

VIVA VOCABULARY!

Practical Ways to Promote Word Consciousness

By Lois E. Huffman, Ph.D.

Each edition of “Viva Vocabulary!” focuses on different word genres. The goal is to help students (re)discover the joy of language and the expressive power of vocabulary.

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Word Formation Revisited: Part Two of Two*

“Vocabulary is a matter of word-building as well as word-using.” -David Crystal

Many speakers and writers invent words when the need or inclination arises. As noted in the previous Viva Vocabulary! series, “New Words: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow” Parts [One](#), [Two](#), and [Three](#), there are at least 12 ways to create words in English.

Learning about word formation can be fun for students and encourage their interest in vocabulary. New words (neologisms) and new meanings (senses/uses) for existing words are regularly added to the dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com/; apnews.com/).

Two books about neologisms and language change are:

- *Skeddaddle to Selfie: Words of the Generations* by Allan Metcalf (Oxford University Press, 2015) and
- *Words on the Move: Why English Won't - and Can't - Sit Still (Like, Literally)* by John McWhorter (Henry Holt and Co., 2016).

There are also numerous online resources that address word creation in English. One is the [21-st Century Interdisciplinary Dictionary](#), which focuses on neologisms, buzzwords, and jargon. It is a project of an English class at the College of William and Mary. Another is the Oxford Dictionaries' piece [“From Muggle to Whizzpopper: Invented Words in Children’s Literature.”](#)

In Part [One](#) of this article, we revisited the word-formation processes of Coining, Borrowing, Compounding, and Blending. Our focus in this part will be on **Clipping**, **Acronyms**, **Abbreviations**, **Conversion**, and **Paired-Word Sound Play**.

Clipping Remind students that “The natural behavior of language is to change. . . . It is a democratic process. We vote for and against words with the way we use them every day.” ([Mignon Fogarty](#))

Speakers of English love to lop off parts of words in their day-to-day written and spoken communication. The meaning of the clipped form is clear in the context of use. Here are clipped words I've collected in recent years:

adorbs: adorable

amaze: amazing

Aspy (scale): Asperger syndrome (clipped open compound word)

atmos: atmosphere

bago: Winnebago camper

barg: bargain (verb)

bennies: benefits

cal: calendar

cabs: cabinets

caps: capsules or capitals

cams: cameras

cash: cash register

Chi: Chicago

collab: collaboration

comps: comparables

config: configure

convo: conversation

cred: credibility

creds: credentials

des res: desirable residence (British)

deo: deodorant

digcit: digital citizenship (double-clipped open compound word)

doco: documentary

doze: bulldoze

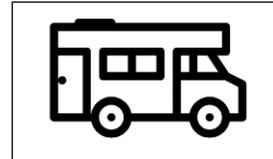
epi pen: Epinephrine pen (clipped open compound word)

eps: episodes

fab: fabrication

fam: family

finlit: financial literacy (double-clipped open compound word)



Fins: Miami Dolphins

fire ex: fire extinguisher (clipped open compound word)

frags: fragments

gift certif: gift certificate

gov: government

haps: happenings

illo: illustration

inspo: inspiration

intel: intelligence

journ: journalist

leo: leotard

low prōf: low profile (clipped open compound word)

mando: mandatory

mod: modify (now often seen as *modding*)

mod cons: modern conveniences

mod pro: modern professional

natch: naturally

neg: negative

next gen: next generation (clipped open compound word)

nom: nominee

op: operation

peds: pedestrians

phenom: phenomenon

pod: podcast

pred: predator

preso: presentation

probs: problems

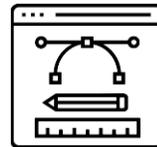
quin: sequin

recs: recommendations

rep: reputation

ruin porn: ruin pornography, a.k.a. photos of ruins (clipped open compound word)

san: sandwich



Scandi or **Scani**: Scandinavian

ses: session

shrooms: mushrooms

sitch: situation

slow-mo: slow-motion (clipped compound)

specs: specifications

sub: subscriber

temp: temperature

twen: twenty

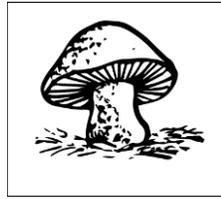
uni: university or uniformed officer or uniform

unsub: unsubscribe or unknown subject

whatev/s: whatever

Zon: Amazon (the company)

zuk /zook/: zucchini



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More Teaching Ideas:

1. To provide a review or an overview of clipping, share the following short PowToon video: [youtube.com/watch?v=MqLd6vF4M0Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqLd6vF4M0Y).
2. Invite interested students to consider the use of clipping in rebranding. To illustrate: Metamucil now emphasizes the *META* portion of its name on its products. The company even has the shorter name in its web address: [Metawellness.com](https://www.metawellness.com). Ask students to consider what perceptions consumers might have of *META* versus Metamucil. Students might also ask family members from different generations how they regard each name.
3. Make sure students are aware that some people dislike clipped words. These shortened forms can cause confusion and be annoying, especially when overused. They also can suggest inappropriate informality in certain contexts and be perceived as disrespectful.

