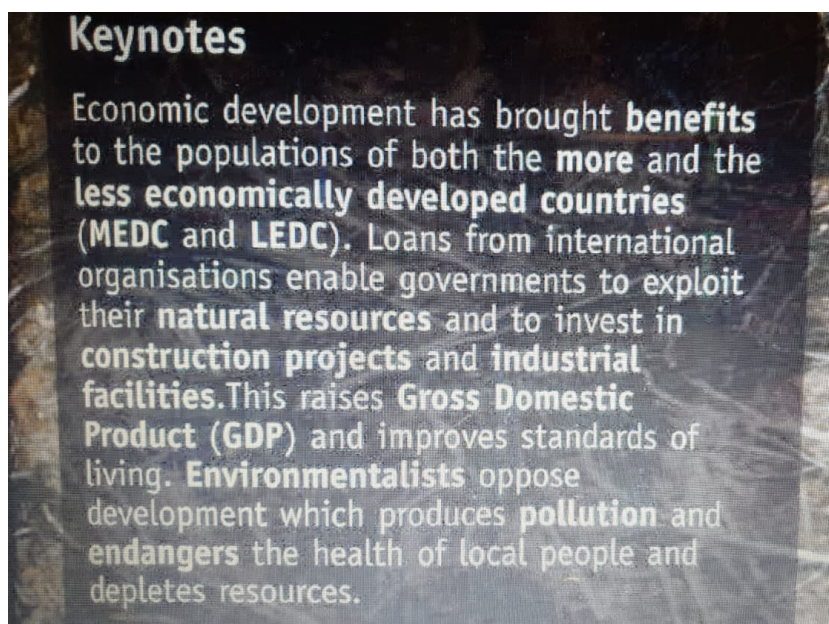


## Word-Formation Processes in English for Political Studies (Advanced Level)

### \*\*\*\* Short-Term Creation Processes \*\*\*\* part one



### Acronyms and Initialisms

**ACRONYMY** is a word-formation process resulting in both **ACRONYMS** and **INITIALISMS**. An **ACRONYM** is a word formed from the initial letters of each of a series of words. Look at the following examples<sup>1</sup>:

- **BRICS** /brɪks/, *Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa*<sup>2</sup>
- **DExEU**, *Department for Exiting the European Union* (in the UK)
- **EFTA**, *European Free Trade Agreement*
- **ERM**, *Exchange Rate Mechanism*
- **FCDO**, *Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office* (in the UK)

<sup>1</sup> For further examples, see <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/whitehall-monitor-2018/abbreviations> as for the UK; and <https://www.leadershipconnect.io/federal-government-acronym-guide/> as for the US.

<sup>2</sup> It is used to refer to these countries as a group in the context of how fast their economies are growing.

- **HO**, *Home Office* (in the UK)
- **LASER**<sup>3</sup> /'leɪzə(r)/, *Lightwave Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation*
- **LSE**, *London School of Economics; London Stock Exchange*
- **MAGA**, *Make America Great Again*
- **Nafta** /'næftə/, *North American Free Trade Agreement*
- **NAO**, *National Audit Office*<sup>4</sup>
- **NASA** /'næsə/, *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*
- **QANTAS**<sup>5</sup> /'kwɒntəs/, *Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service*
- **RADAR**<sup>6</sup> /'reɪdɑ:(r)/, *radio detection and ranging*.

Strictly speaking, **pronounceable "words" are acronyms** – such as:

- **FANG** /fæŋ/, *Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google*<sup>7</sup>; in 2017 the FANG list was expanded to include Apple and the acronym has been referred to as **FAANG** (*Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google*). It has changed again into *Fuels, aerospace, agriculture, nuclear and gold* in the last few weeks as reported by *Il Sole 24 Ore*:



- **IBAN** /'aɪbæn/, *International Bank Account Number*
- **LIFFE** /laɪf/, *London International Financial Futures and Options Exchange*

<sup>3</sup> More commonly and confusingly, it is also written as 'laser'.

<sup>4</sup> **Equivalent in Italian:** "Corte dei Conti".

