

# Why are “Pound” and “Ounce” Abbreviated as “lb” and “oz”?



Most of our abbreviations for units of measurement are pretty straightforward. They are made up of letters from the words they stand for. So how do we get *lb* for “pound” and *oz* for “ounce”?

*Lb* is an abbreviation of the Latin word *libra*. The primary meaning of *libra* was balance or scales (as in the astrological sign), but it also stood for the ancient Roman unit of measure *libra pondo*, meaning “a pound by weight.” We got the word “pound” in English from the *pondo* part of the *libra pondo* but our abbreviation comes from the *libra*. The *libra* is also why the symbol for the British pound is £—an L with a line through it. The Italian lira also used that symbol (with two lines through it), the word “lira” itself being a shortened version of *libra*.

“Ounce” is related to the Latin *uncia*, the name for both the Roman ounce and inch units of measurement. The word came into English from Anglo-

Norman French, where it was *unce* or *ounce*, but the abbreviation was borrowed from Medieval Italian, where the word was *onza*. These days the Italian word is *uncia*, and the area once covered by the Roman Empire has long since switched to the metric system.