Have class members survey people of varying ages and backgrounds about their attitudes toward clipping. Ask students to also find out which clipped words might be perceived negatively. For example, what do residents of San Francisco think about the nickname *San Fran*? ([Some hate the nickname Frisco.](#))

4. Let the class know that company names are formed in different ways, including coining, clipping, blending, compounding, acronyms, abbreviations (a.k.a. initialisms), and combining roots and affixes. The [Name Inspector.com](https://www.nameinspector.com) discusses pros and cons of many of these types of names. Encourage students to find brick-and-mortar stores and online businesses that exemplify the different types. Here are some:

COMPANY NAME	WORD FORMATION PROCESS(ES)
<i>Americamp</i> (American + camp)	Blending, Compounding
<i>Basecamp</i>	Compounding
<i>BlackRock</i>	Compounding
<i>CDW</i> (Computer Discount Warehouse)	Abbreviation
<i>DSW</i> (Designer Shoe Warehouse)	Abbreviation
<i>FabLab</i>	Clipping, Paired-Word Sound Play
<i>Flipboard</i>	Compounding
<i>Foot Locker</i>	Compounding
<i>GEICO</i> (Government Employees Insurance Company)	Acronym
<i>Groupon</i> (Group + coupon)	Blending
<i>Hootsuite</i>	Compounding
<i>HMH</i> (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)	Abbreviation
<i>Hulu</i>	Coining, Paired-Word Sound Play
<i>ING</i> (International Netherlands Group)	Abbreviation (Pronounced I-N-G)
<i>JetBlue</i>	Compounding
<i>LG</i> (Lucky Goldstar)	Abbreviation
<i>Lime Crime</i>	Paired-Word Sound Play
<i>LOMO</i> (Lomography)	Clipping, Paired-Word Sound Play
<i>Microsoft</i> (Microprocessor + software)	Blending
<i>Modpools</i> (Modern + pools)	Clipping, Compounding
<i>Nabisco</i> (National Biscuit Company)	Blending
<i>NECCO</i> (now-defunct New England Confectionary Company)	Acronym
<i>Noracora</i>	Paired-Word Sound Play
<i>NOFO</i> (North Fourth)	Clipping, Compounding
<i>Prehype</i>	Affixation
<i>Rubbermaid</i>	Compounding
<i>Skillshare</i>	Compounding
<i>Squarespace</i>	Compounding
<i>UnderArmour</i>	Compounding or Affixation
<i>UNTUCKit</i>	Affixation, Compounding
<i>Zynga</i>	Coined (i.e., made up)

As the company names above suggest, many new words are formed using more than one process. Lems, Miller, and Soro (2017) note that this is common in English.

5. Ask more advanced students to explore clipped words that are roots or affixes, such as *auto*, *dis*, *hyper*, *macro*, *meta*, *retro*, *semi*, and *trans*. Students should find out what each means and how the word part came to be used as a freestanding word. For instance, *emo* (a.k.a. *emocore*) is a “music genre characterized by expressive, often confessional, lyrics” that emerged after hardcore punk (en.wikipedia.org). *Emo* is also short for emotional, as in “Why are you being so *emo*?” (Please be aware that some of these clipped words relate to sexuality or are now considered slurs.)

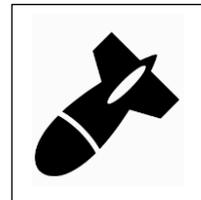


(Several more examples of affixes that have become words can be found in Part [Three](#) of the Viva Vocabulary! article “Roots and Affixes Doing Their Part.”)

6. Remind students that **back-formation**, like clipping, involves lopping off a portion of a word. Unlike clipping, however, a suffix is what is usually removed, and the resulting word has a different part of speech. An example is the verb *liaise*, which comes from the noun *liaison*. Although *liaise* seems to be increasingly seen and heard in modern America (e.g., “[His] duties include *liaising* with the BSA.” -*The News and Observer*), the word entered the language in 1928 and in the past, was used chiefly by speakers of British English (merriam-webster.com).

