

The ABCs of Braille: Basics for Beginners

Wednesday, January 11, 2023



Before we start...

As with all online conferences, please follow good etiquette by:

- Keeping yourself on mute when you're not speaking
 - Bottom left corner of your iPhone screen
 - ALT+A on a PC
 - Option+A on a Mac
- Using the raise hand option when you have a question
 - Double tap on your name in the participants list on an iPhone or go into the "more" tab and find raise hand there
 - ALT+Y on a PC
 - Option+Y on a Mac
- Saving the use of the chat feature for urgent questions/comments.
- The information part of this session will be recorded and later posted on the Braille Literacy Canada YouTube Channel. We will stop the recording prior the to question and answer portion.

The World Braille Day planning organizations acknowledge the historical oppression of land, cultures, and original Peoples in what we now know as Canada. We respect and affirm the inherent and Treaty Rights of all Indigenous Peoples across this land and will continue to honour the commitments to self-determination and sovereignty we have made to Indigenous Nations and Peoples. Please take a moment to acknowledge the lands on which you live, work, and play.



Braille Literacy Canada, the Canadian Council of the Blind, CNIB, the National Network for Equitable Library Service, Alternate Education Resources Ontario, the Centre for Equitable Library Access, and the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired had a lot of fun working together and are pleased to deliver this series of events during the month of January in celebration of World Braille Day.

“Access to communication in the widest sense is access to knowledge... We must be treated as equals, and communication is the way we can bring this about. Braille is knowledge and knowledge is power” – Louis Braille



Our presenters today:

Kim Kilpatrick, CCB
Daphne Hitchcock, BLC
Natalie Martiniello, BLC
Ioana Gandrabur, CELA
Shelley Ann Morris, CCB

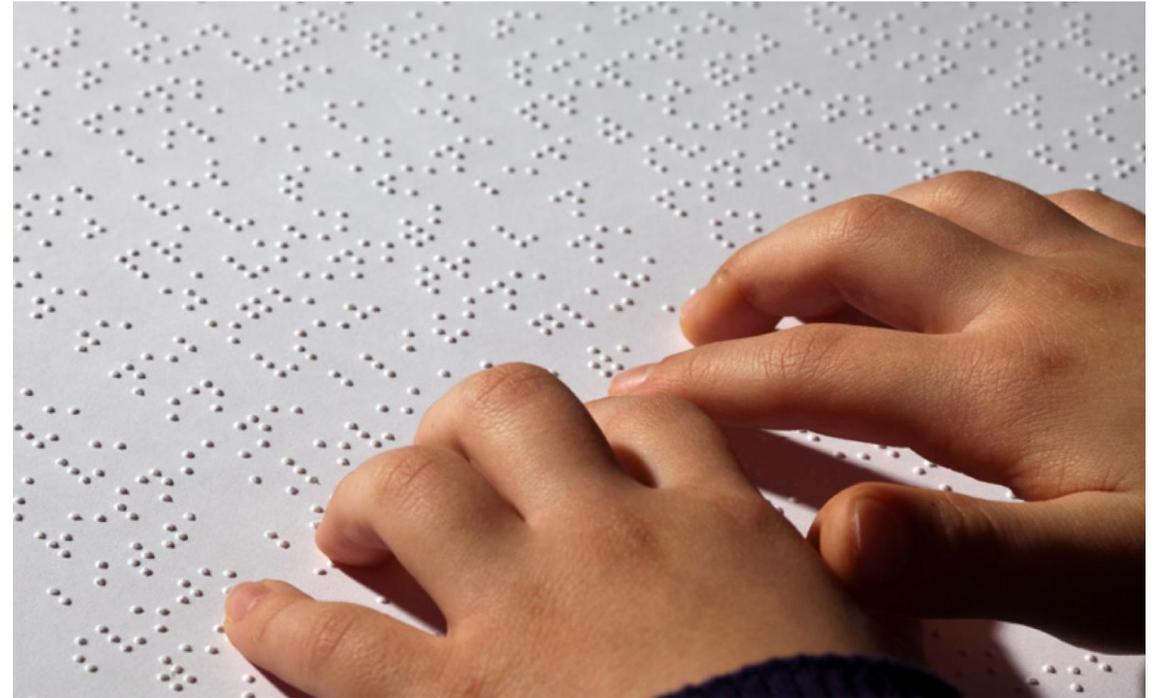


What is braille?

