The modern English alphabet is a Latin alphabet consisting of 26 letters, each having an uppercase and a lowercase form, and the same letters constitute the ISO basic Latin alphabet. The exact shape of printed letters varies depending on the typeface (and font), and the shape of handwritten letters can differ significantly from the standard printed form (and between individuals), especially when written in cursive style. English is the only major modern European language requiring no diacritics for native words (although adiaeresis is used by some publishers in words such as "coöperation" or "naïve").[1][2] Written English does, however, have a number of digraphs.

The alphabet was derived from an original series of sixteen characters, that emerged as a way to record spoken words.[3] The English language itself was first written in the Anglo-Saxon futhorc runic alphabet, in use from the 5th century. This alphabet was brought to what is now England, along with the proto-form of the language itself, by Anglo-Saxon settlers. Very few examples of this form of written Old English have survived, mostly as short inscriptions or fragments.

The Latin script, introduced by Christian missionaries, began to replace the Anglo-Saxon futhorc from about the 7th century, although the two continued in parallel for some time. As such, the Old English alphabet began to employ parts of the Roman

### History

#### Old English

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alphabet in its construction. Futhork influenced the emerging English alphabet by providing it with the letters thorn (ƿ) and wynn (ƿ). The letter eth (ð) was later devised as a modification of dee (d), and finally yogh (ȝ) was created by Norman scribes from the insular g in Old English and Irish, and used alongside their Carolingian g.

The a-e ligature ash (Æ æ) was adopted as a letter in its own right, named after a futhork rune æsc. In very early Old English the o-e ligature ethel (Œ ø) also appeared as a distinct letter, likewise named after a rune, æðel. Additionally, the v-v or u-u ligature double-u (W w) was in use.

In the year 1011, a monk named Byrhtferð recorded the traditional order of the Old English alphabet. He listed the 24 letters of the Latin alphabet first (including ampersand), then 5 additional English letters, starting with the Tironian note ond (7), an insular symbol for and:

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z & þ ð Æ

Modern English

In the orthography of Modern English thorn (ƿ), eth (ð), wynn (ƿ), yogh (ȝ), ash (æ), and ethel (œ) are obsolete. Latin borrowings reintroduced homographs of ash and ethel into Middle English and Early Modern English, though they are largely obsolete (see "Ligatures in recent usage" below), where they are used they are not considered separate letters (e.g. for collation purposes but rather ligatures). Thorn and eth were both replaced by th, though thorn continued in existence for some time, its lowercase form gradually becoming graphically indistinguishable from the minuscule y in most handwriting. Y for th can still be seen in pseudo-archaisms such as "Ye Olde Booke Shoppe". The letters þ and ð are still used in present-day Icelandic, while ð is still used in present-day Faroese. Wynn disappeared from English around the 14th century when it was supplanted by uu, which ultimately developed into the modern w. Yogh disappeared around the 15th century and was typically replaced by bygh.

The letters u and j, as distinct from y and i, were introduced in the 16th century, and w assumed the status of an independent letter. The variant lowercase form long s (ſ) lasted into early modern English, and was used in non-final position up to the early 19th century. Today, the English alphabet is now considered to consist of the following 26 letters:

A a · B b · C c · D d · E e · F f · G g · H h · I i · J j · K k · L l · M m · N n · O o · P p · Q q · R r · S s · T t · U u · V v · W w · X x · Y y · Z z

Written English has a number of digraphs, but they are not considered separate letters of the alphabet:

ch · ci · ck · gh · ng · ph · qu · rh · sc · sh · th · ti · wh · wr · zh

Ligatures in recent usage

Outside of professional papers on specific subjects that traditionally use ligatures in loanwords, ligatures are seldom used in modern English. The ligatures ā and ē were until the 19th century (slightly later in American English) used in formal writing for certain words of Greek or Latin origin, such as encyclopædia and cælum, although such ligatures were not used in either classical Latin or ancient Greek. These are now usually rendered as "ae" and "oe" in all types of writing, although in American English, a lone e has mostly supplanted both (for example, encyclopedia for encyclopædia, and manoeuvre for manoeuvre).

