

creative ideas for effective
language activities and games

ALPHABET ANSWERS

EVERYTHING to Know (Now)
about Teaching & Learning
the Letters of the Alphabet
Language Learning Levels & Skills =
Pre-Literacy to Beginning Reading & Writing;
Beginning to Intermediate Spelling
& Vocabulary

by Elaine Kirn-Rubin & Arthur E. Rubin
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Workshop Handout

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A
 $\bar{a} = /e^y/$

The Names of the Alphabet Letters



Before beginning *phonics/pelling* instruction, teach, review, or practice the *names* of the 26 letters of the English alphabet. Consistently remind participants that each letter name *contains* one or more distinct sounds of the language, but it is *not* the same as the *sound(s)* it spells in print or makes in speech.

1. **Present the letter names.** In large print on a board or large paper, put the letters of the alphabet in order. Say—or have others say—the name of each letter as you print or write it. Tell and/or repeat each letter name clearly; listeners imitate your (exaggerated but correct) pronunciation. Point to the letters *A* to *Z* and have the group tell their names. Repeat in reverse order *Z* to *A*. Then point to letters in random order; 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*, *V* vs. *W*, *C* vs. *S*, *K* vs. *Q*, *G* vs. *J*, *L* vs. *R*, etc.

For practice in *sound awareness*, they can also count the *number of sounds* in a letter name. For instance, there is *one sound* in *ay* (*A*), *ee* (*E*), *I*, *oh* (*O*), and *yoo* (*U*). There are 2 or 3 sounds in most other letter names, like *b ee* (*B*), *e f* (*F*), *ai tch* (*H*), *a r* (*R*), or *w ie ee* (*Y*).

2. **Use a variety of materials.** To ensure that new readers can recognize letters in various *forms* (*upper- and lower-case, print, cursive, and different fonts*), repeat *Step 1* with alphabet posters, banners, charts, letter flash cards, handwriting models, worksheets, and so on. If appropriate, have fun with the *Alphabet Song*, from books or websites like kididdles.com or en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphabet_song.
3. **Do an Alphabet Chain.** Pronounce the name of the first letter of the English alphabet, *A*. Indicate that the next participant is to say the name of the second letter, *B*. The next person tells the third letter, *C*, and so on around the group. Continue the chain until the end of the alphabet, *Z*. If anyone gets stuck or names a letter incorrectly, point to the appropriate letter for that turn. Have the whole group pronounce it. Then repeat *Step 5* with the alphabet in reverse order, *Z* to *A*. Later, perform the chain with every other or every 3rd letter (which has been erased or covered).
4. **Review.** If needed, repeat any of the steps in adapted ways at useful intervals, maybe before a phonics lesson or activity—as a reminder of the distinction between *letter-names* and the sounds they make.



Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers

To understand oral spelling and spell aloud, language learners and users at *all* levels of proficiency need to be able to *recognize* and *say* the *names* of the letters of the alphabet—at least eventually.



Detailed suggestions for teaching and learning the English alphabet appear in Authors & Editors' *Alphabet Answers* (ISBN 978-1-34637-01-2). Learners unfamiliar with the roman writing system may be able to handle only one or a few letters per lesson, perhaps along with handwriting or typing instruction. Those *used* to the letter shapes might need frequent reminders that American-English phonics can vary significantly from the correlations between letters and sounds in *their* languages.



When the English names of the roman letters are *first* taught or reviewed, you can add challenge and perhaps surprise by mentioning—or having eager participants try to say—the *sound(s)* that a letter produces. Can you or they (already) provide examples of sample words that illustrate the complexity of the system?

For example, the letter *a* spells /æ/ in *apple*, /ɑ/ in *cards*, /ɑ/ in *father*, and /eɪ/ in *able*. The letter *c* is pronounced /k/ in *cat* but /s/ in *cell*. The letter *g* can make both the /g/ and /dʒ/ sounds, as in *girl* and *genie*—and so on.

Instructions for *the Names of the Alphabet Letters*

Repeat, say, or read the American-English names of the 26 block-print alphabet letters—as spelled out after an = sign below.

