

## THE ACRONYM CONTINUES TO INSPIRE CREATIVELY ABBREVIATED LANGUAGE (TACTICAL)

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My 1993 book *Acronymymania* (Dell, Intrepid Linguist Library) explored the lure and lore of abbreviations—historically, linguistically and humorously. Examples, both genuine and facetious, populated its pages.

In the ensuing decade, a wealth of new acronymic phenomena has proliferated, including the many coinages used in e-mail messages and wireless texting. A board game called *Acronymity* challenges players to identify ... well, you know.

The example that may have generated the most attention recently is the **U.S.A. PATRIOT** Act—which stands for **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism. The 2001 law quickly became the target of criticism for its potential impact on civil liberties, as well as for acronymic excess.

Here is a sampling of other ingenious or amusing specimens from the past few years. (According to my Official Rules, periods are superfluous in a true acronym that's pronounced as a word rather than letter-by-letter—but some folks apparently can't resist.)

- Enthusiasts of the classic 1960s David Janssen drama formed a club with a somewhat redundant name: **F**ans **U**nited for **G**reat **I**ntelligent **T**elevision and an **I**nteresting **V**ideo **E**ntertainment **S**eries, or **F.U.G.I.T.I.V.E.S.**
- A 1994 made-for-TV science-fiction movie was titled **M.A.N.T.I.S.**, short for **M**echanically **A**ugmented **N**euro-**T**ransmitter **I**nterception **S**ystem.
- A National Weather Service program is called **S**ea, **L**ake and **O**verland **S**urge from **H**urricanes, or **SLOSH**. Meanwhile, a meteorological research project at the University of Oklahoma Weather Center is named **V**erification of the **O**rigins of **R**otation in **T**ornadoes **E**xperiment, or **VORTEX**.
- In 2002, in the wake of the corporate financial scandals, Congress created the **P**ublic **C**ompany **A**ccounting **O**versight **B**oard, or **PCAOB**. The urge to turn initialisms into acronyms even when the result doesn't quite work led industry professionals to dub the new regulatory agency "peekaboo." Although some observers deemed this sobriquet awkward and flippant, others consider it appropriate to the group's purpose, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article.
- Dan Savage's "Savage Love" sex advice column appears in alternative weekly newspapers. His correspondents understandably wish to disguise their identities, signing their queries with creative pseudonyms such as **S**eeking the **R**ight **O**riental **K**ind of **E**xotic **M**assage **E**xpert. Dan's answers characteristically begin: "Well, **STROKEME**, you might..."



Wits, wags and cynics love to redefine existing names and words acronymically for satirical purposes. Examples:

- When the **Acela** train debuted, we were assured that the name really stands for "Amtrak customers experience late arrivals."
- The **Personal Computer Memory Card International Association** is known as **PCMCIA**. But some insist that the term means "People can't memorize computer industry abbreviations."
- Leaders of the Church of the Subgenius, a wacky cult presumably intended as a spoof of religion, claim that they oppose "Cliques of normals secretly planning insidious rituals aimed at controlling you," or **CONSPIRACY**.
- Male chauvinists say that **bimbo** means "brains in my breasts only." Feminists counter that **bitch** is short for "being in total control, honey."

In *Acronymania*, I devised a bunch of original acronyms, including **TOOTLE** (totally out of the loop), **WAFLE** (walk a fine line), and **SO SAD** (same old song and dance). I expected these neologisms to sweep the country and enter the language. Surprisingly, that didn't happen, but I remain undaunted. Following are a few new candidates, along with recommended proper usage:

- **O NO** one night only  
"You mean we have to catch this performance or miss out? **O NO!**"
- **FALL** financing a lavish lifestyle  
"He embezzled the money and now he's headed for a **FALL**."
- **TARARA** there aren't really any right answers  
"We'll have to make a judgment call here. This is a **TARARA** situation."
- **BLOOP** blow out of proportion  
"Jack, this is a trivial disagreement. Why do you always have to **BLOOP** everything?"
- **TOUSLE** tons of unread stuff lying everywhere  
"Don't give me another document. You'll just **TOUSLE** me."
- **OO-HE** out of his element (pronounced "hoo-whee!")  
"Look at Stan trying to sink that 30-foot putt. **OO-HE!**"

I will conclude with a modest proposal for a new initialism: **QSA**, for **quasi-sexual-activities**. If ever there were a compelling need for a word that doesn't exist, surely this is it. If my coinage catches on, I plan to write the definitive book on the subject, which I shall title *QSA in the USA*.