

The English Names of the Letters of the Alphabet

Before engaging in practice activities and games, it may be necessary to *teach and/or learn* the names of the 26 letters of the English alphabet. Here are some possible lesson steps:

1. In large print on a (chalk or white) board or large paper, put the upper (and/or lower) case block letters of the alphabet in order. Begin with *A*. In clear English, say the name of each letter as you print it. Listeners try to imitate your pronunciation.
2. Beginning with *A*, point to each letter in order and say its name. As learners repeat, reinforce or correct their pronunciation by modeling the name of the letter again—perhaps even more slowly or clearly.
3. Begin with the last letter on the board or paper. In reverse order, point to each letter and pronounce its name. Learners repeat several times. Continue to model clear pronunciation.
4. Point to the letters in random order. Emphasize the ones that learners have difficulty with. Learners repeat the names again.
5. Point to the letters of the alphabet in order and have the group tell their names. Repeat in reverse order. Then point to letters in random order, and have learners name them. Provide additional practice of letters whose names may confuse learners—such as *A* vs. *E* vs. *I*, *B* vs. *V* vs. *F* vs. *W*, *C* vs. *S*, *K* vs. *Q*, *D* vs. *T*, etc.

If exact or close repetition of lesson or activity procedures provides participants with comfort or confidence, you can repeat the same steps at appropriate intervals with the same materials in similar ways. On the other hand, if “bored” teachers or students tend to tune out when they think they already “know the answers,” variety or surprise can make them more alert—so that they don’t waste their own time.

For instance, any or all of the above instructions can be followed with other materials, such as colorful alphabet posters, pre-printed alphabet charts projected onto a screen, smaller versions distributed on handouts or cards, big letters on separate pages hung in a line or a banner, and so on. With or without help, learners can “teach” one another in pairs or small groups. They can use alphabet materials on their own and/or for home study with their families.

Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers

In naming the letters of the alphabet in English, the writing systems of beginners’ native languages may determine the pace and level of the presentation, the practice activities or games, the reinforcement, and the mastery checks or tests.



For instance, those unfamiliar with the roman alphabet may be able to handle only one or a few letters per lesson. In this case, there should be several or many copies of each letter to point to and name.



If they are learning or practicing *only* the letter names, more advanced learners can deal with the whole alphabet at one time. Especially if they already “know” the information, the names can be presented and practiced as “mini-pronunciation lessons.”

For example, the lengthening of vowel sounds at the ends of words (in all the letter names except *f*, *h*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *r*, *s*, *w*, *x*) can be indicated with the pulling apart of hands or the stretching of a rubber band.

The voiced/voiceless contrasts of the initial consonants in the letter names *b* vs. *p*, *z* vs. *c* and *d* vs. *t* invite an explanation of the principles of voicing (vibration of the vocal cords vs. the use of air), which apply to the names of *all* the consonant letters.

Instructions for *the English Names of the Letters of the Alphabet*

From the upper-case & lower-case letters—
and the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)
or dictionary pronunciation symbols,
pronounce the English names of the letters.

Aa

A = / e^y / = ā

Bb

B = / bi^y / = bē

Cc

C = / si^y / = sē

Dd

D = / di^y / = dē

Ee

E = / i^y / = ē

Ff

F = / ef / = ěf

Gg

G = / dʒi^y / = jē

Hh

H = / e^ytʃ / = āch

Ii

I = / a^y / = ī

Jj

J = / dʒe^y / = jā

Kk

K = / ke^y / = kā

Ll

L = / el / = ěl

Mm

M = / em / = ěm

Nn

N = / en / = ěn

Oo

O = / o^w / = ō

Pp

P = / pi^y / = pē

Qq

Q = / ky^w / = kyū

Rr

R = / ɹ / = ār

Ss

S = / es / = ěs

Tt

T = / ti^y / = tē

Uu

U = / yu^w / = yū

Vv

V = / vi^y / = vē

Ww

W = / dʌb^lyu^w / = dūblyū

Xx

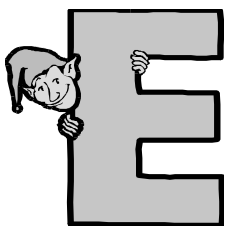
X = / eks / = ěks

Yy

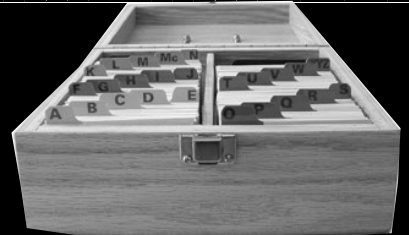
Y = / wa^y / = wī

Zz

Z = / zi^y / = zē



Alphabet-Letter Alphabetization



The ability to *alphabetize* (to put letters and combinations of letters into alphabetical order) is important at *all* stages of language acquisition and use. At *any* level of proficiency, however, learners can begin arranging letters into sequences. With one or more sets of 26 (purchased, borrowed, and/or self-made—and preferably large) letter cards, everyone can practice and/or cooperate or compete in alphabetizing:

1. If there are fewer than 26 participants, remove the appropriate number of cards displaying letters from the end of the alphabet. Shuffle the remaining cards and give one to each person. As fast as they can, learners arrange *themselves* in order according to the positions of their letters in the alphabet. Then they show and tell their letters in an “alphabet chain.” If enough letters remain, repeat this activity with the rest of the alphabet cards in the set.
2. Alternatively, simply give out the appropriate number of large letter cards (one to each person) at random. When participants arrange themselves in alphabetical order, they will discover that some of the letters are missing. These can be supplied from the remaining cards in the set as the (incomplete) “alphabet chain” is recited.
3. Next, participants work together to put the 26 letter cards back into an alphabetized set. They can check their sequencing by going through the set again, saying the letters as they place the cards face down on a surface or at the back of the deck to keep them in order.
4. Later, learners can time themselves in alphabetizing their shuffled card set, trying to “beat their own record” each time. Alternatively, groups (each equipped with its own set of 26 cards) can compete against one another in alphabetizing quickly. For even more challenge, they can try alphabetizing their card sets in reverse, from *Z* to *A*.
5. In each group, the 26 letter cards of a set can be dealt out to participants. Each person can arrange the letters in his or her “hand” into alphabetical order, noting the “blanks.” Then group members can combine their arranged card hands into a complete alphabetized set.

Learners that can click before they can write can get more letter-alphabetizing practice by playing computer games—at websites such as <http://www.playkidsgames.com/alphabetGames>. or <http://www.learningplanet.com/act/abcorder>. Also, anyone can use downloadable, reproducible, or self-made worksheets.

Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers



Lowest-level learners—as well as very young or aging participants that need practice in small motor skills—might enjoy putting *three-dimensional* forms of the 26 letters to good use. Some purchasable items produced in the shape of letters, or with alphabet letters printed on them, are wooden blocks or cubes, jigsaw puzzle pieces, magnetic pieces, bean bags, stencils or templates, rubber stamps, beads, and even pasta or pieces of cereal called *Alpha-Bits*. Participants can follow suggested steps or invent their own procedures to examine, manipulate, and put these items into forward or backward alphabetical order.



Alphabetizing in the “real world” of work and life goes beyond putting 26 individual letters into the appropriate sequence, of course. Faster learners may be eager to start arranging sets of *multi-letter* items into alphabetical order. Unlikely to begin with *all* of the 26 distinct letters, some names or words will begin with the *same* letter or the same two or more letters. In these cases, participants must learn additional alphabetizing rules.

Additionally, some participants will want to learn to use the alphabetizing features of their computer software—useful if they type all or most of their communications.

Instructions for *Alphabet-Letter Alphabetization*

In order from left to right and from top to bottom, color or mark the box of each capital letter of the alphabet from *A* to *Z* once. Don't mark the other boxes.

Q	A	B	Z	Y	C	V	D	W	D	X	E	F	G	J	H	H	H
U	I	J	G	L	M	K	Q	T	L	S	M	V	N	A	O	C	B
F	I	Q	K	R	S	T	P	U	B	O	V	C	W	N	X	Y	A

Now color or mark the box of each of the 26 lower-case letters in alphabetical order.

a	j	o	p	b	c	d	c	d	k	e	u	f	t	g	h	s	r
q	i	h	j	e	k	v	w	l	b	m	z	n	z	l	o	e	p
q	n	r	d	f	g	s	t	u	v	c	w	x	a	y	b	z	x

In order from left to right and from top to bottom, color or mark the box of each capital letter of the alphabet in backwards order—from *Z* to *A*—once. Don't mark the other boxes.

Z	C	Y	B	H	A	Z	K	X	N	W	D	V	E	U	M	M	T
J	I	R	S	V	Q	U	W	P	X	X	O	P	N	M	P	L	K
R	I	H	T	G	F	W	E	W	Q	D	O	C	B	G	A	O	L

Now color or mark the box of each of the 26 lower-case letters in reverse alphabetical order.

a	h	z	b	y	x	w	c	v	g	u	f	t	d	s	i	e	r
p	j	o	k	l	q	n	s	m	v	l	x	y	k	z	y	z	j
i	h	m	g	n	f	e	r	t	d	u	c	u	w	v	p	b	a