Aa

A = ay

Bb

B = b ee

Cc

C = s ee

Dd

D = d ee

Ee

E = ee

Ff

F = e f

Gg

G = j ee

Hh

H = ai tch

Ii

I = a yee

Jj

J = j ay

Kk

K = k ay

Ll

L = e l

Mm

M = e m

Nn

N = e n

Oo

O = oh

Pp

P = p ee

Qq

Q = k y u

Rr

R = a r

Ss

S = e s

Tt

T = t ee

Uu

U = y oo

Vv

V = v ee

Ww

W = d ou b le y oo

Xx

X = e k s

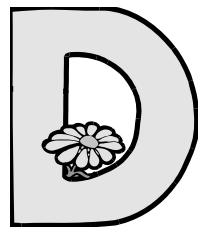
Yy

Y = w ay ee

Zz

Z = z ee

phonicspelling = ˌfɑːnɪkˈspɛlɪŋ, D = dē or /diː/ = The Names of the Alphabet Letters



Alphabet Rhythm (Letter Beats)



Because the *rhythm* (speech music) of oral language is an integral element of pronunciation or clear-accent training, it may be advantageous to pay attention to its “beats” early on. The names of all the letters of the English alphabet (except *w*) have one syllable—and therefore, one beat—each, so an alphabet version of a very old, very low-tech game called “Rhythm” should work well for letter-name practice.

1. There should be between six and 26 players. Everyone sits in a circle. They “letter off.” The first person says “A,” the second—“B,” the third—“C,” and so on—until each player is assigned a different letter in alphabetical order.
2. In unison, all players slap their thighs twice, clap twice, and then snap the fingers on each hand to the same rhythm. On the first snap (with the right hand), the first player says his or her letter (“A”). On the second snap (with the left hand), the same person says any other letter represented in the circle (for example, “E.”) After two more slaps and claps, the person just “named” says his or her letter aloud, followed by someone else’s—for example, “E” (*snap*)—“C” (*snap*).
3. The *slap, slap, clap, clap, snap, snap* rhythm continues until someone makes a mistake. That player moves to the last position of the circle. Everyone behind him/her moves up and “reletters” himself or herself. For example, if the “C” player loses the third place in the circle, the “D” player becomes “C,” the “E” player becomes “D,” and so on. Play continues until time is called. At the end of the game, the person in the “A” place of the circle is the winner.
4. If any of the letters were not practiced in the first “Alphabet Rhythm” game, be sure to include them in the next round.

Are participants musically inclined and/or interested in rhythm activities? Then they might try setting the 29-syllable “lyrics” of the English alphabet (A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-J-K-L-M-N-O-P-Q-R-S-T-U-V-W-X-Y-Z) to other simple tunes, like “Happy Birthday,” “Yankee Doodle,” “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” or the like. As they substitute the names of the letters in order for the original syllables of a melody, they can look at the music, beat the rhythm, and/or “play the notes” with simple rhythm instruments—sticks, blocks, shakers, drums, etc.

Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers

For lessons that include melody (tune) or the beats of syllables, it is participants’ inclination toward or (lack of) interest in music and rhythm that determine which activities to use, how to present and practice them, and how much time and energy to spend.



In chanting or singing any alphabet song, participants should understand that the names of the *letters* are different from the names of the *notes* of the tune they are using.

For example, the melody of the original, most often sung English “Alphabet Song” is like the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Its 28 quarter, half, and eighth notes—one for each syllable of the alphabet, are C, C, G, G, A, A, G; F, F, E, E, D, D, D, D, C; G, G, F, E, E, D; G, G, G, F, E, and D. Beginning language learners proficient in musical notation might benefit and feel satisfaction from comparing the sheet music (and perhaps the syllables of the lyrics) of both elementary songs.



If more advanced students want to use the sheet music of other simple songs, they can write the letters of the alphabet in order under the syllables of the original lyrics—or even create their *own* melodies. Then they can “perform” their newly composed alphabet songs.

Row row row your boat gen - tly down the stream,
 mer - ri - ly mer - ri - ly mer - ry - ly mer - re - ly life is but a dream.