Acronyms and Abbreviations These word forms, which are shortened versions of phrases, are made from the first letters of the constituent words. An acronym is pronounced as a word (e.g., *MAMIL* – **M**iddle-**A**ged **M**an in Lycra). In an abbreviation (a.k.a. initialism), the individual letters are said (e.g., *WMD* – **W**eapon of **M**ass **D**estruction).

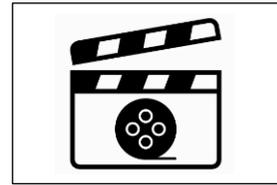
“Due to rampant misuse of the term ‘acronym,’ some dictionaries are now starting to add an extra definition to it, allowing acronyms to expand their scope to include initialisms. So, as the English language evolves, this additional definition of acronym may stick and become widely accepted. But at present, it’s generally still good form to distinguish between the two.” (todayifoundout.com)



More Teaching Ideas:

1. Share the *ADU* abbreviation, its meaning, and some examples with the class (*ADU* = **A**ccessory **D**welling **U**nit). Talk about why this abbreviation has taken hold today. Also ask students what they know about *ADUs* (e.g., converted garage apartment, granny flat, basement apartment) and if they have lived in one or know someone who has or does. Encourage students to also consider whether they would like this kind of living arrangement and where and when it might be advantageous. More information on *ADUs* is at buildinganadu.com/what-is-an-adu/.

- Ask class members to contribute links for blog posts and online articles that contain acronyms or abbreviations. Share a school-appropriate example from your own reading. For instance, I read an [Education Week](#) article that included the abbreviations *CTO* and *CAO* and discussed how these jobs have become more and more intertwined: “As school-technology use continues to grow, school district chief academic officers and chief technology officers increasingly must collaborate.” Make sure students highlight the acronyms and discuss their contexts of use along with the value of knowing them.
- Encourage students to be on the lookout for acronyms and abbreviations in their favorite games, movies, games, and internet/TV programs. To illustrate, you might share that on one episode of the TV series *Criminal Minds*, the *BAU* (**B**ehavioral **A**nalysis **U**nit) tracked an *LDSK* (**L**ong-**D**istance **S**erial **K**iller), a skilled marksman who shot people in broad daylight from a long distance. Students should identify the “alphabet words” as either acronyms or abbreviations and give a reason for the classification. (In the previous example, both *BAU* and *LDSK* are abbreviations since the letters in each are pronounced: /B-A-U/ and /L-D-S-K/.)



Then have students consider why such shortenings appear in entertainment products despite viewers’ possible lack of familiarity (e.g., The show is attempting to appear realistic and current because contemporary speakers frequently use acronyms and initialisms. Many scriptwriters seem to enjoy language and choose words that offer insights into characters. Learning the abbreviations makes people feel like they are “part of the club” or have insider information.)

- Bring up abbreviations and acronyms that have more than one meaning. Present some of the following examples and ask students to think about the importance of context and how to avoid confusion and other challenges that multiple meanings pose. Also let the class know that “the passion for initialisms seems to be wearing off,” possibly because of the confusion (theguardian.com).

Word	Word Formation Process	Meanings
<i>ADA</i>	Abbreviation	American D ental A ssociation, A ssistant d istrict a ttorney
<i>AM</i>	Abbreviation	A mplitude m odification, A nte M eridian
<i>AP</i>	Abbreviation	A dvanced P lacement, A ssociated P ress, a ssistant p rincipal
<i>AR</i>	Abbreviation	A ccelerated R eaders, A ugmented r eality
<i>BC</i>	Abbreviation	B efore C hrist, b lind c opy
<i>BO</i>	Abbreviation	B ody o dor, b ox o ffice
<i>CFA</i>	Abbreviation	C hartered F inancial A nalyst, C ommon f ormative a ssessment
<i>GM</i>	Abbreviation	G eneral m anager, G eneral M otors (Thanks, Adrian!)

<i>PC</i>	Abbreviation	P eace C orps, p ersonal computer, p olice constable (British), p olitically correct, p rinted circuit
<i>PTO</i>	Abbreviation	P aid or p ersonal time o ff, P arent T eacher O rganization
<i>NCRA</i>	Abbreviation	N orth C arolina R eading A ssociation, N ational C ourt R eporters A ssociation
<i>TLC</i>	Abbreviation	t ender l oving c are, T he L earning C hannel, T he L ettered C ottage (blog)

5. Invite older learners to look for initialisms that are the nicknames of famous people. Examples: *FDR* – Franklin **D**elano **R**oosevelt; *JFK* – John **F**itzgerald **K**ennedy; *JKR* – **J**(oanne) **K**(athleen) **R**owling; *LBJ* – Lyndon **B**aines **J**ohnson or **L**eBron **J**ames; *MLK* – **M**artin **L**uther **K**ing, Jr.; *RBG* – Ruth **B**ader **G**insburg (*RBG* is also the title of the 2018 documentary about Justice Ginsburg.); *SJP* – Sarah **J**essica **P**arker.



