

# The ABC and the 1, 2, 3

Saying telephone numbers correctly and spelling aloud are important skills

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It's easy to get confused when giving your telephone number or spelling your name to someone. Often it's even more confusing when callers spell their names and tell you their phone numbers. So how can you make numbers easy to understand? Here is some simple advice.

1. Say each figure separately in groups of two or three. For example: the number 397 6285 is usually said "three nine seven, six two, eight five". Don't say something like "three hundred and ninety-seven, sixty-two, eighty-five." This will confuse callers.

2. The number 0 is pronounced as "zero" or like the letter O. For example, the number (0208) 307 160 could be pronounced "zero two, zero eight, three zero seven, one six zero". Or you could say: "O two, O eight, three O seven, one six O". "Zero" is a little easier for less fluent speakers of English to understand. In Britain, some people say "nought" instead of "zero". Avoid this, as it can be confusing to other second-language speakers, but you should remember what it means.

3. When a figure occurs twice in sequence, British speakers use the word "double". For example, (055) 677 99 is said "zero double five, six double seven, double nine".

4. If a figure occurs three times in sequence, you have two options. For

example, the number (099) 444 2333 can be said "zero double nine, triple four, two triple three"; or you can say "zero double nine, four double four, two three, double three".

5. Numbers with several zeros at the end are often said as whole numbers. For example, 07 2000 is said "zero seven, two thousand".

6. Country codes can be said in two ways. The 0049 for Germany can be said "O, O, four nine for Germany" or "(plus) forty-nine for Germany".

Spelling words can be even more confusing than saying numbers. It's easy for second-language speakers to confuse "E" with "I" or "A", or to forget what to call "H" and "Y".

If you want to make sure that you spell a word — such as your name — correctly, then use a spelling alphabet. The best one is the International Civil Aviation Organization alphabet.\* It uses words that are easy to pronounce, that are international, and that are not easily confused with other words. I suggest you learn it by heart.

Here's how you use it: "My family name is Bauer. That's B for Bravo, A for Alpha, U for Uniform, E for Echo



and R for Romeo." You can also use this alphabet to check your caller's spelling: "Sorry. Did you say F for Foxtrot or S for Sierra?" When spelling the German "ü", you can say "U for Uniform with two dots over it". Or you could try saying "the German U with an umlaut". Many people will understand what you mean. To test yourself, try spelling your first name and your family name aloud, and then do it again using the spelling alphabet. If you find it difficult, try spelling the name of your street in the same way. Practise this until it's easy to do.

Saying phone numbers correctly and spelling words aloud are basic skills and can be difficult in a second language. If you can do them easily, nobody will notice; but doing them badly may hurt your professional credibility.

You'll find the complete ICAO alphabet at [www.spotlight-online.de/doc/22894](http://www.spotlight-online.de/doc/22894)

<b>aviation</b> [ˌeɪvɪˈeɪʃən]	Luftfahrt
<b>by heart</b> [baɪ 'hɑ:t]	auswendig
<b>country code</b> ['kʌntri ,kəʊd]	internationale Vorwahl
<b>credibility</b> [ˌkredə'bɪləti]	Glaubwürdigkeit
<b>figure</b> ['fɪɡə]	Ziffer
<b>fluent</b> ['flu:ənt]	fließend
<b>in sequence</b> [ɪn 'si:kwəns]	hintereinander
<b>occur</b> [ə'kɜ:]	vorkommen
<b>triple</b> ['trɪpl]	dreimal

In a *Spotlight* edition ([www.spotlight-online.de](http://www.spotlight-online.de)), **Ken Taylor** devotes his "English at Work" language column to the important skill of saying telephone numbers correctly and spelling them aloud. He says: "If you want to make sure that you spell a word — such as your name — correctly, then use a spelling alphabet. The best one is the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) alphabet." Here it is:

<b>A - Alfa</b>	<b>N - November</b>
<b>B - Bravo</b>	<b>O - Oscar</b>
<b>C - Charlie</b>	<b>P - Papa</b>
<b>D - Delta</b>	<b>Q - Quebec</b>
<b>E - Echo</b>	<b>R - Romeo</b>
<b>F - Foxtrot</b>	<b>S - Sierra</b>
<b>G - Golf</b>	<b>T - Tango</b>
<b>H - Hotel</b>	<b>U - Uniform</b>
<b>I - India</b>	<b>V - Victor</b>
<b>J - Juliet</b>	<b>W - Whiskey</b>
<b>K - Kilo</b>	<b>X - X-ray</b>
<b>L - Lima</b>	<b>Y - Yankee</b>
<b>M - Mike</b>	<b>Z - Zulu</b>

**The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) alphabet** is the name of the system which assigns code words to the letters of the English alphabet so that critical combinations of letters can be pronounced and understood by those who send and receive radio or telephone messages regardless of their native language.

### Exercise 1: Talking

- Spell your first and last name in the ICAO alphabet!
- Spell your partner's first and last name!
- Spell the name of the shop you are working at!