Braille is a tactile code that allows people with limited or no vision to read by touch.

The design of the braille cell is such that it fits perfectly under a fingertip.

Typically, the reader uses both hands for reading, with the index fingers used for braille character discrimination and the other fingers as line and page guides.



What is a braille cell?

The braille cell is unit of 6 dots, and each letter or character in the braille code is based on a combination or arrangement of those dots.

The raised dot array is set in two parallel columns, with each column having 3 dots.

For ease of explanation, the dots have a numbered position in the braille cell.

The photo shows a 6 cup muffin tin with 6 numbered tennis balls. The muffin tin is positioned in a portrait mode, with the long edge on the sides. It represents a braille cell.



These are mighty dots, they are dynamic and do double duty.

When all 6 dots are raised, we call this a full cell or braille cell. Using a combination of these 6 dots we can create a character that represents a letter, a number, punctuation or even a whole word. All the conventions of print can be represented with the dot matrix.

Something to note: Braille is not a language, but a code. Although we are discussing English braille, these same 6 dots are used when representing other languages such as French, Spanish or Japanese. Or when writing computer code and music.

The first 10 letters of the alphabet: letters a–j

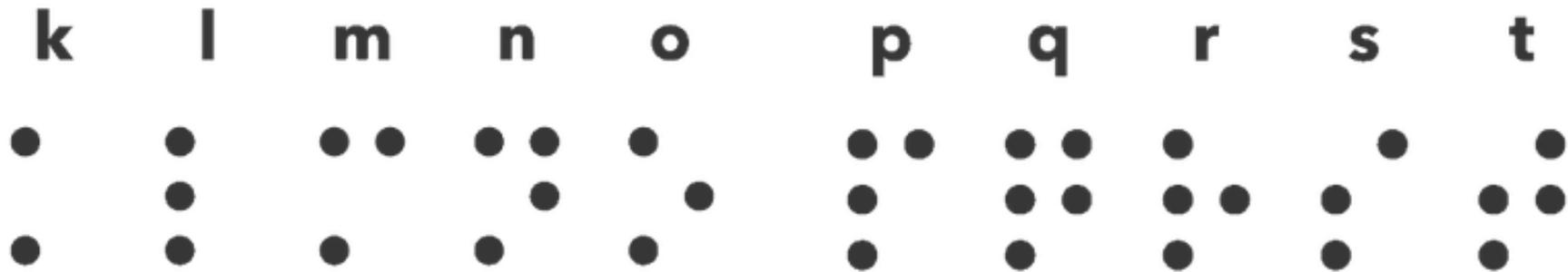
The first 10 letters use the top half of the braille cell.

The four dots on the top part of the cell are dots 1 – 2 on the left and dots 4 – 5 on the right.



letters k-t

The next 10 letters of the alphabet; letters k – t use the top half of the braille cell and additionally dot 3.