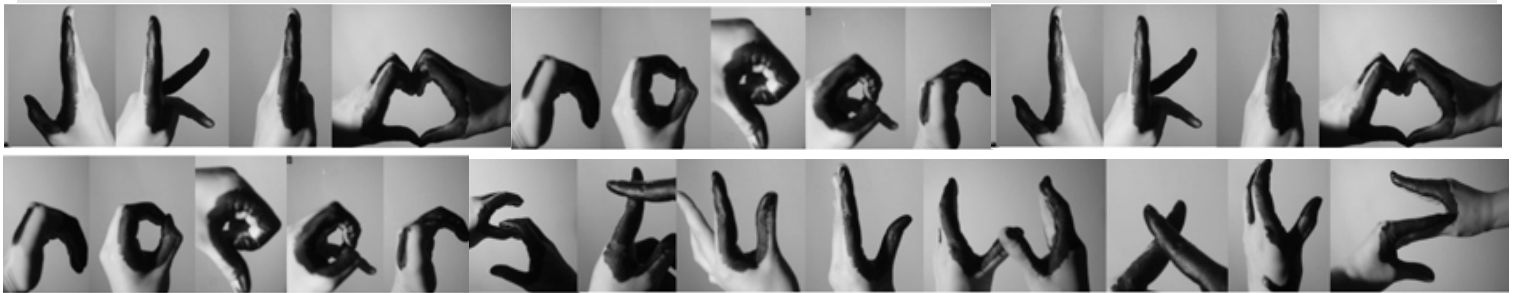
the Alphabet A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R S T U V W / 'dʌb'yə/ X Y Z

Other Songs to Try: *Happy Birthday = Good Morning to You, You Are My Sunshine, Yankee Doodle, Mary Had a Little Lamb*, and many more: <http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/index.html>, <http://bussongs.com/>, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/music.htm>, etc.

Instructions for *People-Letters (Hand & Body Poses)*

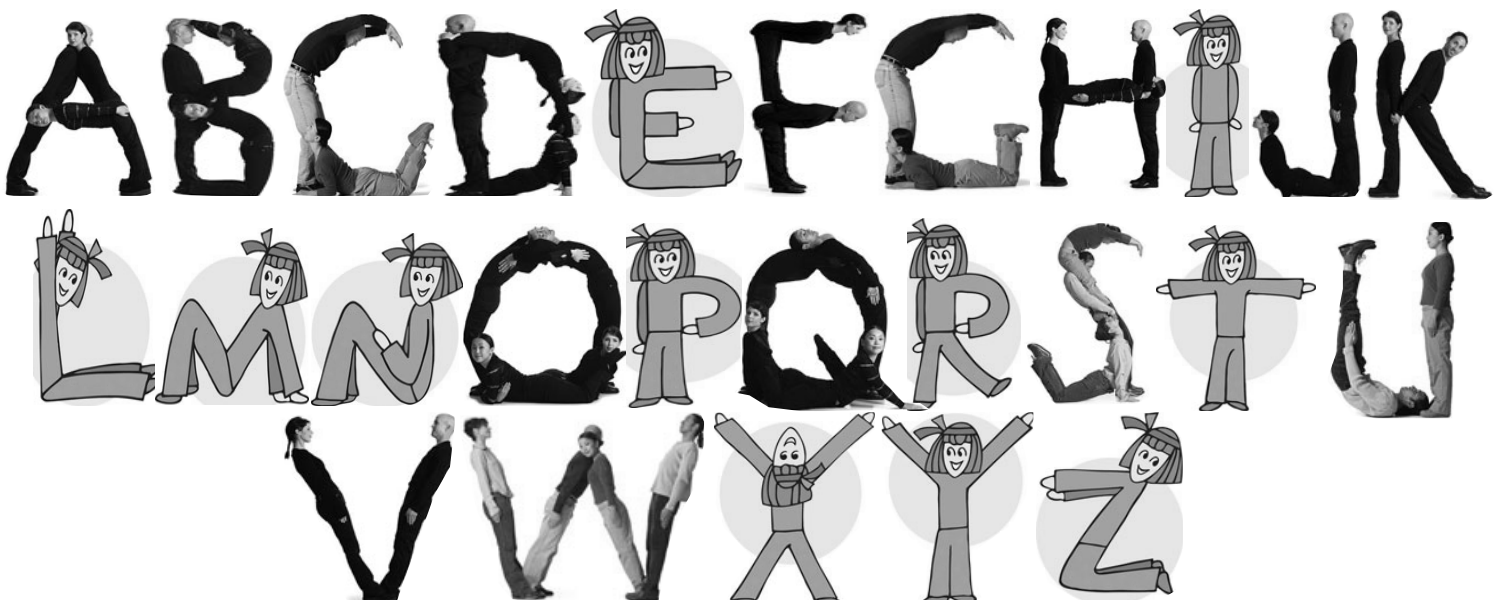
from <http://www.emmilaakso.com/index.php?/projects/human-alphabet>

