Old English

The **English language** has been written using the **Latin alphabet** from ca. the 7th century. Since the 5th century, the [Anglo-Saxon Futhorc](#) had been used, and both alphabets continued to be used in parallel for some time. Futhorc influenced the Latin alphabet by providing it with the letters *thorn* [þ](#) and *wynn* [ƿ](#). The letter *eth* [ð](#) was later devised as a modification of [d](#), and finally *yogh* [ȝ](#) was created by Norman scribes from the [insular g](#) used in Old English and [Irish](#) and used alongside their [Carolingian](#) *g*. Additionally, the [ligatures](#) *double-u* [w](#) for *vv*, *æsh* [æ](#) for *ae*, and *æthel* [œ](#) for *oe* were in use.

In the year 1011, a writer named Byrhtferð ordered the Old English alphabet for numerological purposes.[2] He listed the 24 letters of the Latin alphabet (including [ampersand](#)) first, then 5 additional English letters, starting with the [Tironian](#) *nota* or *ond,* ⁊*,* which was a specifically English symbol for *and*:

> A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z & ⁊ ƿ Þ Ð Æ

[[edit](#)] Modern English

In [Modern English](#) [orthography](#), þ, ȝ, ð, and ƿ are obsolete, although þ continued its existence for some time, its lower case form gradually becoming graphically indistinguishable from the minuscule [y](#) in most handwritings. On the other hand, [u](#) and [j](#) were introduced as distinct from [v](#) and [i](#) in the [16th century](#), and w assumed the status of an independent letter, so that the English alphabet is now considered to consist of the following 26 letters:

Letter	Letter name ([IPA](#))
[A](#)	a [eɪ]
[B](#)	bee [biː]
[C](#)	cee [siː]
[D](#)	dee [diː]
[E](#)	e [iː]
[F](#)	ef [ɛf] (spelled *eff* as a verb)
[G](#)	gee [dʒiː]
[H](#)	aitch [eɪtʃ] or haitch [heɪtʃ] in [Hiberno-English](#)
[I](#)	i [aɪ]
[J](#)	jay [dʒeɪ]
[K](#)	kay [keɪ]
[L](#)	el [ɛl]
[M](#)	em [ɛm]
[N](#)	en [ɛn]
[O](#)	o [oʊ]
[P](#)	pee [piː]
[Q](#)	cue [kjuː]
[R](#)	ar [ɑɹ] (rhotic) or [ɑː] (non-rhotic) (*see [rhotic and non-rhotic accents](#)*)
[S](#)	ess [ɛs] (spelled *es-* in compounds like *es-hook*)

T   tee [tiː]
U   u [juː]
V   vee [viː]
W   double-u [ˈdʌb(ə)l juː]
X   ex [ɛks]
Y   wy [waɪ] (sometimes spelled *wye*)
Z   zed [zɛd]; zee [ziː] in American English

Unfortunately, these common names for the letters are often hard to distinguish from each other when heard. The NATO phonetic alphabet gives each letter a name specifically designed to sound different from any other. Therefore, aircraft pilots and many other people use the NATO phonetic alphabet names instead of these common names.

The apostrophe is also used to write English and is part of many English words, but is not considered part of the alphabet.

[edit] Notes

[edit] Phonology

The letters A, E, I, O, U are vowels; and sometimes Y (and very rarely W) functions as a vowel too, but more often they are semivowels. The remaining letters are consonants. The letter most frequently used in English is E. The least frequently used letters are Q, X, and Z. The list below shows how often each letter is used:

A - Common
B - Mildly Common
C - Common
D - Mildly Frequent
E - Frequent
F - Mildly Common
G - Common
H - Mildly Common
I - Common
J - Mildly Rare
K - Mildly Rare
L - Mildly Frequent
M - Common
N - Frequent
O - Common
P - Common
Q - Rare
R - Frequent
S - Frequent
T - Frequent
U - Mildly Common
V - Mildly Rare
W - Mildly Rare
X - Very Rare

