

THE SIMPLICITY OF BRAILLE

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Contrary to popular belief, Braille is not difficult to learn. It is an elegant and simple code that fits on a 3" x 5" card. The genius of Louis Braille, the inventor of the code, is demonstrated in the simplistic pattern of the alphabet, and the thrifty approach to the numbering system, which utilizes the first ten letters of the alphabet preceded by a number indicator symbol. Unlike print, there is only one letter-for-letter code with one or two symbols inserted before upper case letters, or words. The learning curve is greatly decreased by the fact that there is no need to learn two codes—(as a learner of print learns both print and cursive). When print is not an option, Braille is the answer for gaining literacy, a necessary tool for independence, self-respect and employment.

Another popularly held belief is that Braille is no longer needed in our paperless society. It is easy to disprove this myth with a simple question: "Are sighted people ready to give up printers, pens and other writing tools?" The resounding answer is "NO!" More paper is manufactured and sold in America today than any other time in our society.

The basic ability to read with understanding and to write clearly is vital to everyone. Those skills are important at work, at home, and in our communities.

Computers are making literacy even more important. E-mail and the Internet are changing the way we communicate and the way we get information. The speed of communication and information exchange is constantly increasing. Computers have become essential parts of most workplaces. Every sector, from transportation and warehousing to steel plants and health care is more dependent upon computers every year. Clearly, any problems with reading and writing will have a real impact on people's ability to get jobs, to get promotions - or simply to get the most out of life.

Braille makes it possible to access every aspect of literacy, from labeling personal items and medicine bottles to operating the most current technology available to the general public, and many specially adapted PDA devices for the blind.

The Braille alphabet, numbers, punctuation and other symbols are created in a six-dot formation called a "cell", which contains two columns of three dots each. Each dot is assigned a number to facilitate ease of learning. As shown in the illustration, from top to bottom, the first column contains dots 1, 2 and 3. The second column contains dots 4, 5 and 6.



