

Main Changes to British Braille 2004

A new edition of British Braille has been prepared by the Braille Authority of the United Kingdom, incorporating ideas and suggestions of braille users and producers collected since the last update in 1992, as well as making corrections. The impact of the changes on ordinary reading will, however, be minimal. This document lists the main changes with some words of explanation. A full list is also available (e.g. from the BAUK web site, www.bauk.org.uk), intended to help transcription agencies, individuals, and software manufacturers assimilate the changes at a detailed level.

It is anticipated that braille producers will be able to incorporate these changes into their transcriptions by the end of August 2005, and this may be regarded as the official implementation date. However, braille producers and users who wish to proceed before that date may implement the rule changes as soon as convenient.

References in this document are to sections and paragraphs in the new edition.

1. British Braille is published in a single print edition, but in two braille versions – one with capitals indicated, the other without capitals except for particular relevant examples. Both braille versions cover all the rules. The reason for the two braille editions is to give users the choice of their preferred reading style, in accordance with the general recommendations on capitals made by BAUK.
2. The braille edition is in two volumes: the main body of rules is in volume 1, and the appendices and index are in volume 2. The change to two volumes is partly due to the extra space needed to cover rules both on capitalized and non-capitalized braille, but also to allow us to have an expanded index.
3. The Note at the beginning explains that rules relating to non-capitalized braille only, have been marked by an asterisk. (This presentation is thought easier and more streamlined than the other way round, i.e. marking rules relating to capitalized braille only.)
4. In cases such as 1930s it is no longer necessary to insert an apostrophe before the s in braille if it is absent in the original print. The insertion of an apostrophe was previously required, but this deviation from print is now thought to be an unnecessary complication for the braille rules.
5. The oblique stroke has been changed to dots 4-5-6 dots 3-4. The ambiguities and additional braille rules needed with the previous sign are thus removed. This is in line with a change in BANA practice (Braille Authority of North America), as well as with UEBC (Unified English Braille Code – an experimental code under development internationally). See section 4.6.

6. The rules on capitals as agreed and published in the leaflet "Capitals in British Braille" (April 1998) have been incorporated. These rules are mainly contained in section 5.2 – Capitals, which has been entirely rewritten; but other places affected include 5.6 – Letter Sign, 7.1 – Print Abbreviations, and various places in 8 – Contractions. A few amendments have been made to the rules as originally published, the most important being that the contractions "to", "into" and "by" are now allowed before a capital indicator. This last change was made to conform with the rule on italics.

7. The use of computer code indicators is included in British Braille (section 5.3), and a short list of computer code signs is included in 2.7. These are taken from the Braille Computer Notation. The main use is expected to be for the transcription of email and internet addresses, which will no longer require explanatory notes or ad hoc methods. However, as pointed out in 5.3.1, the use of this facility is not restricted to this area, and may be used wherever the greater precision in representing arbitrary sequences of characters without ambiguity is needed in a literary context. One difference from the Braille Computer Notation is that the default is for letters to be lower case (the opposite convention is currently used in Braille Computer Notation). This is now thought to be the more natural default position.

8. The rules for italics (section 5.5) have been amended so that the closing indicator for a passage is placed after the last word, rather than before. This is thought to be a logical change consistent with the approach taken with capitals. It is also in line with word processor and standard markup systems, as well as normal keyboard practice, and avoids complex definitions of what constitutes a word. The closing indicator after a passage is dots 4-6 dot 3, but the opening passage and word indicators for italics have not changed.

9. A facility has been added to allow parts of words to be italicized without the need to insert hyphens (5.5.17). This will be particularly useful for grammar books where word endings etc. need to be highlighted, but the insertion of hyphens (as previously required) is intrusive and possibly ambiguous.

10. Section 5.6 dealing with the letter sign has been largely reworked to clarify the logic of the rules, and the relationship between the letter sign and capital sign.

11. The force of the numeral sign no longer carries over the hyphen (6.1.3). This simplifies the rules and avoids some ambiguities, although it takes more space.

12. Dots in strings of digits are to be represented as a dot 2, whether or not they indicate a decimal point (as in section numbers). See 6.1.8. This simplifies the rules.

13. Section 7.1 on print abbreviations has been largely rewritten and made logically tighter, in the light of the revised rules on capitals and the letter sign. A wider range of cases is covered than previously.

14. A new sign for the bullet symbol, dots 4-5-6 dots 2-5-6 has been added (7.2.10). The current normal method for dealing with bulleted lists in braille is still included (i.e. simply indenting the list items and ignoring the bullet), but the inclusion of a braille bullet sign allows writers and transcribers the option to represent such bullets.

15. A new sign for the commercial "at" symbol, dot 4 dots 2-3-4-6 has been added to the literary code (7.2.11). This allows simple email addresses to be transcribed directly without the need to resort to the computer code method (see point 7); nevertheless, BAUK recommends that the method using computer code indicators be the norm in most transcription circumstances as it provides a single method which is of general application.

16. A letter sign (as well as a capital sign) is now needed before a capital unit abbreviation, in accordance with the normal rules (7.5.1). A letter sign is now also needed before a lower case letter starting a mixed case unit such as mA (7.5.1), or a compound unit abbreviation (7.5.13). Both of these changes bring unit abbreviations into line with other abbreviations and simplify the rules.

17. Signs have been added for the Euro (dot 4 e) and the Yen (dot 4 y).

18. When the pound sign or dollar sign appear in conjunction with other letters (as in Australian dollars), they are preceded by dot 4. This change resolves a long-standing ambiguity in transcribing such monetary units, e.g. Australian dollars could previously be read as "A" with an abbreviation point. As an extension of this, where the pound sign or dollar sign stands alone without a following number, it is now preceded by a dot 4, but without a numeral sign (7.5.9). Note also that the use of dot 4 in such cases forms a consistent pattern with other cases of monetary units (see point 17).

19. The contraction "be" may now in general only be used at the beginning of a word if it constitutes a syllable, and is unstressed. Previously there was no requirement that it be unstressed. It is believed that this additional requirement will give more natural results – there are several examples in the word list in Appendix III. Note that the word "being" is left as an exception in which "be" should still be contracted.

20. The contraction for "here" is now permissible in the word "sphere" and its compounds. This change removes an exception and simplifies the rules.

21. The contraction "ness" may now be used in feminine endings (8.6.5). This change removes an exception.

22. The general rule on bridging contractions across a prefix and the remainder of the word (8.9.1) has been liberalized and simplified, eliminating reference to the meaning of the word. For example, "ed" in "redouble" is now permissible. However, caution is still advised to avoid using contractions which would make a word hard to assimilate by the reader.

23. The general rules on bridging contractions across diphthongs (8.9.6-7) have been liberalized and simplified; apart from "ea", contractions are now generally permissible.

24. The guidance on word division has been amended to say that a contraction should not be broken when it constitutes a phoneme (e.g. "ch" or "th"), but in other cases it is permissible to do so. (See 9.9.3.) It is thought that this more closely reflects a "natural" approach to word division.

25. The signs from the revised Welsh Braille Code have been incorporated in Appendix I (E).
26. Appendix III, Guide to Contracting, has been revised, largely as a consequence of the changed rules on bridging contractions, but also by adding a few new special cases.
27. The index has been substantially expanded with additional headwords, to allow quicker and more accurate reference to be made to the rules and signs.

Amended August 2004