Y - Mildly Rare
Z - Rare

[**edit**] Letter names

The names of the letters are rarely spelled out, except in compound words like *tee-shirt, deejay, emcee, okay, aitch-less, wye-level*, etc., and derived forms like *exed out, effing, to eff and blind*. The forms listed here are from the [Oxford English Dictionary](): vowels stand for themselves, and consonants are *C+ee* or *e+C*, with the exceptions of *aitch (haitch), jay, kay, cue, ar, ess (es-), wy (wye), zed*. The plural forms of the vowels are *a's* or *aes, e's, i's, o's* or *oes, u's*.

[**edit**] Apostrophe

The [apostrophe](), while not considered part of the English alphabet, is used to write English words. A few pairs of words, such as *its* and *it's, were* and *we're,* and *shed* and *she'd* are distinguished in writing only by the presence or absence of an apostrophe. It also distinguishes the [possessive]() endings *-'s* and *-s'* from the common [plural]() ending *-s*.

[**edit**] Diacritics

[Diacritic]() marks are not common in English, appearing mainly in foreign and loan-words such as *résumé, naïve,* and *façade*. Often such use of diacritics is optional but in some words such as "soupçon" the only spelling found in English dictionaries (the [OED]() and others) uses the diacritic. Occasionally, especially in older writing, diacritics are used to indicate the [syllables]() of a word: *cursed* (adjective) is pronounced with one syllable, while *cursèd* (verb) is pronounced with two. Similarly, there's a chicken *coop*, where the two vowel letters represent a single vowel sound (a [digraph]()), versus *cooperate* (from [1604]()), *co-operate* (from [1762]()), or *coöperate* (from [1876]()), where they represent two. These distinctions are, however, optional, and often unused even where they would serve to alleviate some degree of confusion. See also [Written accents in English]().

[**edit**] Ligatures

The Roman ligatures [Æ]() and [Œ]() are still used in formal writing for certain words of Greek or Latin origin, such as "[encyclopædia]()" and "[cœlom]()". Lack of awareness combined with technological limitations (the [QWERTY]()-format keyboard commonly used in typography does not have keys representing either ligature) has made it common to see these two letters displayed as "ae" and "oe" respectively in modern, non-academic usage. These ligatures are not used in American English (and related variants), and, for the most part, a lone "e" has supplanted both "ae" (as in the aforementioned spelling "encyclopedia") and "oe" (e.g., "fetus" instead of "foetus.")

In [Old English](), Æ was adopted as a letter on its own and called *[æsc]()* ("ash"), and in very early Old English Œ also appeared as a distinct letter named *[æðel]()* ("ethel"), both after [Futhorc]() runes.

Other Old English letters (also used in [Middle English]() and modern [Icelandic]()) are [Þ]() *(thorn)* and [Ð]() *(eth),* both now *th* with the exception of being *y* in a few archaisms like *Yᵉ Olde Booke Shoppe*.

The variant lower-case form ſ *(long s)* lasted into [early modern English](), and was used in non-final position up to the early nineteenth century.

The [ampersand]() (&, *&)* has sometimes appeared at the end of the English alphabet as with Byrhtferð's list of letters in 1011.[2] The figure is properly speaking a [ligature]() for the letters *Et*. In English it is used to represent the word *and* and occasionally the Latin word *et,* as in the abbreviation *&c* (et cetera).

[[edit]()] See also

- [Alphabet]()
- [ASCII]()
- [Anglo-Saxon Futhorc]()
- [English language]()
- [History of the English language]()
- [Alphabets derived from the Latin]()

[[edit]()] Footnotes

1. [^]() See also the section on [Ligatures]()
2. ^ *[a]() [b]()* Michael Everson, Evertype, Baldur Sigurðsson, Íslensk Málstöð [ON THE STATUS OF THE LATIN LETTER ÞORN AND OF ITS SORTING ORDER]()