

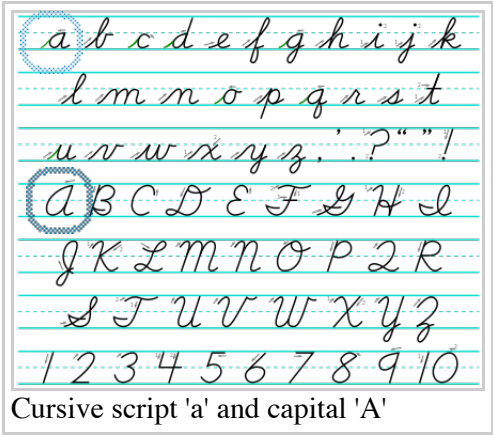
A

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A (named *a* /ˈeɪ/, plural *aes*^[nb 1]) is the first letter and vowel in the ISO basic Latin alphabet.^[2] It is similar to the Ancient Greek letter alpha, from which it derives. The upper-case version consists of the two slanting sides of a triangle, crossed in the middle by a horizontal bar. The lower-case version can be written in two forms: the double-storey **a** and single-storey **ɑ**. The latter is commonly used in handwriting and fonts based on it, especially fonts intended to be read by children. It is also found in italic type.

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

















A cursiva.gif




History


The earliest certain ancestor of "A" is aleph (also called 'aleph), the first letter of the Phoenician alphabet^[3] (which, by consisting entirely of consonants, is an abjad rather than a true alphabet). In turn, the origin of aleph may have been a pictogram of an ox head in proto-Sinaitic script^[4] influenced by Egyptian hieroglyphs, styled as a triangular head with two horns extended.


Egyptian	Cretan	Phoenician <i>aleph</i>	Semitic	Greek <i>Alpha</i>	Etruscan A	Roman/Cyrillic A	Boeotian 800–700 BC	Greek Uncial	Latin 300 AD Uncial
				Aα		A			
									


In 1600 B.C.E., the Phoenician alphabet's letter had a linear form that served as the base for some later forms. Its name must have corresponded closely to the Hebrew or Arabic aleph.


When the ancient Greeks adopted the alphabet, they had no use for the glottal stop—the first phoneme of the Phoenician pronunciation of the letter, and the sound that the letter denoted in Phoenician and other Semitic languages—so they used an adaptation of the sign to represent the vowel /a/, and gave it the similar name of alpha. In the earliest Greek inscriptions after the Greek Dark Ages, dating to the 8th century BC, the letter rests upon its side, but in the Greek alphabet of later times it generally resembles the modern capital letter, although many local varieties can be distinguished by the shortening of one leg, or by the angle at which the cross line is set.



Blackletter A


Uncial A


Another Blackletter A


Modern Roman A


Modern Italic A


Modern script A

The Etruscans brought the Greek alphabet to their civilization in the Italian Peninsula and left the letter unchanged. The Romans later adopted the Etruscan alphabet to write the Latin language, and the resulting letter was preserved in the Latin alphabet used to write many languages, including English.

Typographic variants

During Roman times, there were many variations on the letter "A". First was the monumental or lapidary style, which was used when inscribing on stone or other "permanent" mediums. For perishable surfaces, what was used for everyday or utilitarian purposes, a cursive style was used. Due to the "perishable" nature of the surfaces, these examples are not as prevalent as the monumental. This perishable style was called cursive and numerous variations have survived, such as majuscule cursive, minuscule cursive, and semicursive minuscule. There were also variants that were intermediate between the monumental and the cursive. The known variants include the early semi-uncial, the uncial, and the later semi-uncial.^[5]

At the termination of the Roman Empire (5th century AD), several variants of the cursive minuscule appeared through Western Europe. Among these were the semicursive minuscule of Italy, the Merovingian script in France, the Visigothic script in Spain, and the Insular or Anglo-Irish semi-uncial or Anglo-Saxon majuscule, of Great Britain. By the 9th century, the Caroline script, which was very similar to the present-day form, was the principal form used in book-making, before the advent of the printing press. This form was derived through a combining of prior forms.^[5]

15th-century Italy saw the formation of the two variants that are known today. These variants, the *Italics* and *Roman* forms, were derived from the Caroline Script version. The Italics form used in most current handwriting consists of a circle and vertical stroke ("ɑ"), called Latin alpha or "script a". This slowly developed from the fifth-century form resembling the Greek letter tau in the hands of dark-age Irish and English writers.^[3] Most printed material uses the Roman form consisting of a small loop with an arc over it ("a").^[5] Both derive from the majuscule (capital) form. In Greek handwriting, it was common to join the left leg and horizontal stroke into a single loop, as demonstrated by the uncial version shown. Many fonts then made the right leg vertical. In some of these, the serif that began the right leg stroke developed into an arc, resulting in the printed form, while in others it was dropped, resulting in the modern handwritten form.

