First Steps in Braille — Lesson 1: The Braille Cell and the Letters A to J

Ngang Memorial Higher Online School

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Our guiding principle: we guide each learner on the things they CAN do, so they become better in that domain.

Welcome

Welcome to your first Braille lesson. In this lesson you will learn what Braille is, how the Braille cell works, and the letters A to J. Work slowly, with your fingers. Braille is learned by touch, so your fingers are your main tool in this lesson.

What Braille is

Braille is a system of reading and writing by touch. Instead of printed letters that you see, Braille uses small raised dots that you feel with your fingertips. Groups of raised dots stand for letters, numbers, and other symbols. By moving your fingers across the dots, in order, you read words and sentences.

The Braille cell

Every Braille letter fits inside one small rectangle called a cell. A cell has six dot positions: two columns and three rows.

The dots are numbered like this:

●1 ●4
●2 ●5
●3 ●6

- Dot 1 is top left. Dot 4 is top right.

- Dot 2 is middle left. Dot 5 is middle right.

- Dot 3 is bottom left. Dot 6 is bottom right.

In the diagrams in this lesson, ● means the dot is raised (you can feel it), and ■ means the dot is flat (no raised dot in that place).

The empty cell looks like this:

○ ○
○ ○
○ ○

A tactile-first method — learn by touch first

Do these steps before you study the letter diagrams:

Step 1. Make a practice cell. Use an egg carton cut to six cups (two across, three down), or a muffin tin with six cups. Each cup is one dot position.

Step 2. Use small balls, large beads, coins, or bottle caps as “dots.” Place one in a cup when that dot is raised; leave the cup empty when it is flat.

Step 3. Close your eyes or look away. Run the fingertips of your reading hand gently across the cups, left to right, top to bottom. Say the dot numbers out loud as you touch each position: “one, two, three, four, five, six.”

Step 4. Practice finding one position at a time. Ask a partner, or set it up yourself, then find: dot 1 only; dot 2 only; dot 3 only; then dots 1 and 2 together.

Step 5. Use a light touch. Pressing hard makes dots harder to tell apart. Move slowly. Speed comes later, after accuracy.

Tip: Keep your fingernails short and your hands warm and dry. Cold or wet fingers feel less.

The letters A to J

The letters A to J use only the top four dot positions (dots 1, 2, 4, and 5). Learn them in this order.

A — dot 1

● ○
○ ○
○ ○

Feel: one dot, top left, and nothing else.

B — dots 1, 2

● ○
● ○
○ ○

Feel: two dots in a line down the left side, top and middle.

C — dots 1, 4

● ●
○ ○
○ ○

Feel: two dots across the top row.

D — dots 1, 4, 5

● ●
○ ●
○ ○

Feel: the top row, plus one more dot at middle right.

E — dots 1, 5

● ○
○ ●
○ ○

Feel: a diagonal — top left and middle right.

F — dots 1, 2, 4

● ●
● ○
○ ○

Feel: the top row, plus middle left.

G — dots 1, 2, 4, 5

● ●
● ●
○ ○

Feel: four dots — the whole top block, two rows full.

H — dots 1, 2, 5

● ○
● ●
○ ○

Feel: middle row full, plus top left.

I — dots 2, 4

○ ●
● ○
○ ○

Feel: a diagonal the other way — top right and middle left. Compare I with E: E starts at top left; I starts at top right.

J — dots 2, 4, 5

○ ●
● ●
○ ○

Feel: top right, and the whole middle row.

Step-by-step exercises

Exercise 1 — Build each letter. With your egg carton or muffin tin, build A, then B, then C, up to J. Say the letter name each time you build it.

Exercise 2 — Feel and name. A partner builds a letter without telling you which one. Feel it slowly and name it. Do five letters. Then change roles if you are working with someone.

Exercise 3 — Find the difference. Build A and then B. Feel both. The only difference is dot 2. Now build C and then D. The only difference is dot 5. Finding one-dot differences is the heart of Braille reading.

Exercise 4 — Read a short row. Build this row of cells in order: C — A — B. Feel them left to right and read the word: CAB. Then build: B — E — D. Read it: BED. Then build: D — A — D. Read it: DAD.

Exercise 5 — Say and check. Cover your practice cell. Say from memory: “A is dot 1. B is dots 1 and 2. C is dots 1 and 4.” Check by building each one. Continue in the same way up to J.

Lesson check

You have finished Lesson 1 when you can:

- Explain, in your own words, what a Braille cell is.
- Name the six dot positions by number while touching them.
- Build and feel the letters A to J.
- Read the three practice words in Exercise 4 by touch.

Practice a little each day. Your fingers learn by doing, one cell at a time.

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