Then have students investigate how such initialisms come into use and what their advantages and disadvantages might be. One article that provides information and examples is on Slate.com: [“RFK, DSK, OBL, W--? When Did We Start Referring to Famous People by Three Initials?”](#) (Please be aware that the article contains foul language.)

6. Bring up the acronym, *OK*, which is commonly found in informal speech and writing, such as text messages where it might be shortened to “K. Challenge students to think about the many uses of *OK* and to delve into its history. One book on the subject is *OK: The Improbable Story of America’s Greatest Word* by Allan Metcalf (Oxford University Press, 2012). Ask students to respond to Metcalf’s thesis that [OK is “America’s greatest word”](#) and give specific reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.



7. Challenge secondary students to compile a list of businesses known primarily by their initials (e.g., *AT&T*, *BMW*, *CVS*, *GSK*, *H&M*, *MGM*, *UPS*). Additional examples are in the Mental Floss piece [“Spell It Out: 16 Abbreviated Company Names Explained.”](#) Have students list advantages and disadvantages of such names. Here are some:

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to pronounce if the company name is not English • Useful for updating a brand or glossing over a dated word that is part of an organization’s name • Faster to say and write • Easy to remember, if simple and unique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May make a company’s product focus unclear to consumers who are not familiar with the business • May be construed as annoying (pretentious) and unnecessary • May cause confusion in locating information about the company, if not unique

In talking about these pros and cons, you might share the following scene from an episode of the TV series *NCIS*:

Dr. Jimmy Palmer: “*GSW* to the chest. You know what’s weird about the abbreviation *GSW*? It takes longer to say than the words it stands for.

GSW, five syllables; gunshot wound, three. Acronyms are weird.”

Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs: “The slug. *ASAP*.”

Dr. Palmer: “On it, *PDQ*.”

More discussion and examples of company name abbreviations can be found in the Fatrabbittcreative.com post [“The Unexpected Perils of Business Acronyms”](#) and the B2B.com post [“To Abbreviate Your Company Name or Not, That is the Branding Question.”](#)

Slack, who wrote the latter post, tells companies that it’s “probably best to go with what people are calling you.” Interestingly, *B2B* stands for **Business to Business**. Related abbreviations for other kinds of marketing are *B2C* (**Business to Consumer**) and *B2E* (**Business to Employee**). More examples of abbreviations that are related to each other: *AR* (**augmented reality**), *MR* (**mixed reality**), and *VR* (**virtual reality**.)

8. Talk about abbreviations (initialisms) which are also antonyms, such as *NBD* (**No Big Deal**) ↔ *VBD* (**Very Big Deal**), *DOB* (**Date of Birth**) ↔ *DOD* (**Date of Death**), and *DW* (**dear wife**) ↔ *DH* (**dear husband**). Have students consider the communication challenges when using these abbreviations. For example, an innocent typographical error could lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and confusion.
9. Designate days or hours during which students should record any abbreviations and acronyms they happen to see or hear. Here are “alphabet-words” I observed in one week:

WORD	MEANING	FORMATION PROCESS
<i>AI</i>	Artificial Intelligence	Abbreviation
<i>The BFG</i>	Big Friendly Giant	Abbreviation
<i>BOB</i>	bug-out bag	Acronym
<i>CGI</i>	computer-generated image	Abbreviation
<i>CSR</i>	corporate social responsibility	Abbreviation
<i>DR</i>	Dominican Republic	Abbreviation
<i>GOAT</i>	greatest of all time (e.g., Some people consider Serena Williams the GOAT in tennis.)	Acronym 
<i>IG</i>	Instagram	Abbreviation
<i>INCYMI</i>	In case you missed it	Abbreviation