<sup>5</sup> **Qantas Airways Limited** is the flag carrier airline of Australia and its largest airline by fleet size, international flights and international destinations.

<sup>6</sup> More commonly and confusingly, it is also written as 'radar'.

<sup>7</sup> The acronym for four high-performing technology stocks in the market. The term was coined by CNBC's *Mad Money* host Jim Cramer in 2013.

- **NATO** /'neɪtəʊ/, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*
- **NASDAQ** /'næzɔːk/, *National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations*<sup>8</sup>
- **NORAD** /'nɔːræd/, *North American Aerospace Defense Command*
- **OPEC** /'əʊpek/, *Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries*
- **PAUSE** /pɔːz/, *Policies Assure Uniform Safety for Everyone*<sup>9</sup>
- **PIN** /pɪn/, *Personal Identification Number*
- **POTUS** /'pəʊtəs/, *President of the United States*
- **SALT** /sɔːlt/, *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*<sup>10</sup>
- **SCOTUS** /'skəʊtəs/, *Supreme Court of the United States*
- **START** /stɑːt/, *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*
- **SURE** /ʃʊə(r)/, *Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency*<sup>11</sup>
- **UNESCO** /juː'neskəʊ/, *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*;

whereas **abbreviations** such as

- **CIA** /,siː ai 'eɪ/, *Central Intelligence Agency*<sup>12</sup>
- **ECB**, *European Central Bank*
- **ESM**, *European Stability Mechanism*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> **Equivalent in Italian:** "Indice telematico della Borsa di New York / Indice dei titoli tecnologici della Borsa di New York".

<sup>9</sup> **Equivalent in Italian:** "Misure che assicurano sicurezza uniforme per tutti".

<sup>10</sup> The **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)** were two rounds of bilateral conferences and corresponding international treaties involving the United States and the Soviet Union, the Cold War superpowers, on the issue of arms control. The two rounds of talks and agreements were SALT I (1972) and SALT II (from 1972 to 1979). **Equivalent in Italian:** "Negozianti per la limitazione delle armi strategiche".

The talks led to the **STARTs**, or **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties**, which consisted of **START I** (a 1991-completed agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union) and **START II** (a 1993 agreement between the United States and Russia, which was never ratified by the United States), both of which proposed limits on multiple-warhead capacities and other restrictions on each side's number of nuclear weapons. A successor to START I, **New START**, was proposed and was eventually ratified in February 2011. **Equivalent in Italian:** "Trattati per la riduzione delle armi strategiche".

<sup>11</sup> A new instrument proposed by the European Commission for temporary **Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)**: it will allow for a financial assistance up to EUR 100 billion in the form of loans from the EU to affected Member States.

<sup>12</sup> A department of the US government that collects information about other countries, often secretly.

<sup>13</sup> The **European Stability Mechanism (ESM)** is an intergovernmental organization located in Luxembourg City, which operates under public international law for all Eurozone Member States having ratified a special ESM intergovernmental treaty. It was established on September 27, 2012 as a permanent firewall for the Eurozone, to safeguard and provide instant access to financial assistance programmes for member states of the Eurozone in

- **FBI** /,ef bi: 'aɪ/, *Federal Bureau of Investigation*<sup>14</sup>
- **GDP**, *Gross Domestic Product*
- **GNP**, *Gross National Product*
- **GOP** /,dʒi: əu 'pi: /, *Grand Old Party*<sup>15</sup>
- **ICJ**, *International Court of Justice*
- **IDF**, *Israeli Defense Forces*
- **JSE**, *Johannesburg Stock Exchange*
- **LSE**, *London Stock Exchange and London School of Economics*
- **NYSE**, *New York Stock Exchange*
- **OECD**, *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*<sup>16</sup>
- **OSCE**, *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*<sup>17</sup>
- **PPP**, *Purchasing Power Parity*<sup>18</sup>
- **QE**, *Quantitative Easing*
- **WTO**, *World Trade Organization and World Tourism Organization.*

**are initialisms** because each letter is pronounced with the sound it has in the alphabet. Thus, the distinction between an acronym and an initialism rests essentially on the way we have to pronounce it.

