

# Portmanteau Words

For Curious Linguists

**Introduction:** Read the explanation of the word “portmanteau”.

A portmanteau is a type of old suitcase which could carry an equal amount of luggage on each side. While we don't really use this type of suitcase any more, the word remains in the English language with a very-different-although-somewhat-related use. For example, “brunch” is a portmanteau (or portmanteau word). It is a combination of the words “breakfast” and “lunch”.



We see portmanteaus in all areas of English. We see them in common vocabulary, both from older English—“smog” is actually a combination of “smoke” and “fog”—and in more modern uses, such as “blog”, coming from “web” and “log”. Even political movements and campaigns can take their name in the form of a portmanteau: see the moment when Britain ‘exits’ the EU, i.e. “Brexit”.

In one area of popular culture, Pokémon (the word itself) is a portmanteau itself, coming from “pocket” and “monster”. A vast number of pokémon’s names are also portmanteaus (take the starter pokémon—Charmander, Squirtle, and Bulbasaur—as a few examples).

In the world of celebs, Some couples receive a portmanteau of their names to refer to the two of them together. Take 2006’s power couple Brangelina as an example. The New York Times crossword once even gave readers the clue, “How I wish Natalie Portman dated Jacques Cousteau, so I could call them ‘Portmanteau’”.



**Vocabulary:** Are you able to guess the portmanteau formed by the following words?

How do we call:

1. a person that we pretend is a friend but is really an enemy;
2. a hotel, typically on the side of a motorway, where people tend to stay just for a night;
3. a type of leggings that people wear that have the appearance of jeans;
4. an item of cutlery which combines the spoon and the fork;
5. the “language” resulting from combining English and Spanish in conversation;
6. the feeling when you are hungry and your hunger makes you feel angry;
7. a type of software which is malicious to your computer;
8. a seminar which is delivered on the web;
9. a person who is not an alcoholic but is addicted to shopping;
10. a TV show or film which is both romantic and a comedy;
11. the word derived from execute which is a verb meaning “to give an electric shock”; and
12. the item which analyses a person’s breath to determine whether they are drunk?

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**Speaking:**            **Ask and answer the following questions as a group.**

1. Do you have anyone that you consider a frenemy?
2. Have you ever stayed at a motel?
3. Do you ever wear jeggings?
4. When do people usually use sporks?
5. Do you have a favourite example of Spanglish?
6. Do you often get hangry?
7. Have you ever accidentally installed malware?
8. Do you often have to attend webinars?
9. Do you consider yourself to be a shopaholic?
10. What is your favourite romcom film or series?
11. Have you ever electrocuted yourself?
12. Have you ever been breathalysed?