<i>IoT</i>	I nternet o f T hings	Abbreviation
<i>IRL</i>	i n r eal l ife	Abbreviation
<i>KO</i>	K nockout	Abbreviation
<i>LARP</i>	L ive A ction R ole- P laying	Acronym
<i>MYO</i>	m ake y our o wn	Abbreviation
<i>OER</i>	o pen e ducational r esources	Abbreviation
<i>OJT</i>	o n-the- j ob t raining	Abbreviation
<i>PTO</i>	p aid t ime o ff	Abbreviation
<i>ROG</i>	R epublic o f G amers	Abbreviation
<i>SEL</i>	S ocial and e motional l earning, S tandard E nglish L earner	Abbreviation
<i>SEO</i>	S earch E ngine O ptimizer	Abbreviation
<i>SOTU</i>	S tate o f the U nion (U.S. presidential speech)	Acronym
<i>SPF</i>	S un P rotection F actor	Abbreviation
<i>SUP</i>	s tandup p addleboard	Acronym
<i>TIL</i>	T oday I L earned	Acronym
<i>VLC</i>	v irtual l earning c ommunity	Abbreviation
<i>WFH</i>	w ork f rom h ome	Abbreviation
<i>YKWIM</i>	Y ou k now w hat I m ean.	Abbreviation

Have students compare their lists, noting similarities and differences. As a group, analyze the contexts where examples were found. Did this impact the number or kinds of words that were collected? If so, how?

10. Encourage students to think more about the impact of social media on the proliferation of abbreviated words. Bring up the following Twitter and Instagram hashtags (All are acronyms.), which are now used in informal writing and speech: *SCOTUS* (**S**upreme **C**ourt **o**f the **U**nited **S**tates), *POTUS* (**P**resident **o**f the **U**nited **S**tates), *FLOTUS* (**F**irst **L**ady **o**f the **U**nited **S**tates), and *BOTUS* (**B**unny **o**f the **U**nited **S**tates – Marlon Bundo, pet rabbit of U.S. Vice President Mike Pence’s family). Ask students to share other hashtags that are acronyms or abbreviations.



11. Obtain a pack of *POTUS, FLOTUS, and SCOTUS Knowledge Cards: A Quiz Deck of ACRONYMS*. (One of your students may own them or you can purchase them online. Another option is to make your own deck of acronym cards.) Ask students to use the cards to test their knowledge of acronyms. For example, do students know that *RICE* (**R**est, **I**ce, **C**ompression, **E**levation) is the recommended treatment for a sprained ankle?

If desired, also make a deck of initialism (a.k.a. abbreviation) cards. Include 40 or more useful abbreviations, such as *ROI*, which means **return on investment**.

12. Challenge your class to note when writers misuse the term acronym as illustrated in this Grammarbook.com post:

“*RMJ* is an acronym for **Recycle My Junk.**’ No, *RMJ* is an **initialism**. There is a key difference between acronyms and initialisms. If you can say it as a word, as in *NASA* or *ROM*, it is an acronym. If you pronounce each letter, as with *FBI* or *RSVP*, it is an initialism.” (Italics added.)

Students should keep their own running list of such grammar goofs found in the media or made by people in their world.

13. Talk about the use of acronyms in the work world. Judith Kallo of Businessemail etiquette.com, recommends that acronyms be used sparingly in business writing such as email. “Most times it is preferred to type out the phrase rather than risk the other side not knowing what you mean. Or worse you look like a lazy communicator.” Kallo maintains that “just a handful of acronyms are suitable for business, and only in informal communications. They are:



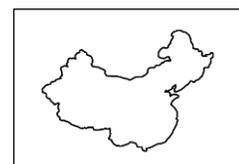
BTW = **By the Way** *HTH* = **Hope This Helps** *FWIW* = **For What It’s Worth**
TIA = **Thanks in Advance** *LOL* = **Laugh Out Loud**”

Also share relevant information from the *SmartCompany* article [“Why It’s Time We Got Rid of Corporate Jargon.”](#) One point the author makes is that acronyms can frustrate employees and potential customers and cause them to feel disconnected. (Warning: The article includes language that may not be appropriate for young people.)

Then ask students to survey local businesses about their policy on acronym use in oral and written work communications (e.g., emails, presentations, customer materials). Encourage students to also consider the appropriateness of acronyms and abbreviations in their own digital correspondence with companies.

14. Share the acronym *EGOT*, which was recently added to Merriam-Webster.com. Let students know that although the word can also refer to a gene, a more common meaning relates to a small but accomplished group of people that includes Mel Brooks, Whoopi Goldberg, Marvin Hamlisch, Audrey Hepburn, John Legend, and Rita Moreno. After students have a chance to guess what these people have in common, tell the class that *EGOT* stands for “winning an **E**mma, **G**rammy, **O**scar, and **T**ony Award in one’s lifetime.” According to Wikipedia.com, only 15 people have achieved this status.