It is important to highlight that acronyms such as **FANG**, **LIFFE**, **PAUSE**, **SALT**, **SURE**, **START** and so on, are commonly called **reverse acronyms** since "they are formed in such a way as to yield not only pronounceable words but also words that are homophones to existing words".

**WARNING:** some abbreviations can be pronounced either as individual letters (= initialism) or as a word (= acronym), as in the case of

- **CEO**<sup>19</sup>, *Chief Executive Officer*

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financial difficulty, with a maximum lending capacity of €700 billion. All new bailouts for any Eurozone member state will now be covered by ESM, while the EFSF and EFSM will continue to handle money transfers and programme monitoring for the previously approved bailout loans to Ireland, Portugal and Greece. **Equivalent in Italian:** "MES, Meccanismo europeo di stabilità", "Fondo salva-Stati".

<sup>14</sup> The police department in the US that is controlled by the national government and that is responsible for dealing with crimes that affect more than one state.

<sup>15</sup> The Republican political party in the US.

<sup>16</sup> An intergovernmental economic organisation with 37 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. It is a forum of countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy, providing a platform to compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members. **Equivalent in Italian:** "OCSE, Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico".

<sup>17</sup> **Equivalent in Italian:** "OSCE, Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa".

<sup>18</sup> A measurement of prices in different countries that uses the prices of specific goods to compare the absolute purchasing power of the countries' currencies. **Equivalent in Italian:** "PPA, Parità del potere d'acquisto".

- **FAQ**, *Frequently Asked Questions*
- **FTSE** /'futsi/, *Financial Times Stock Exchange*
- **VAT** /,vi: eɪ 'ti: /, /væt/ (mainly in the collocation «VAT-free»), *Value Added Tax*

Such abbreviations can be a useful way to make writing and speaking more concise and less repetitive, as well as to create an international code easily and immediately understandable among both the community of scholars, learners and users. Think, for instance, of the abbreviation we usually use when make a cash transfer:

- **IBAN** /'aɪbæn/<sup>20</sup>, *International Bank Account Number*;

when we use a credit card:

- **CID**, *Card IDentification number* or *Card IDentification code*
- **CVV**, *card verification number* or *card verification value*, depending on what financial services company has issued the credit card;

as well as all the other abbreviations used in a bank:

- **BBAN code**, *Basic Bank Account Number*
- **BIC**, *Bank Identifier Code, Business Identifier Codes*
- **CIN**, *Control Internal Number*
- **SWIFT code**<sup>21</sup>, *Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication*

However, abbreviations can be confusing if not explained at their first use – particularly as the same abbreviation can have more than one meaning. In fact, the shorter is the abbreviation the higher is the number of its potential meaning.

Acronyms and initialisms are generally spelled without periods:

- **AOB**, *any other business*;
- **IMF**, *International Monetary Fund*;
- **IT**, *Information Technology*
- **PLC**, *Public Limited Company*
- **PM**, *Prime Minister*

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<sup>19</sup> It currently coexists with **CE** (*Chief Executive*).

<sup>20</sup> It is an internationally agreed system of identifying bank accounts across national borders to facilitate the communication and processing of cross border transactions with a reduced risk of transcription errors.

<sup>21</sup> The **Swift Code**, consisting of 8 or 11 characters, is a standard format of Bank Identifier Codes (BIC) and the unique identification code for a particular bank. These codes are used when transferring money between banks, particularly for international wire transfers. Banks also used such codes for exchanging other messages between them. The registrations of Swift Codes are handled by the "Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication" (shortened into the acronym "SWIFT") and their headquarters is located in Belgium.



- **UN**, *United Nations*
- **WHO**, *World Health Organization; White House Office*

and may or may not be capitalized:

- **a/c**, *air conditioning*;
- **n/a**, *not available* or *not applicable*;
- **Pakistan**, *Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir + 'stan'*, from Persian 'stan' – i.e. a country in South Asia;
- **VAT/vat**, *value added tax* (the latter especially used in the lexical collocation «vat-free»).

