

Keep your English up to date

Mwah!

Professor David Crystal

You've seen it on television, or in the street, hundreds of times, thousands of times. Two people come towards each other, they obviously know each other very well, and they start to kiss each other - but it's not a full frontal kiss. No, what happens, one person puts the cheek against the other person's cheek and they have what is often called an 'air' kiss. They make a kissing noise, which shows that they're coming together, as great intimates, but it's not a real kiss at all. And many people then give this air kiss a noise, a word, and it's usually 'mwah', 'mwah' - something like that.

Now, how do you write it? Well nobody knows quite how to write it, but it's really m-w-a-h. I saw it written in about the mid-nineties for the first time. And, there's a plural too: "there's lots of mwahs about these days" I remember reading in somebody's journal at one point. It's an affectation, it's associated with a social elite – probably everybody does it to a degree or another.

What's unusual is to get the effect coming out as a word. It's a sort of 'sound symbolic' word - mwah - it's a lovely way of expressing the actual noise that takes place when you do a phoney kiss of this kind. And I've never done it myself - I'm not a 'mwah' type person - but I think an awful lot of people are. I certainly don't think I've ever heard it on the radio and certainly not as a way of saying goodbye to listeners - but I'll try it out and see what happens, so 'mwah'!!



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