habit cannot be turned off when you go from your office to a larger audience in the field. (By the way, there are 115 spell outs for EA, 300 for PC, 121 for TM, 144 for TA and 122 for SE.)
- **Avoid acronyms and abbreviations of more than six characters.** A lengthy acronym increases the chance of keying errors and transpositions, and limits their use in database fields, especially when cascaded (MGMT/OCHCO, FEMA/USFA). COMPSVC can easily be COMSVC, etc.
- **Always use all capital letters** (DOD, DOJ, DOS), even though you see others not doing so for branding purposes, because someone else did it, or just to be different. Conformity and consistency eliminate the question “Is this an exception to the rule? This way or that? This time or not?”
- **Avoid numerals.** They convert an acronym into a symbol, are frequently used for branding and trademarks, but are used inconsistently to be multipliers, versions or shortcuts for repeating a consonant, and raise questions as to their meaning. Too late now, but the 2005 DHS reorganization should have been SSR instead of 2SR (catchy but not consistent). Leave numerals to symbols and trademarks.
- **Do not use hyphens or slashes within a single acronym.** Hyphens and slashes are separators or connectors used to cascade subsets and qualifiers (such as MGMT/CFO or the Airports Council International, North America, or ACI/NA). They also present database field and alphabetical problems. The only special character accepted is the ampersand (S&T, I&A), which IT has cleared as a recognizable character.
- **Do not combine two acronyms to create a third acronym.** List them separately, and leave a space between them when used in text. If one is a subset of the other or a qualifier, in text they may be joined by a slash. That is what slashes are for. (Example: Not CIKRCRM—these are two separate acronyms, CIKR for critical infrastructure and key resources, and CRM for common risk model.)
- **Do not set a “precedence without end” by beginning a string of infinite variables of the same acronym.** Instead, use the one core acronym and spell out the modifiers. If RMA is Risk Management and Analysis, do not have an RMAAC (Advisory Committee), RMAR (Report), RMAWG (Working Group), RMAPs (Partners), or RMAS (System). Or, if ERT is Emergency Response Team, do not create a SERT (Seattle), RERT (Regional) or AERT (Animal). Advance notice of proposed rulemaking is not ANPRM, but “Advance NPRM.” Likewise, the enhanced critical infrastructure protection assessment is not ECIPA, but “enhanced CIP assessment.” The Federal Air Marshal Service Training Center should be FAMS Training Center, not FAMSTC. The National

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Industrial Security Program Operating Manual should not be NISPOM, but NISP Operating Manual, as NISP is the core acronym.

- **The “O” Rule:** When creating an acronym for a new office or program, avoid CF (Center for), CO (Council on), FO (Friends of), and O, and stick to the Key words for your core acronym. In the beginning everyone wanted an “O” in front of their office acronym, so they would have been OCRCL, OCNE, OMGMT, etc. A few were unavoidable to distinguish between the IG and OIG, or because PA would not have worked alone due to too many related spell outs (public announcement, public assistance).
- **Do not create an acronym that contains such a large portion of the words and is so close to the whole spell out that you might as well spell it out** (Caribbean Community can be spelled out as easily as CARICOM; Operating Summary can be spelled out as easily as OPSUM, especially because it could also be Operations Summary).
- **Do not create or adopt an acronym that is unnecessary** (U.S. Dollar does not need to be USD; a phrase “as low as reasonably achievable” should remain a phrase and not become ALARA), **too weak** (fee for service does not need an FFS acronym; level of effort does not need to be LOE), **potentially ambiguous** (if there is concern about the ATA, is it the Airline Transportation Association, the American Trucking Association or the actual time of arrival; and, is the IBR the initial baseline review or the integrated baseline review? Is the IATO the interim approval to operate or the interim authority to operate?), **or the spell out too thinly used** (applies to one small group or office only or is little known, such as APHF for American Police Hall of Fame). **If the acronym already has many other widely-used spell outs, avoid it** (TSP is widely used in the Federal Government for Thrift Savings Plan, so a new one for Telecommunications Support Program should be TCSP, not TSP; COE is more widely known as center of excellence, so using it also for common operational environment could cause confusion; and BDR, besides Budget Data Request, has 24 other common uses; CFR has 44 other uses; COP has 108 other uses).
- **Do not create an acronym for a short term projects, temporary working committees or a one-time conference.**
- **Avoid acronyms that display insider jargon or local language, in deference to an unknown ultimate audience.**
- **Do not list a singular and plural for the same acronym.** The plural of an acronym is the acronym ending with a lower case "s."
- **Avoid acronyms for titles** (respectfully spell out titles). Too many of them are two-letter, which leads to the problem in rule 1, and will be inconsistent across the Department. Others contain local jargon used only within that Component. Still other longer title acronyms have multiple spell outs even within a Department, and certainly from agency to agency (Associate General Counsel and Assistant General Counsel). All four of these could be assigned to the same airport: Transportation Security Officer, Terminal Security Officer, Transportation Supply Officer and Technical Support Officer.
- **No acronym letter should stand for another acronym** (TSA Approved Instructors should be spelled out, not “TAI”).
- **Avoid acronyms that use unnecessary words to create a trademark or catchy word** (such as Strategic Hazard Identification Evaluation [for Leadership Decisions]—