15. Bring attention to the initialism *PRC*, which stands for **P**eople’s **R**epublic of **C**hina, the formal name of China. In recent years, I have noticed “Made in *PRC*” stamped on more and more products. Ask students to investigate why a company might use this instead of the “Made in China” imprint. Do most Americans know the



meaning of the *PRC* initialism and realize that the item was produced in China? Is the use of the initialism an attempt to disguise an item’s source and thus avoid criticism from American consumers who are concerned about offshoring jobs, overreliance on imports, or the quality of goods from China? Have students read and respond to the information and perspectives in *The Diplomat* piece [“How ‘Made in China’ Became a Stigma.”](#)

16. Remind your class that a **backronym** (a.k.a. reverse acronym) is “a word that is re-interpreted as an acronym.” ([wordsmith.org](#)) Laura Wattenberg, on [BabyNameWizard.com](#), calls backronyms “false, after-the-fact acronyms.” As these examples suggest, forming backronyms continues to be irresistible:

Existing Word	Invented Expansion to Form Backronym
AMBER (Alert)	America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response*
ASSIST	A Student Scholarship Interactive Search Tool
BIBLE	Basic Information Before Leaving Earth (Thanks, Larry!)
BING	Because It’s Not Google*
BOY	Beginning of Year
BUSY	Being Under Satan’s Yoke
FIRE	Financial Independence, Retire Early (Thanks, Trent!)
FOG	Fats, Oil, and Grease
GOD	Gift of Desperation (Anne Lamott, Author)
GRACE	God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense (Thanks, Nathan!); Generosity, Respect, Action, Compassion, Energy (“ The Attributes of Grace ” by John Baldoni)
ICE	In Case of Emergency (person to contact); Immigration and Customs Enforcement
KEY	Keep Educating Yourself (Thanks, Jo Ann!)
LATTE	Listen to the customer, Acknowledge the complaint, Take problem-solving action, Thank them, and Explain why the problem occurred. (forbes.com)
PUSH	Pray Until Something Happens (Thanks, Aida!)
RACHEL	Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning (“RACHEL is a server with open-source software and content that delivers large sections of the internet to a school or other educational organization.”) (literacybeat.com)

SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SWAT	Super Word-Attack Teacher (Thanks, Glen!)
TAG	Tell something you liked, Ask a thoughtful question, Give a positive suggestion (Steps for students to give peer feedback) (Thanks, Derek!)
TAP	Total Action Against Poverty (Virginia community action agency - Thanks, Meg!)
USA PATRIOT ACT	Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism*
WINNING	What I Need Now in Ninth Grade program

*blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/11/18/backronym-list/

Sometimes backronyms are created unintentionally, but many are developed on purpose, possibly to be funny, witty, or sarcastic. Some parents even choose to give their children backronymic names, such as *Mabel* (**M**others **A**lways **B**ring **E**xtra **L**ove) (BabyNameWizard.com).

Ask students to reflect on “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of backronyms. For instance, many people think backronyms sound clever and are catchy and easy to remember. Others find them annoying and forced. Be sure students can distinguish backronyms from acronyms.

Conversion **Verbification** (using an adjective or a noun as a verb, as in “*google*” it.) continues to be a common type of conversion as seen in this collection of [verbed nouns](#) at Wordspy.com. However, verbification is not a new phenomenon. Stephen Fry points out in his YouTube video [“Kinetic Typography-Language”](#) that “Shakespeare made a doing-word out of a thing-word every chance he got.”



Another kind of conversion seen today is **nominalization**, which is turning an adjective or a verb into a noun. Nominalization is sometimes called nounification. One example is *creative*, as in the [Gapingvoid.com](#) headline, “What You Don’t Know About a *Creative’s* Life.” (Italics added.) According to [Goinswriter.com](#), a *creative* is an artistic person who influences others. *BuzzFeed’s* post [“20 Ways to Know You’re a Creative”](#) states that “some brains are just wired to want to create, invent, explore, and innovate.”

Nominalization is popular in corporate America and advertising. Helen Sword, in *The New York Times* article [“Zombie Nouns,”](#) maintains that “Academics love [words that have been nounced]; so do lawyers, bureaucrats and business writers.” She also states that “At their best, nominalizations help us express complex ideas: *perceptions, intelligence, epistemology*. At their worst, they impede clear communication.”

More Teaching Ideas:

1. Have students look for other nominalized words. To get things going, bring in examples from the *Cognoscenti* post "[Nounification and Other Assaults on the English Language](#)": "No longer do business people request anything of staff or clients; we make an *ask*. No longer do we solve problems (assuming we ever did...); we merely seek and occasionally find a *solve*." Another example to share comes from an article on [Clark.com](#): "It made me realize how important it is to keep tabs on small *spends*." (Italics added in each quotation.)
2. Let the class know, that like verbification, nominalization is not a new phenomenon. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that *spend* has been used as a noun since before 1688 (<https://english.stackexchange.com>). In the *Grammar Girl* podcast/post "[Can 'Invite' Be Used as a Noun?](#)", Samantha Enslin reports that *invite* as a noun "was first recorded in 1659 in a religious text."

