

THE ABC'S OF LEARNING TO SAY A, B, C, ETC.

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Learners of any language eventually need to be able to identify the names of the letters of the alphabet when spoken by others and also to be able to say them clearly themselves. Oral/Aural spelling may be required when referring to names, addresses, some acronyms and, in general, when clarifying ambiguities concerning the identification of a name or word.

Presentation of the names of the letters of the alphabet (hereafter referred to simply as "the alphabet") should occur relatively early in a beginners course and be repeated as necessary in subsequent courses. In addition, occasional practice spiralled throughout each course should be provided. The alphabet can be dealt with in

small or large doses depending on the time available. The old listen-and-repeat procedure is probably the most suitable presentation technique. The teacher (or native speaker recording) models the letters in sequential sets of 5 (ABCDE, FGHIJ, etc.) while they are pointed out in written form on the blackboard or wall chart.

A useful phonetic transcription of the alphabet is the one by Daniel Jones in *An English Pronouncing Dictionary* (as quoted by Lee, p. 118) or any good English-English dictionary.

This information is for teacher use, not student use, although of the two, students are more likely to come into contact with the dictionary entries. The students can be shown a simple guide to the pronunciation of some of the letters which are also words, as well as some simple pronunciation tips. In the chart below, the items in parentheses are not real words:

A	(e)F	Kay	Pea	U you
Bee	Gee!	(e) L	Q cue	V (ee)
C see/sea	H (A+ch)	(e)M	aRe	W double you
D (ee)	I	(e)N	(e)S	X (eks)
E	Jay	Oh!	Tea	why
				Z(ee)/Z(ed)

(NOTE: Jay and Kay are proper names)

After listening to the model and repeating each set, the students' choral practice can continue with the teacher's saying (or pointing to) a letter and the students' 1) saying it, 2) saying the next letter, 3) saying the previous letter or 4) saying all three. The teacher can also say the 1st. and 3rd. letters of a series of three and ask the students to supply the missing middle letter. This practice can and should become individual once a certain amount of confidence has been built up. The order within the sets can be reserved (bottom-up) for variety and, since A, I and E are particularly troublesome, the vowels can be practiced as a separate group for emphasis. Students can be asked to say the letters or the vowels (ACEGI, BCDFG). Eventually the prompts

can be supplied by a student, rather than the teacher.

The students' names are obviously the most useful source for practicing the alphabet. Students can be asked to spell their names while the teacher (or another student) writes them out on the blackboard. For a short while the teacher can try spelling out names of the students when calling the register instead of saying their names.

The teacher can also provide short letter-by-letter dictations (of proverbs or famous quotations, for example) or students can initiate their own. A useful source for spontaneous spelling practice is the material on the blackboard. The teacher can quickly review the alphabet with those words (related or random) which the teacher or students have already written on the blackboard. In addition, references to addresses, license plates, radio station identification codes and simple chemical formulas (NaCl , H_2O) can be incorporated into practice, as appropriate.

Students can be asked to devise a secret code to dictate (telephone) messages. A simple code is spelling words backwards (evol) or saying one

letter beyond (or previous to) the "real" intended letter (mpwf, knud).

Acronyms can also be used, but care must be taken to be sure that they are pronounced letter by letter and not as words. For example, UN or CIA are spelled out in English, whereas UNESCO is said as a word. Also, some acronyms/abbreviations are commonly found only in written form: RSVP (repondez, s'il vous plait), BYOB (Bring Your Own Bottle) or aka (also known as). Here is a list of acronyms which students might be curious about. (Note that variations in capitalization and punctuation are possible.)

IBM	International Business Machines
A.D.	Anno Domini (in the year of the Lord)
B.C.	Before Christ
a.m.	Ante Meridiem (before noon)
p.m.	post meridiem
C.O.D.	cash on delivery
DDT	dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane
M.D.	Medical Doctor
D.D.S.	Doctor of Dental Surgery
I.Q.	Intelligence Quotient
M.C.	Master of Ceremonies (emcee)

G.I.	Government Issue
V.I.P.	Very Important Person
I.O.U.	I owe you
BLT	Bacon, lettuce and tomato (sandwich)
AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
UFO	Unidentified flying object
TB	Tuberculosis
CD	Compact Disc
VCR	Videocassette recorder
LP	Long playing (record)
PC	Personal Computer

Another simple way of practicing the alphabet is to substitute "advanced" letters (the second half of the alphabet) for the traditional identification of exercise/test items (for example, questions m, n, o or items v, w, x).

Moving into the realm of games, the spelling game STOP (Lee, 1965, 137-138) is a less gruesome version of the traditional "Hangman". The currently popular (in the United States) Wheel of Fortune game is a variation of the same game which can also be adapted for classroom use. Of course, one should not forget the traditional Spelling Bee.

which should progress from familiar words to more challenging recently-encountered words. Different BINGO cards can also be made using letters instead of numbers. A quasi-eye chart can also be prepared to practice the alphabet.

Through the use of some of these techniques, learners will get continual practice and reinforcement of the names of the letters of the alphabet, both aurally and orally until, hopefully, they become "second nature". In the next issue of the NEWSLETTER details on how to set up a simple "Concentration" memory game using the alphabet will be provided. To close, here is a bilingual joke involving the alphabet:

"A Latin American who spoke no English went into a Men's Clothing store in the United States to buy some socks. Since the salesman didn't speak any Spanish, the customer simply pointed to his feet. The salesman took the man to the Shoe Department and showed him some pairs of shoes. The customer indicated that he wasn't interested in shoes and again pointed down to his feet. The salesman then showed him a pair of socks. The pleased customer

can be spelled . . .

exclaimed "Eso si que es!". The surprised salesman said "Well, if you knew how to spell it, why didn't you say so before?".

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

Lee, W.R. 1965. Language Teaching Games and Contests. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

The English Teaching Forum presents... "The ABCs of Travel" Vo. 26, No. 1 (January, 1988), p. 23 and accompanying recording.

"The Lighter Side" feature of the following English teaching Forums: Vol. 22, No. 1 (January, 1984) and Vol. 26, No. 1 (January, 1988) as well as occasional jokes and anecdotes in other issues.