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SHIELD, or Risk Assessment Process [for Informed Decision Making]--RAPID. They must be able to pass the “Oh, Puhleeeeeeze!” test.

5 Acronym History and Reflection

Some History and the Future of Acronyms

Abbreviations were perhaps originally intended to save materials and labor by using symbols for arduous entities repeated often in writing and, as in the art of shorthand, to aid in the speed of recording.

As acronyms and initialisms became popular in the spoken word, abbreviations became an insider's language and even a marketing tool. Cleverly concocted, they took on the ability to instruct (in listening skills: EARS reminded you to Empathize, Ask, Reflect, and Summarize) or even describe (Mothers Against Drunk Driving told you they were MADD).

With the technology of today, the labor-saving feature is muted, and conserving parchment or paper is overturned by the need to add pages of glossaries to documents. (Of course, a bigger waste of paper is using it for documents that no one can understand easily and clearly.)

Abbreviations are often an effort by the creators to say, "That for which this stands is important and needs a word of its own which can become known to all." However, many acronyms and initialisms are relatively short-lived, modified or superceded. Consider the attached list of 1933 U.S. Government "alphabet agencies." Two-thirds of them no longer exist.

The New Deal

In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched his [New Deal](#) to deal with the [Great Depression](#). The administrative style was to create new agencies. Some were set up by Congress (TVA) and others by Roosevelt's Executive Order (WPA).

List of 1930's agencies by initialism

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Administration , 1933
CAA	Civilian Aeronautics Authority (now Federal Aviation Administration), 1933
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps , 1933
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation , 1933
CWA	Civil Works Administration , 1933
FAP	Federal Art Project , part of WPA 1935
FCA	Farm Credit Administration , 1933
FCC	Federal Communications Commission , 1934
FDIC	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation , 1933
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration , 1933
FHA	Federal Housing Administration , 1934
FMP	Federal Music Project , part of WPA 1935

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FSA	Farm Security Administration , 1935
FTP	Federal Theatre Project , part of WPA 1935
FWP	Federal Writers' Project , part of WPA 1935
HOLC	Home Owners Loan Corporation , 1933
NIRA	National Industrial Recovery Act , 1933
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board , 1934
NRA	National Recovery Administration , 1933
NYA	National Youth Administration , part of WPA 1935
PRRA	Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration , 1933
PWA	Public Works Administration , 1933
RA	Resettlement Administration , 1935
REA	Rural Electrification Administration , 1935
RFC	Reconstruction Finance Corporation (originally a Hoover agency), 1932
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission , 1934
SSB	Social Security Board , 1935
TVA	Tennessee Valley Authority , 1933
USHA	United States Housing Authority , 1937
WPA	Works Progress Administration , 1935

In truth, abbreviations today are writer-centered, not reader-oriented. They may save the writer a few keystrokes, but may take more time for the reader to recall and understand.