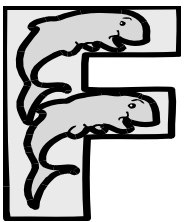
Name the lower-case letters represented by the dark areas in these hand positions— in alphabetical and/or random order. Then trying forming the same letters with your own hand(s) and finger(s). *Can you also form any upper-case letters with your hands?*



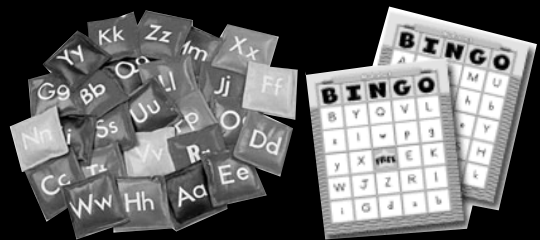
from <http://www.fotosearch.com>

Each of the capital letters below is displayed by the body position(s) of one figure or two to four real people. Name them in alphabetical or random order. Then try forming some of the letters on your own or with one to three others. *Can you think of better or easier ways to show the letters?*





Alphabet Bingo or Letter Lotto



The *Lotto / Bingo* format fits many kinds of language-learning content. To use it to teach, learn, and/or practice the English alphabet, you can purchase, borrow, download, and/or create a letter grid for each potential participant. Each grid should show a different letter of the alphabet in each of the four boxes in each of four rows. There should be a different letter printed on each of 26 large “caller cards.” Give each participant or pair a separate grid; either spread out the 26 caller cards or put the shuffled 26-card set face down on a surface.

1. Picking up the caller cards one by one, call out the letters. Players either “X-out” each letter that is called or—so the grids can be reused—place markers (pieces of paper, poker chips, buttons, beans, etc.) on the boxes as they hear those letters. Repeat each letter two or three times. If necessary, show each called letter card and/or point to the letter on the board, an alphabet poster, or a wall chart.
2. The first person to cover a “Bingo line” (all the boxes in a horizontal row, a vertical column, or perhaps diagonally) calls out “Alphabet Bingo.” That person is the winner if s/he can read aloud all the marked or covered letters in the line correctly.
3. The winner of each game can be the caller for the next game. So that everyone has an equal chance to win with his/her grid, the unused caller cards from each game can be used first for the next one—and/or players can get new grids for each or every few games.
4. Alternatively, instead of using caller cards, each participant in turn can call out a different letter for all players to mark or cover.
5. Alternatively at another time, instead of *calling out* the letters, write them on the board—one by one in various forms: for example, play one game with upper-case block letters and the next with lower-case letters. Players say the letters aloud while marking or covering them.

How does the game of *Letter Lotto* differ from *Alphabet Bingo*? In *Bingo*, players mark or cover items as they are called out; in *Lotto*, they draw one “caller card” at a time from a face-down set, placing it face up on the appropriate grid-box if there is a match (the same letter). If several participants are playing *Lotto* together, there should be several alphabet-letter sets to draw from, perhaps printed in various fonts.

Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers



Here are some ways to make each grid easier for a beginner to use: [a] put larger letters into a 3 by 3 format (three boxes across and three, down) instead of 4 by 4. [b] Instead of placing letters randomly on each grid, choose three letters from *only A to H* for the first column, three from *only I to Q* for the second, and three from *only R to Z* for the third. [c] The letters may be easier to find if they are in alphabetical order in each column.