Then ask the class to speculate what might be contributing to nounification today. The previously mentioned *Cognoscenti* post suggests that "The most obvious explanation is that "*ask*" and "*solve*" are shorter versions of their multisyllabic counterparts in the verb family. And in the era of Twitter, shorter isn't just better, but downright essential." The piece also raises the possibility that nounification allows individuals to distance themselves from their actions by presenting their behavior as a commodity. Another reason people *noun* today may be to appear "with-it." "An example would be when a friend says she'll 'SnapChat' you or that she's 'Ubering' to work." (<https://www.quickanddirtytips.com>)

3. Invite able learners to rework paragraphs and sentences from their school materials and their own writing to remove nounifications. Encourage students to use active voice and strong verbs to enliven their prose and improve clarity. Here is an example from the previously mentioned article "Zombie Nouns" by Helen Sword:



ORIGINAL:

"The *proliferation of nominalizations* in a discursive *formation* may be an *indication of a tendency toward pomposity and abstraction*." (Italics added.)

REWRITE:

"Writers who overload their sentences with zombie-nouns appear pompous and abstract."

Paired-Word Sound Play According to Lems, Miller, and Soro (2017), these "double words" can be made in two ways:

- 1) **Vowel Change Reduplicative.** The vowel sound is changed in the second word in the pair. Usually that vowel sound is formed lower in the mouth (e.g., *clip clop*, *flimflam*, *gewgaw*, *jibber-jabber*, *mishmash*, *tip-top*).
- 2) **Rhyming Reduplicative.** The first sound, usually a consonant, is changed. This sometimes results in a slight onomatopoeic association (e.g., *analysis paralysis*, *ash stash*, *Big Dig*, *Chilly Willy*, *clamp lamp*, *chick flick*, *chop shop*, *cop shop*, *cutie patootie*, *Dobro*, *dojo*, *drop top*, *fab lab*, *fat cat*, *flower power*, *fogdog*, *fold hold*, *flyby*, *fuddy-duddy*, *hip dip*, *hokey-dokey*, *hot shot*, *hot spot*, *hotsy-totsy*, *hubbub*, *green screen*, *lad pad*, *Llama Mama*, *lookbook*, *loosey-goosey*, *meal deal*, *name game*, *neat freak*, *no-go*, *Oompa-Loompas*, *Pee Dee*, *politics schmoltics*, *pot shot*, *ragtag*, *real deal*, *road load*, *rude dude*, *Snap Map*, *space race*, *Thrill Kill*, *wild child*, *yay day*).



As the above examples show, in reduplication, all or part of a syllable is repeated. Words formed through the exact repetition of an entire syllable are known as **tautonyms** (e.g., *blah blah*, *juju*, *MiuMiu*, *NeNe*, *toot-toot*, *Wawa*[®]). You will find more information on tautonyms (a.k.a. repeating reduplicatives, echo reduplicants) in the Viva Vocabulary! post “Jack and Jill Can Be Even More *Nym-ble*” Part [Three](#). The [Dictionary.com blog](#) also has a post on reduplication that you might *LIKE-like*.

More Teaching Ideas:

1. Challenge students to make an engaging, crowdsourced display of brand, product, and business names that are formed through either type of paired-word sound play. Title the digital or physical board “Call It Something That Will Stick With Consumers” (Thanks, Emily!) and remind viewers that the rhyme and rhythm resulting from reduplication may increase the memorability of these words. Invite students and teachers from other classes to submit examples for the board. To start things off, share a few of the following:

Bed Head[®] - line of hair-care products that many people can relate to because they’ve experienced the condition (marthaspelman.com)

ClassPass - monthly fitness program that allows members to work out at studios and gyms near them (Thanks, Danielle and Carly!)

Coast Toast - French toast at Brockton Villa Restaurant in La Jolla, CA (Thanks, Michael!)

Fake Bake[®] - brand of self-tanning and spray tanning products

Fleet Feet Sports[®] - store that sells running shoes, apparel, and gear (Thanks, Julie!)

GOJO[®] - company that makes hand cleaners and sanitizers (Thanks, Annie!)