letters u-z

Then letters u through z add into the matrix dot 6

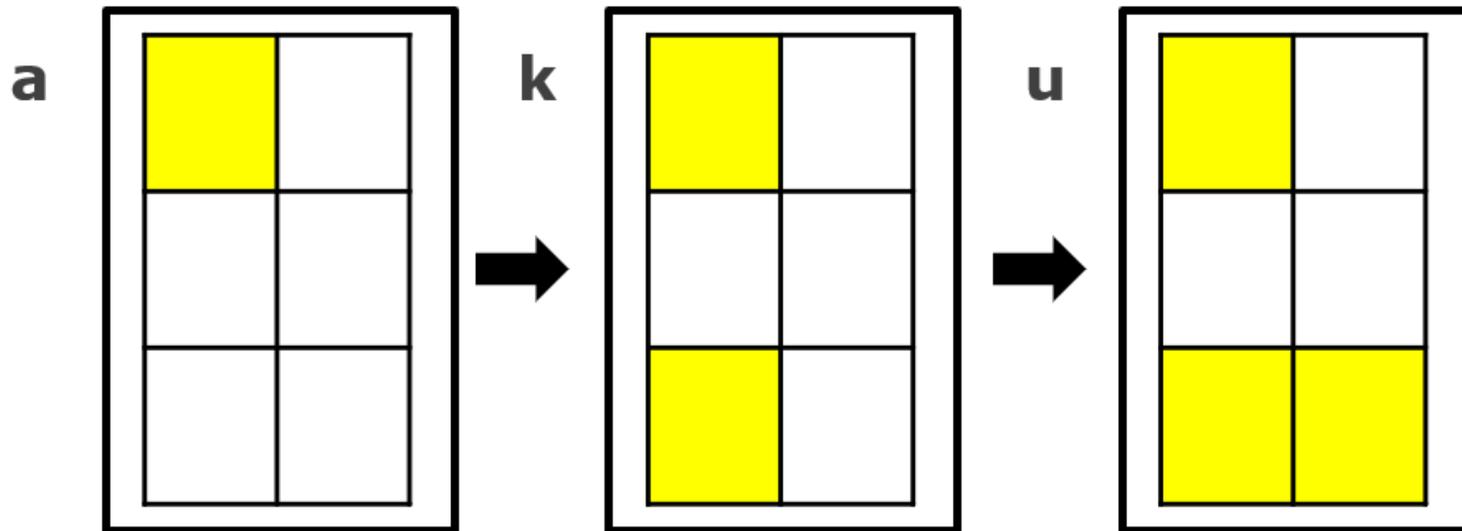
u	v	x	y	z
•	•	••	••	•
	•		•	•
••	••	••	••	••

w

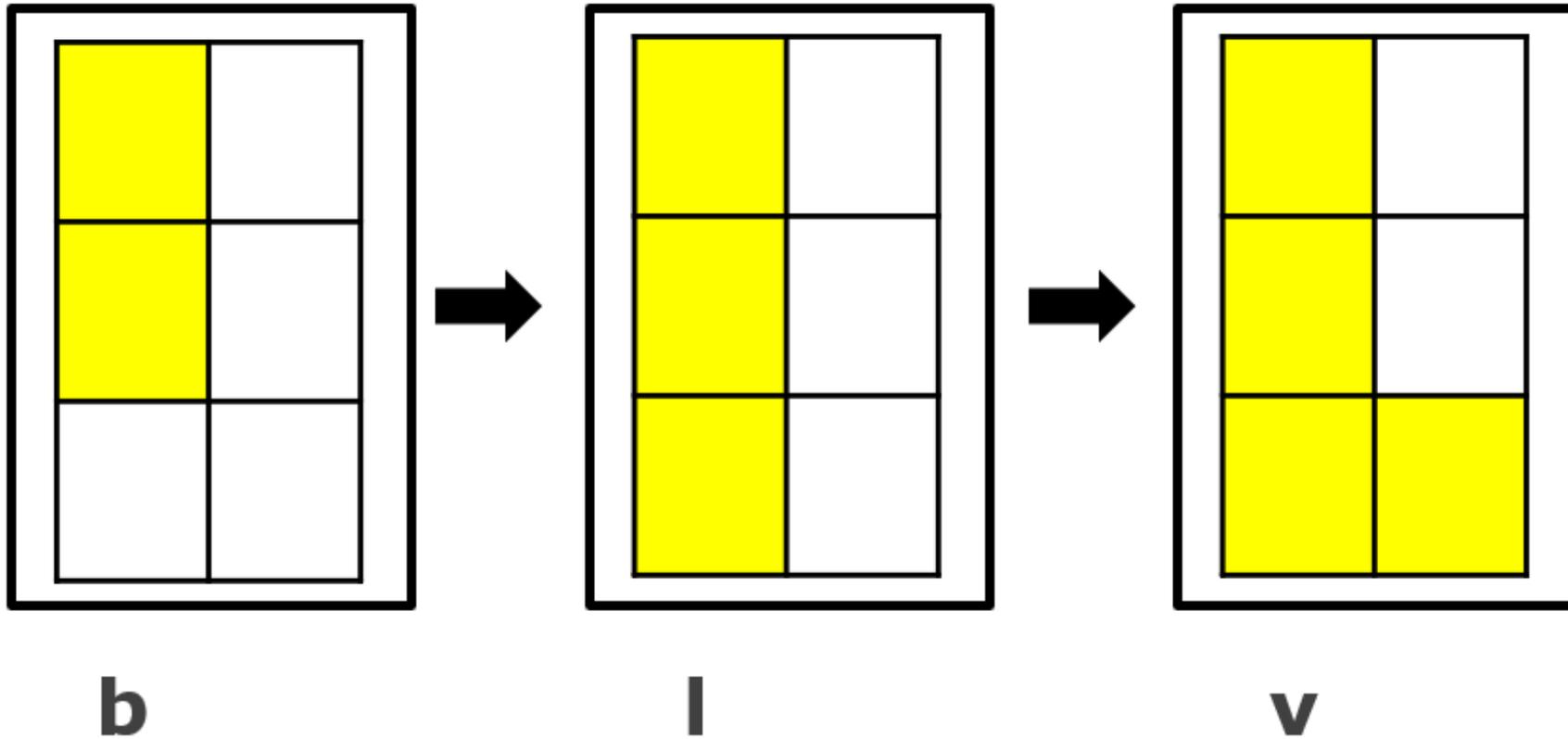
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Braille is logical and follows a pattern