Some fonts for typesetting English contain commonly used ligatures, such as for (tt), (fi), (fl), (fli), and (ffl). These are not independent letters, but rather allographs.

Diacritics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Left-to-right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISO 15924</td>
<td>Latin, 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unicode alias</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unicode range</td>
<td>U+0000 to U+007E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Latin and punctuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diacritic marks mainly appear in loanwords such as naïve and façade. As such words become naturalised in English, there is a tendency to drop the diacritics, as has happened with old borrowings such as hôtel, from French. Informal English writing tends to omit diacritics because of their absence from the keyboard, while professional copywriters and typesetters tend to include them.[7] Words that are still perceived as foreign tend to retain them; for example, the only spelling of souçon found in English dictionaries (the OED and others) uses the diacritic. Diacritics are also more likely to be retained where there would otherwise be confusion with another word (for example, résumé (or resume) rather than resume), and, rarely, even added (as in maté, from Spanish yerba mate, but following the pattern of café, from French).

Occasionally, especially in older writing, diacritics are used to indicate the syllables of a word: cursed (verb) is pronounced with one syllable, while cursed (adjective) is pronounced with two. È is used widely in poetry, e.g. in Shakespeare's sonnets. J.R.R. Tolkien uses é, as in O wingéd crown. Similarly, while in chicken coop the letters -oo- represent a single vowel sound (a digraph), in obsolete spellings such as zoölogist and coöperation, they represent two. This use of the diaeresis is rarely seen, but persists into the 2000s in some publications, such as MIT Technology Review and The New Yorker.

An acute, grave, or diaeresis may also be placed over an "e" at the end of a word to indicate that it is not silent, as in saké. In general, these devices are often not used even where they would serve to alleviate some degree of confusion.