Raising a Generation of Abbreviators

A larger looming cloud is the language of the internet and text messaging called digispeak, also called Internet Speak, Webspeak and chat abbreviations. These shorthand phrases are designed in many cases to encrypt communication, so this faddish but addictive propensity to communicate in the fast lane produces the ironic side effect of being unable to communicate in a proper way with a larger, every day audience. Consider the attached exclusive and growing glossary of digispeak language, and wonder if other uses of LOL, for example, (limit of liability, lots of luck, lots of love, little old lady, Land 'O Lakes butter, or the airport code for Lovelock, Nevada) can ever be used again.

6 Digispeak Dictionary

CODE	MEANING	CODE	MEANING
AAK	Asleep at the keyboard	G2G	Got to go
AAR8	At any rate	GAL	Get a life
ADAD	Another day, another dollar	GE	Girlfriend
AFAIC	As far as I'm concerned	GGN	Gotta go now
AFK	Away from computer keyboard	GJ	Good job
AIM	AOL Instant Messenger	GL	Good luck
AJSIL	Age/Sex/Location	GOL	Giggle out loud
ASAP	As soon as possible	GR8	Great
ATM	At the moment	GRT	Great
ATW	Around the web	GTG	Got to go
		GW	Good work
B	Back	H8	Hate
B4N	Bye for now	HAK	Hugs and kisses
BBS	Be back soon	HAND	Have a nice day
BC	Because		
BCNU	Be seein' you	IAC	In any case
BFN	Boyfriend	IAE	In any event
BFN/IB4N	Bye for now	IC	I see
BG	Big grin	IDC	I don't care
BIL	Boss is listening	IDK	I don't know
BITD	Back in the day	ILY	I love you
BMG	Be my guest	IM	Instant Message
BOTOH	But on the other hand	IMHO	In my humble opinion
BRB	Be right back		In my never even remotely humble opinion
BTDT	Been there, done that	IMNERHO	In my not so humble opinion
	Been there done that, got the	IMNSHO	In my opinion
BTDTGTTSAWIO	t-shirt and wore it out	IMO	In my point of view
BTW	By the way	IMPOV	In other words
BYKT	But you knew that	IOW	In real life
		IRL	
CD9	Code 9: Parents nearby	JIC	Just in case
CID	Consider it done	JK	Just kidding
COZ	Because	JTYK	Just to let you know
CSL	Can't stop laughing		
CU	See you	K	Okay
CUL or CUL8R	See you later	KIS	Keep it simple
		KIT	Keep in touch
DQMOT	Don't quote me on this		
EG	Evil Grin	L8	Late
		L8R	Later
EOM	End of message	LBH	Lets be honest
EWIW	For what it's worth	LOL	Laughing out loud
EZ	Easy		
		MIRL	Meet in real life
F2F	Face to face	MorF	Male or Female 1
F2T	Free to talk	MOS	Mom over shoulder
FAQ	Frequently asked questions	MTFBWU	May the force be with you
FWIW	For what it's worth		
FYI	For your information		

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<u>CODE</u>	<u>MEANING</u>	<u>CODE</u>	<u>MEANING</u>
NBD	No big deal	Y	Why
NE	Any	YT?	You there?
NMU	No not much, you? "Newbi" - someone who is a	YW	You are welcome
Noob	novice	ZZZ	Tired or bored
NP	No problem		
NRN	No response necessary		
OIC	Oh, I see	BTW	(by the way),
OMG	Oh my god	AFAIC	(as far as I'm concerned)
OTP	On the phone	WYSIWYG	(what you see is what you get).
OWTTE	Or words to that effect		
P0S	Parent over shoulder		
P911	Parent emergency		
PAW	Parents are watching		
PCM	Please call me		
PIR	Parent in room		
PLS	Please		
PLZ	Please		
POC	Point of contact		
POV	Point of view		
PRW	Parents are watching		
Q	Question		
RL	Real life		
ROTFL	Rolling on the floor laughing		
RSN	Real soon now		
RUOK?	Are you okay?		
S2R	Send to receive		
SFETE	Smiling from ear to ear		
SIT	Stay in touch		
SOZ	Sorry		
SYS	See you soon		
U	You		
U2	You too		
W/E	Whatever		
WB	Welcome back		
WFM	Works for me		
WTG	Way to go		
WTH	What the hell?		
WU	What's up?		
WYGOWM	Will you go out with me?		
XOXO	Hugs and kisses		

