The Braille alphabet for English-speaking countries (UEB Braille)

Braille is made up of a series of raised dots, arranged in 'cells'. Each cell is made up of 6 dots - 2 columns of 3 dots eah. The dots positions are referred to by number, as follows:

The Braille Cell

1 ● ● 4
2 ● ● 5
3 ● ● 6

Letters and words

Braille letters are created using the following combination of these dots:

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

So, for example, the letter A is just dot 1, and the letter O is dots 1, 3 and 5.

Braille can be produced as grade 1 (uncontracted), or grade 2 (contracted).

Grade 1 Braille uses the Braille letters above for each corresponding letter in a word.

Grade 2 Braille is more advanced, and in addition to the letters of the alphabet, also has characters for common groupings of letters such as 'ch', 'sh', 'st' and 'ing'. There are also contractions for common words such as 'the' and 'with'. Braille is very bulky (it takes up about 3 times as much space as standard text), so using contractions in this way makes it quicker to read, and less bulky.

Numbers

Numbers are shown with a numerical character using dots, 3, 4, 5 and 6. This character is put before the letters A to I to become numbers 1 to 9 and before the letter J to become the number 0. So, for example, the number 3 is made up of the number symbol followed immediately by the letter C, and the number 10 is the number symbol followed immediately by the letters A and J, as follows:
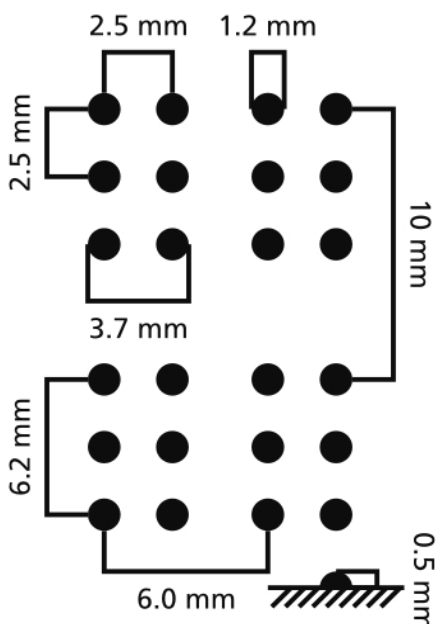
⠼⠁ ⠼⠃ ⠼⠉ ⠼⠙ ⠼⠑
1　2　3　4　5

⠼⠋ ⠼⠛ ⠼⠓ ⠼⠊ ⠼⠁⠚
6　7　8　9　10

The size of Braille - why we can't make it bigger or smaller!

There are very strict guidelines about the dimensions of Braille. These ensure Braille is the right size to be read using fingertips. The size of each dot, space between dots, space between cells, and space between each word and each line are measured exactly. That's why we can't, as we are sometimes asked, make Braille bigger for a poster, or smaller for a business card. The dimensions specified are:

Other characters

Although there are some strict rules to make Braille useable, it is a very versatile code, with unique characters also used for punctuation, accents, mathematical and chemical symbols. There are also characters to show emphasis such as underlined or capitalised words and italics.

Next time you order a Braille document from A2i, why not see if you can recognise some of these symbols, or even 'read' a few words?

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