There’s just not enough time in the day. Have you heard that phrase before? It seems that as the world continues to grow and the reach of technology expands, our time has become a much more valuable — and at times, limited — resource.

So, with our available time slowly shrinking away, are there any ways that we can save time in our lives? While you may not be able to speed up the act of walking your dog or picking up your dry cleaning, the English language can, at least, present options that allow for a shorter, faster experience for both you as a writer and for your readers.

With abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms, you can condense certain areas of your writing without having to sacrifice an entire word or phrase. First, let’s look at the definitional differences between abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms.

Abbreviations are shortened versions of longer words or phrases. They’re quite common and can be found in all forms of writing.

They can be used when referencing individuals and their titles.

[Mister Tibbs = Mr. Tibbs]

Abbreviations can also be found through the method of clipping. Clipping is when you truncate a word by an entire syllable.

[photograph = photo]

Of course, abbreviations aren’t the only way to tighten up our writing. Acronyms and initialisms also help us out. These are created using the first letters of a word or a set of words.

Acronyms are unique in that they form a single, pronounceable word.
[North Atlantic Trade Organization = NATO]

Initialisms are similar, but instead of the new word being pronounced as a single term, each letter is read individually.

[automatic teller machine = ATM]

Initialisms are frequently used in reference to individuals. They can be used in place of first, middle, or last names.

[Bullwinkle Jay Moose = Bullwinkle J. Moose]

Using abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms is common practice among writers — both professional and casual.

What are some of the abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms you use most commonly? In what contexts do you use them most frequently?

About this transcript:

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