If they can write, faster learners can create their own *Alphabet Bingo* or *Lotto* grids with these steps: [a] Each person divides a piece of paper into the same number of equal-sized boxes—either 16 (4 across and 4 down), or 25 (5 by 5). The boxes can be created by folding the paper or drawing vertical and horizontal lines. [b] “Dictate” the appropriate number of letters one by one—in any sequence. As you say a letter, each person prints it in one of the boxes on his/her paper—in a random location so that game players don’t create identical grids. [c] After a few seconds, print each letter on the chalkboard for participants to compare with their own.

Now use the letter grids to play *Bingo* or *Lotto* games—in suggested and other ways.

Instructions for *Alphabet Bingo or Letter Lotto*

Here are only four possible 16-box letter grids for *Bingo* or *Lotto* games. The letters are not printed in alphabetical order; even so, only the letters *A* to *G* appear in the first column; *H* to *N*, in Column 2; *O* to *T*, in Column 3; and *U* to *Z* in Column 4. Grids of various sizes can contain nine (3 x 3), sixteen (4 x 4) or 25 (5 x 5) boxes each.

Alphabet Bingo / Lotto Grid 1

c	N	Q	x
B	J	r	y
F	M	P	Z
d	k	O	u

Alphabet Bingo / Lotto Grid 2

F	J	q	Z
E	H	p	W
B	N	S	x
d	K	t	y

Alphabet Bingo / Lotto Grid 3

d	H	S	W
a	L	a	V
c	i	Q	Z
f	j	t	U

Alphabet Bingo / Lotto Grid 4

B	k	P	V
a	N	o	u
e	l	r	w
G	m	s	X

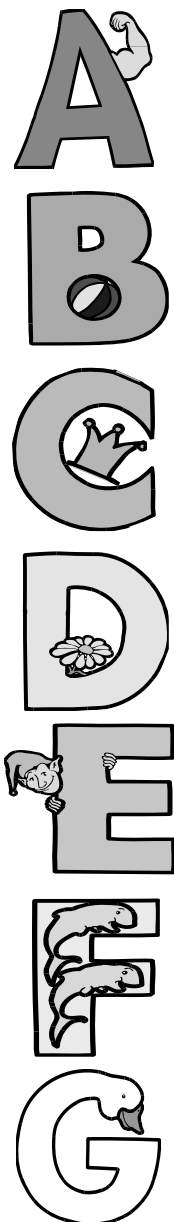
ALPHABET ANSWERS: ACTIVITY F = Alphabet Bingo & Letter Lotto

ALPHABET ANSWERS

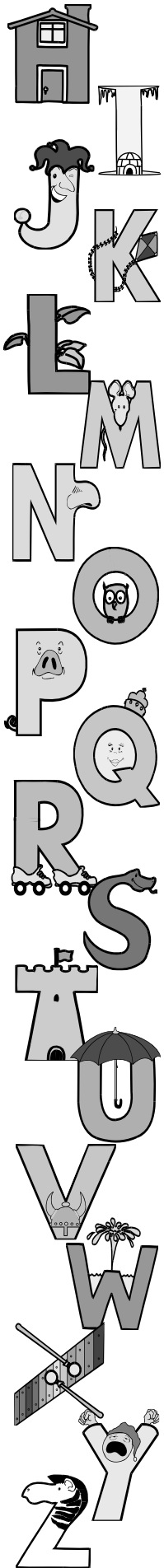
EVERYTHING to Know (Now) about Teaching & Learning the Letters of the Alphabet

Language Learning Levels & Skills = Pre-Literacy to Beginning Reading & Writing;
High Beginning to Intermediate Spelling & Vocabulary