GOPO[®] - food supplement made with rose hip

GrubHub - “online and mobile food-ordering company that connects diners with food from local restaurants” (en.wikipedia.org)

Hobby Lobby - arts and crafts store



Hot Dots® - interactive pen and flashcards for skill review

Hulu - online company that offers streaming service of TV shows, movies, and clips

Itty Bitty® - collectable small, plush figure from Hallmark (Hats off to the Hallmark shops that donate these to hospital children's wards.) (Thanks, Shirley!)

Itty Bitty Toes - online shop that offers couture and vintage clothes for children

LexisNexis™ - company that provides legal, government, and academic database searches

Muk Luks® - brand of boots, shoes, and slippers; originally the name of a soft boot, made of reindeer skin or sealskin



Piggly Wiggly – Southern and Midwestern U.S. grocery store chain (Thanks, Sherri!)

SigFig - investment tracking service

SnipSnap - mobile coupon scanning app

SmugMug - site for displaying and sharing personal photos

SoyJoy® - brand of gluten-free snack bars

Spot Shot - carpet stain remover



StubHub!™ - site where people buy and sell tickets to events

Throat Coat® - brand of organic herbal teas (Thanks, Adam!)

TifTuf™ - variety of bermudagrass that is draught resistant (Thanks, Harris!)

TIKI® Brand - company that makes Tiki torches and other outdoor firelighting (Thanks, Michael!)

Tutti Frutti - brand of self-serve frozen yogurt

Vudu - movie and TV streaming service (Thanks, Jamie!)

Zoho - suite of online applications used by businesses

If desired, divide the board into sections to reflect modern life and peoples' interests. For instance, one area might be devoted to CANDY, GUM, and MINTS: *Dubble Bubble*®, *Jelly Belly*®, *KitKat*®, *Laffy Taffy*®, *PayDay*®, *Reese's Pieces*®, and *Tic Tac*®.

2. As a class, continue collecting words that are formed through paired-word sound play. Here are reduplicants of this kind that I've recently seen or heard:

blame game - "a situation in which different individuals or groups attempt to assign fault to each other for some problem or failure" (merriam-webster.com)

Boho - "socially unconventional," short for Bohemian (urbandictionary.com)

culture-vulture - “a person who avidly attends cultural events” (merriam-webster.com) or someone who appropriates the language, behaviors, or clothing styles of another ethnic or social group (urbandictionary.com)

fender bender - collision of a motor vehicle that results in minor damage

granny nanny - grandmother who regularly provides child care for her grandchild/ren (Thanks, Phyllis!)

house-mouse - police officer who has desk duty and only handles paperwork

grit lit - Southern literature

threadhead - sewing enthusiast (Thanks, Rosina!)



3. Let interested students know about the Wordsmith.org lists of reduplicatives. Different types of reduplicatives have been the weekly theme for A.Word.A.Day. One time the theme was uncommon reduplicatives formed via paired-word sound play: [hugger-mugger](#), [argle-bargle](#), [hoity-toity](#), [tussie-mussie](#), and [hurly-burly](#).
4. Ask class members to look for reduplicants whose meaning has morphed over the years. An example is *mojo*. Traditionally *mojo* has referred to “a power that may seem magical and that allows someone to be very effective, successful, etc.” (merriam-webster.com). This power may include talent or sex appeal. According to Wordspy.com, a new definition of *MoJo* is “journalism that is heavily dependent on mobile technologies to report, produce, and file stories; a person who practices such journalism.” (*MoJo* is formed through **clipping** the **compound** word, **mobile journalism**.)

Another word-formation process is **Scale Change**, which involves adding a prefix or suffix to show a smaller or larger dimension. Scale Change is addressed in Part [One](#) of the Viva Vocabulary! article “Roots and Affixes Doing Their Part.” The article also includes many examples of contemporary words created through that method of word formation.

In addition, remind the class that English grows as existing words in our language take on new meanings. This phenomenon is discussed in the Viva Vocabulary! article [“Not Your Parents’ Words.”](#) which includes lots of examples. One relatively recent example is *whale*. In his post [“The Management of Whales,”](#) Seth Godin states that “in online gaming, a *whale* is someone who plays far more than the typical player. It’s not unusual for 2% of the player base to account for 95% of all the usage.”

I hope you and your students enjoy learning more about our ever-evolving language!

“When I hear someone has coined a word, I feel happy. It tells me that no matter what, we have not given up. We still have hope for humanity. We are still trying to find—and coin—words to describe new things, new ideas, whatever pops up around us.” -Anu Garg, Wordsmith.org

*As with all Viva Vocabulary! articles, inclusion of any term is not an endorsement of its use or the action, person, place, or thing it represents.

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