Letters

The names of the letters are rarely spelled out, except when used in derivations or compound words (for example tee-shirt, deejay, emcee, okay, aitchless, etc.), derived forms (for example exed out, effing, to eff and blind, etc.), and in the names of objects named after letters (for example em (space) in printing and wye (junction) in railroading). The forms listed below are from the Oxford English Dictionary. Vowels stand for themselves, and consonants usually have the form consonant + ee or e + consonant (e.g. bee and ef). The exceptions are the letters aitch, jay, kay, cue, ar, ess (but es- in compounds), double u, wye, and zed. Plurals of consonants end in -s (bees, efs, ems) or, in the cases of aitch, ess, and ex, in -es (aitches, esses, exes). Plurals of vowels end in -es (aes, ees, ies, oes, ues); these are rare. All letters may stand for themselves, generally in capitalized form (okay or OK, emcee or MC), and plurals may be based on these (aes or As, cees or Cs, etc.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Name pronunciation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Old French</th>
<th>Middle English</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ā</td>
<td>'æ/t, 'æ[nb 1]</td>
<td>/a:/</td>
<td>/a:/</td>
<td>/a:/</td>
<td>8.17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>bee</td>
<td>bē</td>
<td>'b̥i:/</td>
<td>/be:/</td>
<td>/be:/</td>
<td>/be:/</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>cee</td>
<td>cē</td>
<td>'s̥i:/</td>
<td>/ke:/</td>
<td>/fe:/ / te:/ /se:/</td>
<td>/se:/</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>dee</td>
<td>dē</td>
<td>'d̥i:/</td>
<td>/de:/</td>
<td>/de:/</td>
<td>/de:/</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ē</td>
<td>'i:/</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>ef (eff as a verb)</td>
<td>ef</td>
<td>'ɛf/</td>
<td>/ɛf/</td>
<td>/ɛf/</td>
<td>/ɛf/</td>
<td>2.23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>gee</td>
<td>gē</td>
<td>'/dʒːi:/</td>
<td>/ge:/</td>
<td>/dʒe:/</td>
<td>/dʒe:/</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>aitch</td>
<td>hā</td>
<td>'/ɛtʃ/</td>
<td>/'a:k/a/</td>
<td>/'aːtʃ/</td>
<td>/'aːtʃ/</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>ī</td>
<td>'/aɪ/</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>6.97%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>jay</td>
<td>jy</td>
<td>'/dʒɛt/</td>
<td>/'dʒæt/</td>
<td>/'dʒæt/</td>
<td>/'dʒæt/</td>
<td>[nb 3] 0.15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>kay</td>
<td>kā</td>
<td>'/keɪ/</td>
<td>/'ka:/</td>
<td>/ka:/</td>
<td>/ka:/</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>el or ell</td>
<td>el</td>
<td>'/ɛl/</td>
<td>/ɛl/</td>
<td>/ɛl/</td>
<td>/ɛl/</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>em</td>
<td>em</td>
<td>'/ɛm/</td>
<td>/ɛm/</td>
<td>/ɛm/</td>
<td>/ɛm/</td>
<td>2.41%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>'/ɛn/</td>
<td>/ɛn/</td>
<td>/ɛn/</td>
<td>/ɛn/</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>ō</td>
<td>'/oʊ/</td>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td>7.51%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>pee</td>
<td>pē</td>
<td>'/piː/</td>
<td>/pe:/</td>
<td>/pe:/</td>
<td>/pe:/</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>cue[nb 5]</td>
<td>qū</td>
<td>'/kjuː/</td>
<td>/kuː/</td>
<td>/kyː/</td>
<td>/kiw/</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>ar</td>
<td>er</td>
<td>'/ɑːɾ/</td>
<td>/ɛɾ/</td>
<td>/ɛɾ/</td>
<td>/ɛɾ/</td>
<td>5.99%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>ess (es-)[nb 7]</td>
<td>es</td>
<td>'/ɛs/</td>
<td>/ɛs/</td>
<td>/ɛs/</td>
<td>/ɛs/</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>tee</td>
<td>tē</td>
<td>'/tiː/</td>
<td>/te:/</td>
<td>/te:/</td>
<td>/te:/</td>
<td>9.06%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>'/juː/</td>
<td>/uː/</td>
<td>/yː/</td>
<td>/iːw/</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>vee</td>
<td>vi</td>
<td>'/viː/</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>double-u</td>
<td>d'ʌbəl juː[nb 8]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>ex</td>
<td>ek스</td>
<td>'/ɛks/</td>
<td>/ɛks/</td>
<td>/ɪks/</td>
<td>/ɛks/</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>wy</td>
<td>hű́</td>
<td>'/w̥ai/</td>
<td>/ui, gui?</td>
<td>/wiː/</td>
<td>/wiː/</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>zed[nb 9]</td>
<td>zētə</td>
<td>'/zɛd/</td>
<td>/zɛd/</td>
<td>/zɛd/</td>
<td>/zɛːd/</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Etymology**
The names of the letters are for the most part direct descendants, via French, of the Latin (and Etruscan) names. (See Latin alphabet: Origins.)

The regular phonological developments (in rough chronological order) are:

- palatalization before front vowels of Latin /k/ successively to /tʃ/, /ts/, and finally to Middle French /s/. Affects C.
- palatalization before front vowels of Latin /ɡ/ to Proto-Romance and Middle French /ʒ/. Affects G.
- fronting of Latin /u:/ to Middle French /y:/, becoming Middle English /iw/ and then Modern English /ju:/, to avoid confusion with established gee (the other name, /j/, was taken from French); vee, a new letter named by analogy with the majority; double-ˌu, a new letter, self-explanatory (the name of Latin V was ʊ); wye, of obscure origin but with an antecedent in Old French wi; zee, an American leveling of zed by analogy with the majority; and izzard, from the Romance phrase i zed or i zeto "and Z" said when reciting the alphabet.