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Alphabet Answers

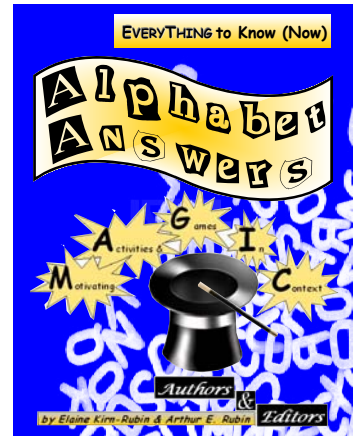
80 pages. ISBN: 978-1-934637-01-2 \$20

EVERYTHING to Know (Now) about the Letters of the Alphabet
(creative ideas for effective language activities and games)

Experience with *any* alphabet serves as a vital foundation for language teaching and learning. It enables children, adult new readers, learners of a second or foreign language, and everyone that studies or works with written language to understand and do oral spelling, to write from dictation, to look up and alphabetize items, and to prepare to read and spell phonetically by manipulating letters that represent sounds.

Alphabet Answers begins at the beginning. It suggests innovative activities and games requiring little preparation, designed to teach the forms, names, and order of the letters in an alphabetic writing system. At many proficiency levels, the 26 ideas A to Z will add variety, motivation, energy, cooperation, and (if desired) competition to the language classroom, tutoring situation, learning group, and/or individual study. Along with referrals to downloadable web pages, each section includes reproducible classroom-ready materials.

L B I
K-8 A/C



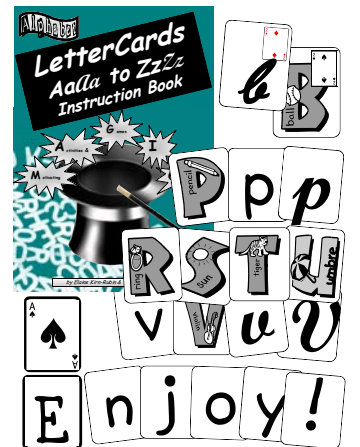
Alphabet LetterCards AaAa to ZzZz

Versions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 = 5 104-card packs + 24-page
Instruction Book ISBN 978-1-934637-19-7 \$18

Every pack of 104 *Alphabet LetterCards—Versions 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5—*contains four (4) styles of each of the twenty-six (26) letters of the English (roman) alphabetic writing system AaAa to ZzZz. In each set of four letters, there is a pair of one upper-case (capital) and one lower- case (small) *manuscript (block)* letter—and one upper-case and one lower-case *cursive (handwriting)* letter. Some versions include pictures illustrating words beginning with each letter. In others, two 52-card decks of standard playing cards—13 ranks of four suits—are incorporated into the corresponding *Alphabet LetterCards*.

Any (part of any) card pack is ideal for effective and efficient presentation and practice of alphabetic principles as well as for motivating, engaging, cooperative, and competitive classic card games.

L B I
K-8 A/C



Alphabet-Letter Bingo & Lotto Tear-Off Pad

English-Roman, 104-pages. ISBN 978-1-934637-20-3 \$12

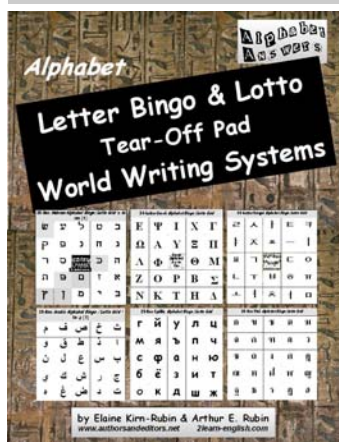
Whether played alone, in pairs, or in larger groups, games motivate! They provide a welcome change of pace from traditional lecture tedium, are multi-sensory, trigger cognitive effort, relieve the pressure of solitary study, and “lower the affective filter” to learning.

Alphabet-Letter Bingo/Lotto provides natural listening practice, pronunciation models, and practice in visual discrimination of printed symbols that stand for sounds—the four forms of the 26 letters of the English alphabet. This reusable/disposable pad contains fifteen (15) varieties of *Caller* or *Matching Cards* that indicate how to pronounce letter names vs. the sounds they produce. They are useable in flexible ways with (or without) 8 “Bingo Cards” for each of 15 kinds of variously leveled *Alphabet Bingo/Lotto Grids*.