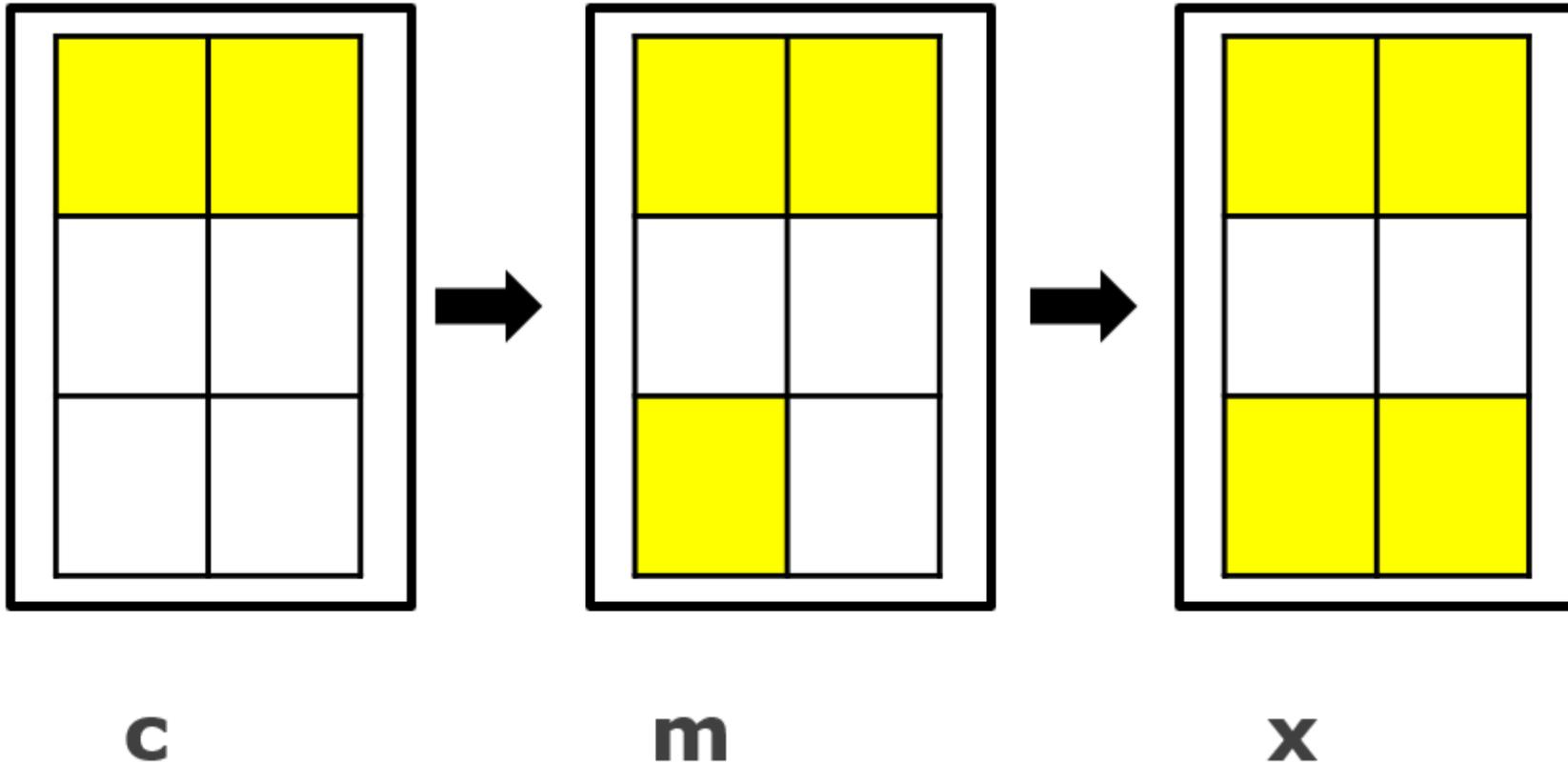
For instance, we can start by making the letter a, popping a tennis ball into the upper left top position of the muffin tin, and then we can add another ball into the bottom left position or dot 3 and make letter k, add dot 6 and make letter u.