Furthermore, some other initialisms – in addition to the already mentioned **FTSE** /'fʊtsi/ – are commonly read as a word, such as

- **jeep** /dʒi:p/, deriving from *GP vehicle* – that is, *general-purpose vehicle*;
- **NCLB**, *No Child Left Behind*<sup>22</sup>, read as 'nicklebee';

**REMEMBER:** maybe, the only initialisms always spelled with periods are the following: **e.g.** (*exempli gratia*) and **i.e.** (*id est*), that are very common in academic and specialised writings and mean "for example / for instance" and "that is, / namely / that is to say"<sup>23</sup> respectively.

**Avoid redundancy with abbreviations:** if a word is represented in the acronym or initialism, do not repeat it:

- **MEDC / LEDC** is correct; 'MEDC / LEDC countries' is wrong;
- **NHS** is correct; 'NHS service' is wrong.
- **OECD** is correct; 'OECD organization' is wrong.

Most acronyms and initialisms belongs to the word-class of nouns – that means they can be common nouns or proper names in accordance with what they refer to and that they can have, if necessary and possible, a plural form:

- **CEOs** stands for 'Chief Executive Officers';
- **CFOs** stands for 'Chief Financial Officers';
- **FOMs** stands for 'Front Office Managers';
- **MEPs** stands for 'Members of the European Parliament';
- **MPs** stands for 'Members of Parliament';
- **POWs** stands for 'Prisoners of War';
- **QUANGOs** (pronounced as /'kwæŋgəʊ/ in its singular form) stands for 'Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations'.

<sup>22</sup> A 2001 United States Act of Congress on education.

<sup>23</sup> **Equivalents in Italian:** "cioè", "vale a dire", "ossia".

- RINOs stands for Republican*s* in Name Only<sup>24</sup>
- VIPs stands for 'Very Important Person*s*';
- VPs stands for 'Vice President*s*';

**N.B. –** In addition to <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/> to check the right pronunciation of most acronyms/initialisms, a very useful tool to discover the full version and understand the meaning of an acronym/initialism is the database [www.acronymfinder.com](http://www.acronymfinder.com).

Even if many acronyms and initialisms currently in use are borrowing from English with an Italian equivalent of their own, such word-building process exists in Italian as well – e.g. think of some important and very common items such as

- **DEF**, *Documento di Economia e Finanza*<sup>25</sup>
- **MAECI**, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale*<sup>26</sup>
- **MASAF**, *Ministero dell'agricoltura, della sovranità alimentare e delle foreste*<sup>27</sup>
- **MISE**, *Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico*<sup>28</sup> (in 2022, it was renamed to **MIMIT**, *Ministero delle Imprese e del Made in Italy*<sup>29</sup>)
- **MINT**, *Ministero dell'Interno*<sup>30</sup>
- **MIT**, *Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti*<sup>31</sup>
- **OPA**, *offerta pubblica di acquisto*<sup>32</sup>
- **PAC**, *politica agricola comune*<sup>33</sup>
- **PMI**, *Piccole e Medie Imprese*<sup>34</sup>
- **SSN**, *Servizio Sanitario Nazionale*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "A member of the Republican party who is disloyal to the party or insufficiently conservative" (cfr. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>). **Equivalent in Italian:** "Repubblicani solo di nome".

<sup>25</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "Economic and Financial Planning".

<sup>26</sup> **Equivalents in English:** "FCDO, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office", best known as "Foreign Office", in the UK; "DOS, Department of State", sometimes called "State Department", in the US.

<sup>27</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests"

<sup>28</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "Ministry of Economic Development".

<sup>29</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "Ministry for Enterprises and Made in Italy"

<sup>30</sup> **Equivalents in English:** "Home Office" or "Home Department" in the UK; "Department of Homeland Security" in the US.

<sup>31</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport"

<sup>32</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "takeover bid".

<sup>33</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "CAP", "common agricultural policy".

<sup>34</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "SMEs, Small and Medium Enterprises".

<sup>35</sup> **Equivalent in English:** "NHS, National Health Service" in the UK.