L B I
K-8 A/C



L B I A
5-8 9-12 A/C C/U



Alphabet-Letter Bingo & Lotto Tear-Off Pad

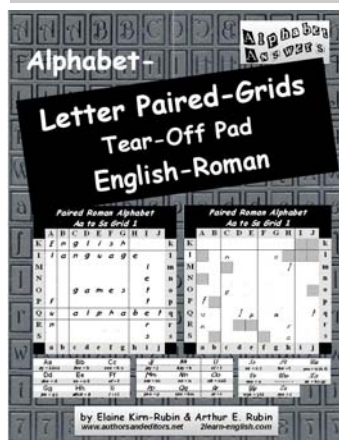
World Writing Systems. 58-pp. ISBN 978-1-934637-21-0 \$9

The *Bingo/Lotto* format fits many kinds of language-education content. It is particularly suited for *alphabetic writing systems*. Its game design can work well with almost *any* world-language abjad or alphabet, such as *Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Cyrillic, and Korean Hangul*.

For *each* of these, offers eight (8) different 25-box *Alphabet-Letter Bingo/Lotto Grids* to play on—with a reference list for the letter names and their sounds printed on the same page. There is a *Caller or Matching Card* for each of letters of all of the systems. The materials will help serve the needs of pre-literate learners of any of these languages as well as the curiosity of English speakers comparing other symbols with those in the Roman alphabet.

If you'd like a *larger* collection of this reusable/use-once pad of *Alphabet-Letter Bingo/Lotto* materials for one or more of the above-mentioned languages—such as leveled *Grids* of smaller sizes displaying cursive or other letter forms, Authors & Editors may be able to accommodate you. And you can make your own *Letter Bingo/Lotto* grids and cards—perhaps for phonetic or invented alphabets.

L B I
K-8 A/C



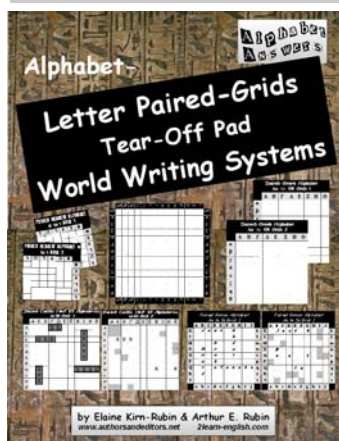
Alphabet-Letter Paired-Grids Tear-Off Pad, English-Roman, 56 pages.

ISBN 978-1-934637-22-7 \$9

The concept of “dyad grid activities” comes from the procedures of a strategic early 1900s pad-and-pencil (now commercial and/or online) guessing game called *Battleship*. To provide systematic *educationally beneficial* practice, in contrast, the borders of both columns and rows of *these Alphabet-Letter Paired Grids* are *lettered*, instead of numbered.

Depending on participants’ language-proficiency levels and goals—and the time available for play, they can choose *Grids* containing any number of square boxes, from 25 (5 columns by 5 rows) to 900 (30 x 30). For maximum practice, the paired pages display various letter forms—upper- and lower-case *manuscript* and/or *cursive*—from different parts of or the whole English alphabet. Like other creative *Alphabet-Letter* activity and game materials, these work because they inspire and motivate (cooperative and/or competitive) learning.

L B I A
5-8 9-12 A/C C/U



Alphabet-Letter Paired-Grids Tear-Off Pad, World Writing Systems, 100 pages.

ISBN 978-1-934637-23-4 \$12

Like the *Bingo/Lotto* format, the *Alphabet-Letter Paired-Grid “battleship”* concept fits many kinds of language-education content, especially *world alphabetic writing systems*. This pad contains pages for practice in *Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Cyrillic, and Korean Hangul letters*.

Alphabet-Letter Paired Grids motivate, provide a surprising (energizing) change of pace, encourage non-threatening social interaction, and are naturally “differentiated” or “tiered” (multi-level). They provide practice in not only language *content* but also both oral and written language *use*. And after learners have mastered *letter names*, the grids can be used for spelling and vocabulary practice—in any (familiar or new) language. Participants can even make grids of their own—in the same alphabet(s) and/or in the symbols of other useful writing systems.