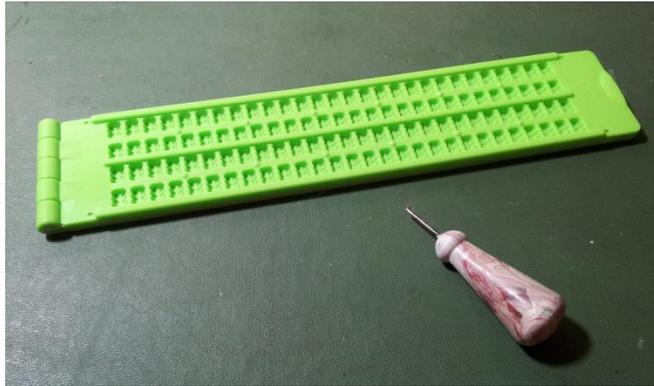
Following the pattern (b, l, v)



Following the pattern (c, m, x)



Tools used to write braille



Slate and Stylus



Dymo Braille Labeler



Perkins Brailler

Getting started with braille

Braille Literacy Canada recognizes that learning braille as an adult or older adult can be a challenge. They have created an amazing free program called Braille Zoomers, a monthly virtual peer-support get-together for adult and older adult braille learners.

New Braille Zoomers can even apply for a starter kit of really cool things to get started on their braille journeys. Some of these items would be great to have in libraries too:

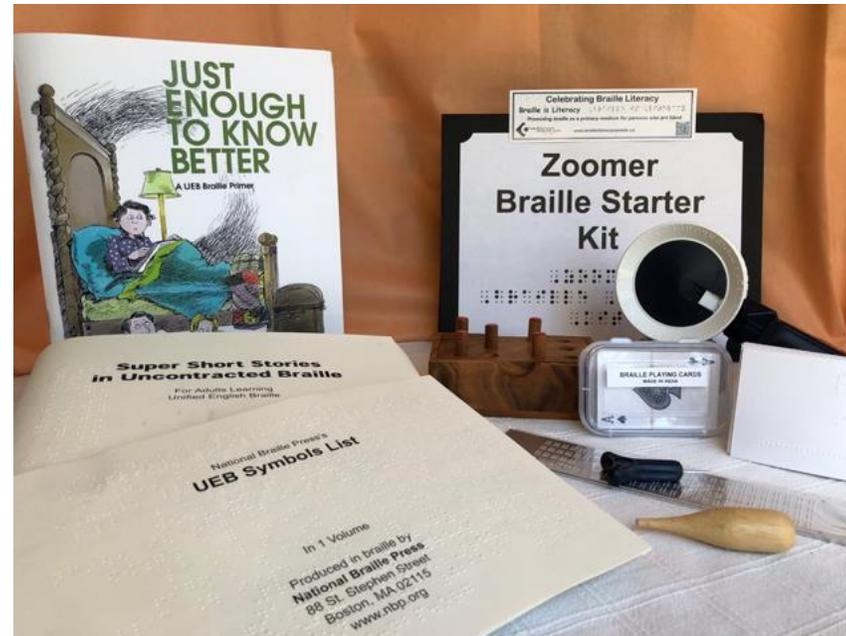
- Just Enough to Know Better (National Braille Press)
- Slate and Stylus
- Dymo Braille Labeller
- Braille Playing Cards

For more information, email info@blc-lbc.ca

Braille Zoomers Starter Kits

Kit includes:

- Dymo braille labeller
- Braille playing cards
- Braille flashcards
- Slate and stylus
- Braille eraser
- Braille paper
- UEB symbols booklet
- Just Enough to Know Better (book)
- BLC Bookmark and Information on Braille Literacy Canada



Why Learn Braille?

“Why learn/use print”?

Sight loss: What are you no longer able to do or want to do?

1. Identifying household items that feel the same or require labels (ex. appliances, cans of soup)
2. Take notes: phone numbers, messages, route instructions
3. Play games with sighted and/or blind friends (cards, board games)
4. Read books with children and/or grandchildren (print-braille books)

Why Learn Braille? (more)

5. Read and “disconnect”! (magazines, novels, etc.)
6. Edit texts for school and/or work
7. Access information difficult to grasp through audio (languages, math, music, images)
8. Access notes during meetings and presentations
9. Fill your toolbox! “If you don’t know it, you can’t choose it”.

Dot 1: Let the light in

Braille = symbol of empowerment/independence

Be aware of possible “bumps” and roadblocks:

- 1. Intimidation: learn what braille is and how it works
 - Think about other new skills you’ve learned
- 2. Become aware of misconceptions:

“braille is only for those who are totally blind”: UNTRUE!

“I don’t read novels. Braille isn’t for me”: UNTRUE!

“I’m too old to learn braille”: UNTRUE!

“With technology, there is no need for braille”: UNTRUE!

Replace the word “braille” with “print”

Where to learn braille?

Vision Loss Rehab Canada: www.visionlossrehab.ca

Pacific Training Centre for the Blind: www.pacifictrainingcentre.ca

Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay (QC): www.llmrc.ca

INLB (French, QC): www.inlb.qc.ca

Hadley: www.hadley.edu

Dot 2: Harness the power of technology!

Braille displays connect to computers and smartphones to provide instant access to braille

You can select uncontracted or contracted braille

Firmer bumps are helpful for older learners

Some braille devices also have typing keys

Braille displays are available in different sizes

You can also type braille directly onto your smartphone!

Dot 3: Get to know others

Lifelong braille users: what role braille can play, helpful tips

Fellow learners: to share resources, strategies and to know you're part of a community!

- Braille Zoomers
- BLC virtual workshops
- CCB "Getting Together With Technology": www.ccbnational.net
- Social media groups (Embracing Braille)
- Podcasts: Braillists Foundation

Dot 4: Create a tactile and braille rich environment

Brush up those tactile skills with tactile markers!

Place braille labels all around you!

Practice your braille: recognizing the shapes of different words

- Example: A and B can be great labels!

Dot 5: Find meaningful opportunities that make sense to you

Braille is not a language, but you should practice it daily

Not just a tool for the future, but a great tool for today!

- Find 10 minutes a day for practice
- Read labels in the home
- Play bingo, board games and cards with friends
- Keep a braille journal
- Read familiar stories and quotes

Dot 6: Have fun!

Remember literacy = enjoyment!

Make braille work for you:

Uncontracted or contracted braille?

For “spot reading” or something else?

Recognize your goals may change as you learn more

From elevator buttons to braille bingo... to?!

Family members

Consider learning some braille too!

- Hadley: www.hadley.edu
- National Braille Press “Just Enough to Know Better” book
- BLC workshops for families and friends
- Help to create labels using a Dymo labeller
- Keep braille in the same place, not under other items
- Create braille greeting cards and tags for a personal touch
- Ask for braille in the community

Ordering Braille Books and Resources

For Purchasing books:

- [American Printing House for the Blind](#)
- [National Braille Press](#)
- [Seedlings Braille Books for Children](#)
- [Braille Book Store](#) (note, for personal/home use only)

Additional websites for resources can be found on the [Braille Literacy Canada website](#)

Already in Libraries/Available for Borrowing free of charge:

- [Centre for Equitable Library Access](#)
- [National Network for Equitable Library Service](#)

About CELA

CELA is a non-profit organization offering more than 1 million accessible titles in a variety of formats including braille.

CELA's collection also includes magazines and newspapers, as well as access to Bookshare.

Bookshare is a large accessible format collection from the US providing thousands of book titles which can be accessed through CELA's catalogue for CELA patrons.

CELA's Braille Offerings

CELA offers a collection of over 11,000 braille titles (books and magazines) for all ages and reading interests

- produced in UEB and includes both contracted and uncontracted braille titles
- mostly human-transcribed
- In addition, Bookshare provides automatically transcribed braille for all epub and etext files (850,000+ titles).

To access them through CELA, you need Proof of disability.

Physical braille: embossed and mailed in boxes to your home (no need to return)

E-braille: download file or use Direct to Player and then read with a braille display

CELA's braille and other formats

Print-braille

- 1,400 picture books for children; all in uncontracted braille.
- Print-braille books sent in the mail and need to be returned

Other Formats

Accessing braille material in parallel with other formats can be useful for supporting learning needs.

- Other than Braille, the main formats we offer are audio, and accessible e-text. But we can deliver books in these formats in a few different ways.
- ZIP and Direct to Player.

CELA's braille comes from various sources : CNIB Beyond Print braille production, files exchanged through the Marrakesh Treaty between international partners

(we're excited this now includes titles from NLS!) and French braille titles through exchange with BANQ in Québec.

For those in Québec, French braille can be accessed directly from BANQ.

Accessing Braille from NNELS

Braille can be accessed from NNELS:

- Physically through any public library through interlibrary loan
- Digitally through <https://www.nnels.ca>

All of NNELS' braille titles are human-transcribed and are in either contracted or uncontracted braille and in French or English.

Most of NNELS' braille titles come from working with publishers to produce new titles at the same time as print publication.

- We have poetry, plot-your-own-stories, young adult, adult, fiction, non-fiction, recipes, print-braille, tactile graphics, and more!

All NNELS epub titles can be read on a braille display. Users can request titles for production.

Recommendations for braille display purchases for libraries, or information for readers can be found at: <https://nnels.ca/library#Technology>

For more information about NNELS' braille and tactile projects, visit <https://nnels.ca/braille>.

Public Libraries and Braille

Advocacy - Public Libraries and Braille

Public libraries can support their patrons

- Libraries may borrow braille titles or download e-braille
- Highlight they have access to a braille collection to their community
- Encourage that all staff be made aware of the availability of braille content at their library
- Create braille signage in the library
- Include braille labels on audiobooks and movies (especially those movies with audio description)
- Promote access to braille to schools
- Include braille activities in programming (Storytime, STEAM etc.)
- Run inclusive books clubs
- Support adult braille learners
- Hire and consult people with lived experience of a disability
- Visit accessiblelibraries.ca for learning opportunities

On behalf of Braille Literacy Canada, the Canadian Council of the Blind, CNIB Beyond Print, the National Network for Equitable Library Service, Alternate Education Resources Ontario, the Centre for Equitable Library Access, and the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired, Thank you for celebrating World Braille Day with us!

We will now stop the recording and allow for a short question and answer period.



Upcoming World Braille Day Events:

Living with braille : Le braille au quotidien*

Wednesday, January 18, 2023

10 Pacific / 11 Mountain / 12 Central / 1 Eastern / 2 Atlantic / 2:30 NST

*Please note that this session will be delivered in French only.

Celebrailliation Time!

Saturday, January 21, 2023

10 Pacific / 11 Mountain / 12 Central / 1 Eastern / 2 Atlantic / 2:30 NST

Let's Keep in Touch: Productive Allyship for Braille in Post-Secondary

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

10 Pacific / 11 Mountain / 12 Central / 1 Eastern / 2 Atlantic / 2:30 NST

Thank you!

"The invention of braille must be compared to the invention of the printing press – its birth was nothing short of a revolution." – Helen Keller