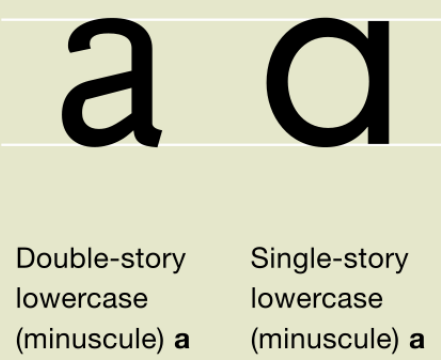
Use in English

In English orthography, the letter A currently represents six different vowel sounds: A by itself frequently denotes the near-open front unrounded vowel (/æ/) as in *pad*; the open back unrounded vowel (/ɑː/) as in *father*, its original, Latin and Greek, sound;^[4] a closer, further fronted sound as in "hare", which developed as the sound progressed from "father" to "ace";^[3] in concert with a later orthographic vowel, the diphthong /eɪ/ as in *ace* and *major*, due to effects of the Great Vowel Shift; the more rounded form in "water" or its closely related cousin, found in "was".^[3]

The double "a" sequence is not a native English combination; however it occurs in some foreign words such as *Aaron* and *aardvark*.^[6]

"A" is the third-most-commonly used letter in English (after "E" and "T"),^[7] and the second most common in Spanish and French. In one study, on average, about 3.68% of letters used in English tend to be 'a', while the number is 6.22% in Spanish and 3.95% in French.^[8]

Use in other languages



Typographic variants include a double-storey **a** and single-storey **ɑ**.

In most languages that use the Latin alphabet, A denotes an open unrounded vowel: /a/, /ä/, or /ɑ/. An exception is Saanich, in which A (and Á) stands for a close-mid front unrounded vowel /e/.

Use in mathematics, logic and science

In algebra, the letter "A" along with other letters at the beginning of the alphabet is used to represent known quantities, whereas the letters at the end of the alphabet (x,y,z) are used to denote unknown quantities.

In geometry, capital A, B, C etc. are used to denote segments, lines, rays, etc.^[5] A capital A is also typically used as one of the letters to represent an angle in a triangle, the lowercase a representing the side opposite angle A.^[4]

In logic, A is used to signify the universal affirmative.

In physics, A is the SI unit symbol for Ampere.

In phonetic and phonemic notation:

- in the International Phonetic Alphabet, [a] is used for the open front unrounded vowel, [ä] is used for the open central unrounded vowel and [ɑ] is used for the open back unrounded vowel.
- in X-SAMPA, [a] is used for the open front unrounded vowel and [A] is used for the open back unrounded vowel.

Other uses

"A" is often used to denote something or someone of a better or more prestigious quality or status: A-, A or A+, the best grade that can be assigned by teachers for students' schoolwork; "A grade" for clean restaurants; A-list celebrities, etc. Such associations can have a motivating effect, as exposure to the letter A has been found to improve performance, when compared with other letters.^[9]

A is a common symbol of school and basic phonetics in the US, along with B and C.

Finally, the letter A is used to denote size, as in a narrow size shoe,^[4] or a small cup size in a brassiere.

Related letters and other similar characters

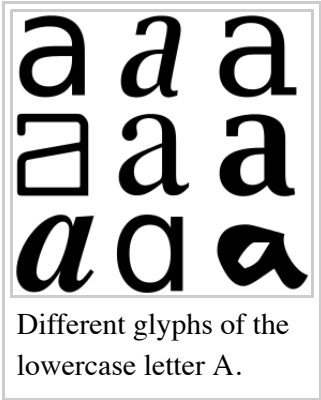
- A α : Greek letter alpha
- A а : Cyrillic letter A
- Q q : Latin letter alpha / script A
- ɐ : a turned lowercase letter A, used by the International Phonetic Alphabet for the near-open central

vowel

- **∀** : a turned capital letter A, used in predicate logic to specify universal quantification ("for all")
- ^a : an ordinal indicator
- *Æ æ* : Latin *AE* ligature
- Å å : A letter used in various Scandinavian (and other) languages

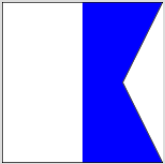

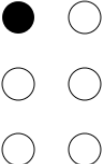
Computing codes

Character	A		a	
Unicode name	LATIN CAPITAL LETTER A		LATIN SMALL LETTER A	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	65	U+0041	97	U+0061
UTF-8	65	41	97	61
Numeric character reference	A	A	a	a
EBCDIC family	193	C1	129	81
ASCII ¹	65	41	97	61



¹ Also for encodings based on ASCII, including the DOS, Windows, ISO-8859 and Macintosh families of encodings.

Other representations

NATO phonetic		Morse code
Alpha		• —
		
Signal flag	Flag semaphore	Braille dots-1

Notes

1. *Aes* is the plural of the name of the letter. The plural of the letter itself is rendered *As*, *A's*, *as*, or *a's*.^[1]

Footnotes

1. Simpson & Weiner 1989, p. 1
2. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/a>
3. Hoiberg 2010, p. 1
4. Hall-Quest 1997, p. 1
5. Diring 2000, p. 1
6. Gelb & Whiting 1998, p. 45
7. Anon 2004
8. Anon 2006
9. British Psychological Society 2010

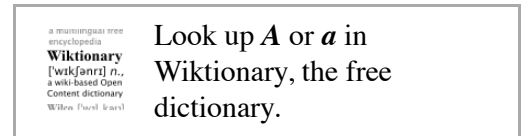
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- Simpson, J. A.; Weiner, E.S.C., eds. (1989). "A". *The Oxford English Dictionary*. I: A-Bazouki (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-861213-3.

External links

- History of the Alphabet



(<http://members.peak.org/~jeremy/dictionaryclassic/chapters/pix/alphabet.gif>)

-  Texts on Wikisource:
 - "A" in *A Dictionary of the English Language* by Samuel Johnson
 - Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "A" (entry). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Eleventh ed.). Cambridge University Press.
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Categories: ISO basic Latin letters | Vowel letters

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