7 Consequence Issues

In this day and age of pending catastrophes, we all know how crucial it will be to communicate quickly and clearly in a time of crisis. That mandates plain language and as little guesswork as possible. It also calls for limiting the use of abbreviations. Scenarios are yet to be written on the consequences of not knowing what is meant by the following acronyms and initialisms:

We need your plan for AMF delivered now!

- Alternate Morgue Facility?
- Alternative Medical Facility?
- Adaptive Module Fabrication?
- Aerial Maneuver Formation?

We have a serious RAD on our hands!

- Resource Allocation Decision
- Radiation-Absorbed Dose

We have spent our allocation for the program for this CY.

- Current Year?
- Calendar Year?

KCI is a high priority target for the chemical/biological study.

- Potassium Chloride?
- Kansas City International Airport?

The COI on biometrics is under intense scrutiny.

- Critical Operational Issue?
- Community of Interest?

That jeopardizes the all-important ATA.

- Airline Transportation Association?
- Actual Time of Arrival?

How should I treat this SOB?

- Shortness of breath?
- ?

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The EOP is out of sorts with reality.

- Emergency Operations Plan?
- Executive Office of the President?

The most recent IED system is not effective.

- Improvised Explosive Device?
- In-line Explosive Detection?

Our ER plan has collapsed in New Orleans.

- Expedited Removal?
- Emergency Room?

We must rely on the ICC to pick up the ball on this one.

- Intelligence Control Center?
- Incident Command Center?

This PIA was found to be totally unacceptable to leadership.

- Policy Initiatives Analysis?
- Privacy Impact Assessment?

The TCU accepted total blame for the lapse of security on campus.

- Tribal Colleges and Universities?
- Threat Containment Unit?
- Transportation Coordination Unit?

An investigation showed the DFO was incompetent.

- Disaster Field Office?
- Designated Federal Official?

If it were not for the HSDN, our coastlands would be in unnecessary danger.

- Homeland Secure Data Network?
- High Seas Drift Nets?

Our safety of our aviation travelers depend in part on the effectiveness of our SAFE program.

- Screening Applied Fairly and Equitably?
- Secure All-around Flotation Equipment?

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The quality of our EMR will determine the effectiveness of future recovery operations.

- Enterprise Metadata Repository?
- Electronic Medical Records?

Finally, here's an actual Government memo announcing new branch and division acronyms. While this was good use of the slash in an organizational cascade, by the fifth tier it gets pretty overwhelming.



Office of Origin: A/LM/OPS
Announcement Number: 2007_02_047
Date of Announcement: February 6, 2007

Washington Logistics Center Division - Name Changes and New Office Acronyms

Effective immediately, the Office of Logistics Management's Washington Logistics Center Division (A/LM/OPS/WLC) will be known as the Secure Logistics Division (A/LM/OPS/SL).

The Washington Distributions Branch (A/LM/OPS/WLC/WDB) will be known as the Warehouse Branch (A/LM/OPS/SL/W). The Motor Vehicle Branch acronym is now A/LM/OPS/SL/MV and the Management Operations Branch acronym is A/LM/OPS/SL/MO.

Please direct any questions to A/LM/OPS/SL's customer service office via email at SpringfieldWarehouse@state.gov.

8 Conclusion

Let's keep identifying the trends and developing reigns that are practical and enforceable.

OK. It's almost COB but, FYI, this is an MOU that this AAR will come ASAP to you as FED POC (no ID needed), but FOUO. BTW, this will be SOP, not a TDY matter (unless OTBE).

Works Consulted for this presentation

"A Modest Proposal to Eliminate Acronyms" by Dr. Helen Moody, Professional Training Company, Corrales, New Mexico © 1996-2005 info@ProfessionalTrainingCompany.com

Acronym and initialism—Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia