



# BRAILLE HOUSE

THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

[www.braillehouse.org.au](http://www.braillehouse.org.au)

## Frequently Asked Questions

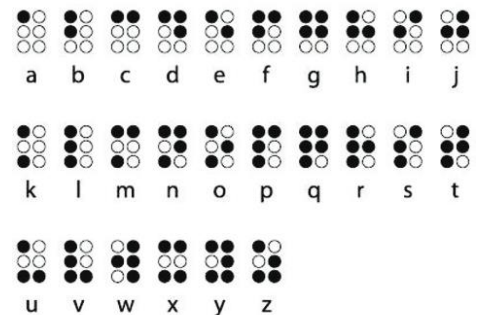
### 1. What is Braille?

Braille is a system of raised dots which is primarily read with fingers by people who are blind or who have low vision. Braille is not a language, rather, it is a code by which many languages (such as English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and dozens of others) may be written and read. Braille is used by people all over the world in their native languages and provides a means of literacy for all.

Because braille is a code, there are rules in relation to height of each dot as well as spacing and size of each cell; therefore, unlike print, it is not something you can change font size or appearance.

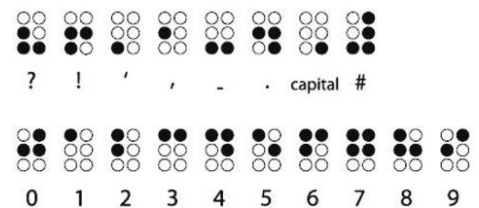
### 2. What does Braille Look Like?

Braille symbols are formed within braille cells. A full braille cell consists of six raised dots arranged in two parallel rows, each having three dots. The dot positions are identified by numbers from one through six. Sixty-four combinations are possible using one or more of these six dots. A single cell can be used to represent an alphabet letter, number, punctuation mark, or even a whole word. Each cell is designed to fit under one finger.



### 3. How is Braille Written?

If every letter of every word is expressed in braille, it is referred to as uncontracted (or Grade 1) braille. Contracted (or Grade 2) braille uses cells individually or in combination with others to form a variety of contractions or whole words. These are also called short forms.



(Ref: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Braille-Alphabet-and-Numbers\\_fig1\\_343406954](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Braille-Alphabet-and-Numbers_fig1_343406954))

### 4. Can Anyone Learn Braille?

No, not everyone can learn braille. Because braille is read with fingers, it requires a level of sensitivity in the fingers to distinguish the raised dots. Some illnesses (such as diabetes), or harsh use of hands/fingers in work or leisure pursuits (such as farming or rock climbing) can diminish sensitivity in fingers.

### 5. Why is Braille Important?

Learning to read and write has far reaching implications. Through reading and writing we learn spelling, punctuation, grammar and most importantly, the ability to interpret information through our own "voice".

Braille is brilliant because it empowers people who are blind or have low vision to be literate. These tiny dots support them to live independently, attain their desired level of education, increase their chances for employment and enable them to interact with communities just like everyone else. Even though text-to-speech technology is helpful for people who are blind or have low vision, Braille offers powerful benefits, including for example, the ability to navigate public areas, ensure the taking of the right medication in the right dose and the ability to interact in the workplace independently (eg, through braille labels to identify tea and coffee).

## 6. What Does it Cost to Produce Braille?

It is difficult to provide an exact figure on a braille cell basis because it depends on the words being used and the contraction of those words. Advances in technology also allows us to now be able to emboss braille onto both sides of pages which saves paper. If you are looking to have something transcribed or produced in Braille, all you have to do is send through what you want transcribed and Braille House will contact you to discuss your needs with the view to progress a quote and recommendations for the best format.

## 7. Is it true that Braille House has a long and interesting history?

Comparative to other organisations and charities in Australia, Braille House has a very long and proud history. It was in March 1897 that seven women met in the Telegraph Chambers in Queen Street, Brisbane and formed the Queensland Braille Writing Association (now known as Braille House). The group included Mrs Sharp who was the Head Teacher at the School for the Blind and Lady Lamington, the wife of the then Governor of Queensland. All of the seven undertook to braille twelve texts each, and thus began the work of creating a Library of braille books. Teaching blind, vision impaired and sighted people to read and write braille soon followed.

Two years later, on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1899, a free lending library was officially opened. Starting with just 54 books, the number of texts grew considerably over the ensuing years. Some members of the association brailled over a thousand volumes each, and whilst some of these people would have had access to a Stainsby or Perkins braille machine, much of the work would have been manual, dot by dot, using a frame and stylus.

Millions of dots and half a century later, Braille House found the property that it still calls home at 507 Ipswich Road, Annerley in Brisbane. Over that time, which of course included two World Wars and The Great Depression, Braille House occupied various rented rooms including the original meeting place in the Telegraph Building and the basement of 247 Vulture Street, South Brisbane.

Mr R F Tunley, well known to blind and vision impaired children and adults of his time as *Grandfather Tunley*, voiced the thought that Braille House very much needed a permanent home for its ever-growing library of braille books. Even more needed was a place for meetings, classes and the many other activities of this totally voluntary and busy organisation. Fundraising began in 1952, with the South Brisbane Rotary club making it their project for the year. An Entertainment Committee was formed within the association and the concerts, bridge parties and fetes began.

It was one of the helpful Rotarians who suggested that a certain property on Ipswich Road at Annerley might be suitable. The property was a big old Queenslander, in good condition and with enough land to allow for expansion. It had, coincidentally, originally belonged to the family of Mrs Brennan, one of the transcribers. Mrs Brennan's daughter also became a volunteer at Braille House.

The property was purchased for £6,000 on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1954, and once again with the help of South Brisbane Rotarians and some local Boy Scouts the big move was made. The Official Opening was performed a week later on June 17<sup>th</sup> by Lady Lavarack, the wife of the then governor of Queensland.



## 8. What happens today at Braille House and what services are offered?

Over its more than 125-year history, the mission of Braille House has effectively remained constant; that is to empower people of all ages who are blind or have low vision through alternate formats.

Braille House of today provides the following services:

**Library:** At the heart of Braille House is the free leading library, where books and magazines are transformed into alternate tactile formats including braille, ebraille and moon, plus other accessible formats (eg large print). Braille House is the only braille library in the state of Queensland, and one of only two free braille lending libraries in Australia. The library provides resources to children, young adults, adults, schools and organisations. It is one of the oldest continuous braille lending libraries in the world and the only library in the southern hemisphere to produce and loan titles in moon (a braille alternative). We are further a signatory to the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organisation and a member of the International Accessible Book Consortium. As a result, in addition to the numerous hardcopy and ebraille items in our collection, our readers by mid-2023 will have access to over 730 000 titles in 80 languages in a range of accessible formats, plus over 8,000 music scores in braille. Our accessible online catalogue enables easy browsing of all resources including twin-vision picture books, junior, young adult, and adult braille books as well as ebraille.

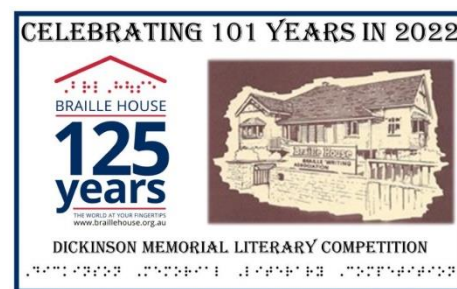
**Transcription Services:** Our transcribers are vital to the production of books and other resources in braille for children and adults, students of all ages, organisations and government departments. This includes braille, Moon (an alternative to braille), twin vision (which is both braille and print) and eBraille (electronic braille). In addition, Braille House's production area transcribes and produces in tactile formats business cards, menus, brochures, certificates, newsletters and concierge material. Further to these, we can also produce tactile maps and calendars. For businesses, these are produced on a fee-for-service basis. Should you be interested in making an inquiry, visit our website. ([https://www.braillehouse.org.au/create\\_braille/](https://www.braillehouse.org.au/create_braille/))

**Braille Lessons:** Tutoring adults who wish to become touch readers of braille or moon script is another important component of Braille House services. Braille House's tutoring also includes a "Braille for Print Users" course for people who have sight but assist others who are blind or have low vision, or for people with sight who want to upskill in braille for transcription purposes. Students attend courses at Braille House or are able to learn remotely.

**Braille Literacy Challenge:** Braille House hosts this annual event to support the development of Queensland students' Braille literacy skills. Traditionally it is held on the second last Friday of Term 3 (of the Queensland school year). The Braille Literacy Challenge provides an opportunity and context for social networking and peer support for students who learn braille. The event also captures the significant contribution of Braille House to the educational access, participation and achievement of braille reading Queensland students. Attending students have the option of participating in relation to reading, writing or both and they can take part remotely if circumstances do not permit attendance at Braille House.



**Dickinson Memorial Literary Competition:** This competition was started in 1921 by the "Queensland Musical, Literary and Self Aid Society for the Blind" (QMLSAS) as an Essay Competition; the subject was "Self Reliance", and first prize in each category was one guinea. Harold Dickinson and his brother Edwin were both members of the QMLSAS and were very involved in the literary and musical world at that time, although Harold believed that it was Edwin who was the literary brother. Edwin died in January 1956, but his name continued to be synonymous with the competition. The Society changed its name in 1966 to Queensland Society of Blind Citizens, and in 1986 it acquired royal assent to use the prefix Royal. Then it all became complicated, including name changes and mergers of various organisations supporting Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision.



Staff and volunteers at Braille House are especially pleased to be able to continue, and perpetuate, the competition with the Dickinson name attached. This is directly a result of Mercy Dickinson, Harold's wife, who was a volunteer proof-reader and teacher of braille at Braille House for many years. Mercy was blind and happy to be able to give back in kind for the services she herself had received when Braille House volunteers transcribed many of her texts while she was at State High School and later when she became the first blind student to go through and get her first degree at Queensland University in 1939.

In 2022, Braille House, with the support of Brisbane City Council, facilitated the 101<sup>st</sup> Dickinson Memorial Competition, with the theme of "Time". Traditionally each year has a focus theme, the competition runs over the months of June – August, and prizes are awarded. It includes the categories of Adult Short Story, Adult Poem / Lyrics / Limerick, Adult Opinion / Reflection, Senior Student, Junior Student, and People's Choice – as voted by the public. Potential entrants are advised to monitor the Braille House website for information about past and upcoming competitions. (<https://www.braillehouse.org.au/dickinson-2022/>)

**Braille House Awareness Shows:** Braille House has developed Braille Awareness Shows that are designed to promote understanding through an informative, interactive presentation and workshop which fosters acceptance, inclusion, integration, and equality.

Participants are encouraged to share their newfound learnings with their families and friends. Wider and long-term implications include breaking down of barriers and building social cohesion through the promotion of positive and supportive environments for those with blind or low vision to flourish. Important to our mission is promoting inclusion and to this end we offer our *Braille Awareness Shows* to early childhood centres, schools, libraries, community centres and other groups.

The Braille Awareness shows recently won both the judged category and People's Choice for Best Volunteer Led Activity or Class for Children in the National What's On 4 Kids Awards.



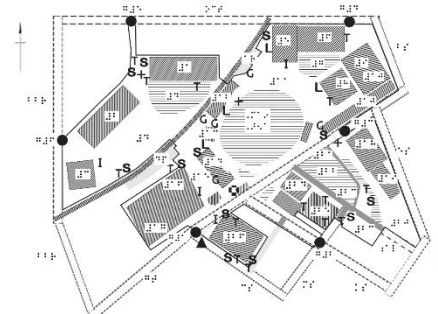
Anyone interested in hosting a Braille Awareness Show is encouraged to visit our website to download a flyer or make contact about booking a show.

( <https://www.braillehouse.org.au/braille-awareness-shows/> )

**Braille Club:** This project is Club is an initiative of the Australian Braille Authority, that is supported by and hosted at Braille House.

Braille Club is a networking and engagement opportunity that is run for Queensland braille reading students to meet with others. The club is run on the first Tuesday of the month online, and there are also face-to-face meetings throughout the year. One example of the 'in person' meetings is the annual Brisbane Exhibition (EKKA) trip, where participating students attend the EKKA together. In 2022 Braille House designed and produced EKKA maps to support the students' visit.

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## 9. Does Braille House have a Strategic Direction?

*The world at your fingertips.*

In 2022, Braille House undertook an extensive Strategic Planning process which resulted in our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. The key elements identified in the plan are as follows:

*Our Mission:* To empower people of all ages who are blind or have low vision through alternate formats.

*Our Values:*

- **Integrity** - We do what's right and act with kindness, transparency, and honesty.
- **Respect** - All our interactions are constructive, collaborative, and considerate of others. Together we deliver our best.
- **Empowerment** - We provide opportunity for all – clients, volunteers, and staff - to be involved and do their best.
- **Sustainability** - Building on our foundations, we look forward and adapt to change to ensure longevity.
- **High Expectations** - We are committed to providing our clients, the community, and one another with high quality service and resources.

## 10. Does Braille House Look to be Innovative?

At Braille House we are continually looking for creative and inventive ways to serve those who are blind or have low vision, and the community in general. As an example, in late 2022 we were awarded the “Best Assistive Technology Product” at the Australian Disability Service Awards for our Tactile QR Code Indicators.

## 11. How is Braille House funded?

Braille House currently receives no recurrent government funding. We rely on the generosity of the general public through donations and bequests, as well as corporate sponsorship and a small variety of grants. Volunteer support is also critical to the provision of our services.

## 12. Why Give to Braille House?

All Australians have the right to equal access to information. When information is not easily accessible, people who need alternative formats are often left having to solely rely on a third party. This impedes their independence and can restrict a persons' access to what could be critical information.

The number of visually impaired people continues to rise in Australia and is expected to increase from 570,000 to over 800,000 by 2030. Alternative formats to receive information will become even more crucial, especially as Queensland and Australia welcome visitors to the regions for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.

Braille House delivers critical services to Australians who are blind or have low vision. Braille is essential for literacy among the blind. Access to braille for education, employment and leisure plays a critical role in ensuring equality, accessibility and participation. It provides people with support to live independently, attain their desired level of education, increase their opportunities for employment, and interact with their communities (source: [Ryles Study](#) ). Importantly, a recent study published in the *Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research (2018)*, found braille literacy is uniquely associated with wellbeing and self-esteem among legally blind adults. Participants who learned braille early in childhood reported the highest wellbeing levels. At Braille House we are empowering blind and vision impaired learners by providing the tools to be literate.



It is this blind and low vision community that is assisted by the resources and services collaboratively provided by the staff and volunteers at Braille House. We cannot continue to offer these services without volunteer assistance, alongside all important financial support from the public and business community.

### 13. How Can I Get Involved with Braille House?

There are numerous ways to get involved with Braille House.

- *Donate:* As a not-for-profit / charity, Braille House relies heavily on philanthropic donations, as well as general donations from the public. Through the Braille House website, donors can make donations as one offs or can set up an ongoing / regular donation arrangement. Donations help us to grow and maintain Braille House as a place of excellence in the production and teaching of Braille; it is a hub of activity providing expert tuition and tactual reading materials to people who are blind or have low vision.

More specifically, by giving you help us to:

- Keep pace with advances in technology;
  - Develop and deliver targeted individual tutoring programs;
  - Enable people who can no longer read print to have access to text;
  - Respond to special requests;
  - Outreach to the wider community.
- *Corporate Sponsorship:* Braille House works with a variety of organisations to create mutually beneficial partnerships that communicate key messages based on common values and shared objectives. Many of the involvement opportunities may provide a tax deduction / benefit. An alliance with Braille House can further reinforce an organisation's positive public image. Please contact 07 3848 5257 for more information.
  - *In Memoriam Gifts:* Commemorate your life and / or the life of a loved one by requesting donations be made to Braille House. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible and a tax receipt will be issued for each gift made.
  - *Bequest:* Make a Bequest in a will in favour of Braille House. Potential wording can be obtained from the Braille House website. ( <https://www.braillehouse.org.au/get-involved/bequest/> )
  - *Volunteer:* Volunteering is a great way to get involved at Braille House and support people who are blind or have low vision. Volunteering at Braille House offers you many benefits including:
    - ✓ developing new skills and gaining experience;
    - ✓ keeping up to date with your existing skills;
    - ✓ developing skills and experience to be included in a job application;
    - ✓ making new friends and working as a vital part of the Braille House team;
    - ✓ feeling a sense of community commitment and personal satisfaction;
    - ✓ helping Braille House make a difference to people who are blind or have low vision, their families and communities.

### 14. How can I make contact with Braille House?

We encourage you to reach out to us via:

Phone: 07 3848 5257

Email: [admin@qbwa.org.au](mailto:admin@qbwa.org.au)

Website: [www.braillehouse.org.au](http://www.braillehouse.org.au)