The novel forms are aitch, a regular development of Medieval Latin acca; jay, a new letter presumably vocalized like neighboring kay to avoid confusion with established gee (the other name, /j/, was taken from French); vee, a new letter named by analogy with the majority; double-ˌu, a new letter, self-explanatory (the name of Latin V was ʊ); wye, of obscure origin but with an antecedent in Old French wi; zee, an American leveling of zed by analogy with the majority; and izzard, from the Romance phrase i zed or i zeto "and Z" said when reciting the alphabet.

Some groups of letters, such as seepee and bee, or em and en, are easily confused in speech, especially when heard over the telephone or a radio communications link. Spelling alphabets such as the ICAO spelling alphabet, used by aircraft pilots, police and others, are designed to eliminate this potential confusion by giving each letter a name that sounds quite different from any other.

**Frequencies**

The letter most commonly used in English is E. The least used letter is Z. The frequencies shown in the table may differ in practice according to the type of text.[8]

**Ampersand**

The & has sometimes appeared at the end of the English alphabet, as in Byrhtferð’s list of letters in 1011.[5] Historically, the figure is a ligature for the letters Et. In English and many other languages it is used to represent the word and and occasionally the Latin word et, as in the abbreviation &c (et cetera).

**Apostrophe**

The apostrophe, while not considered part of the English alphabet, is used to contract English words. A few pairs of words, such as its (belonging to it) and it's (it is or it has), were (form of 'to be') and we're (we are), and shed (to get rid of) and she'd (she would or she had) are distinguished in writing only by the presence or absence of an apostrophe. The apostrophe also distinguishes the possessive endings -'s and -s' from the common plural ending -s, a practice introduced in the 18th century; before, all three endings were written -s, which could lead to confusion (as in the Apostles words).[9]

**Phonology**

The letters A, E, I, O, and U are considered vowel letters, since (except when silent) they represent vowels; the remaining letters are considered consonant letters, since when not silent they generally represent consonants. However, Y commonly represents vowels as well as a consonant (e.g., "myth"), as very rarely does W (e.g., "cwm"). Conversely, U and I sometimes represent a consonant (e.g., "quiz" and "onion" respectively).

W and Y are sometimes referred asemivowels by linguists.

**Proposed reforms**
Alternative scripts have been proposed for written English – mostly extending or replacing the basic English alphabet – such as the Deseret alphabet, the Shavian alphabet, Gregg shorthand, etc.

See also

- Alphabet song
- NATO phonetic alphabet
- English orthography
- English-language spelling reform
- American manual alphabet
- Two-handed manual alphabets
- English Braille
- American Braille
- New York Point

Notes

1. often in Hiberno-English due to the letter's pronunciation in the Irish language
2. mostly in Hiberno-English, sometimes in Australian English, usually in Indian English (although often considered incorrect), and also used in Malaysian English
3. The letter J did not occur in Old French or Middle English. The Modern French name ji/ʒi/, corresponding to Modern English jy (rhyming with i), which in most areas was later replaced with jay (rhyming with kay).
4. in Scottish English
5. One of the few letter names not spelled with the letter in question. The spelling qu ~ que is obsolete, being attested from the 16th century
6. in Hiberno-English
7. in compounds such as ases-hook
8. Especially in American English, the fl is often not pronounced in informal speech (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed). Common colloquial pronunciations are /dəˈbəjə/, /dəˈbəja/, and /dəˈbaʃə/ (as in the nickname "Dubya"), especially in terms like www.
9. in British English, Hiberno-English, and Commonwealth English
10. in American English

References

1. As an example, an article containing a diaeresis in "coöperate" and an cedilla in "façades" as well as a circumflex in the word "crêpe" (Grafton, Anthony (2006-10-23). "Books: The Nutty Professors, The history of academic charisma" (http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/23/061023crbo_books?currentPage=all)The New Yorker.)


Further reading


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