Writing systems: abjads | alphabets | syllabic alphabets | syllabaries | complex scripts | undeciphered scripts | alternative scripts | your con-scripts | A-Z index

Latin alphabet

- Ancient Latin alphabet
- Roman alphabet for Latin
- Irish uncial alphabet
- Old English alphabet
- Modern Latin alphabet
- Accented letters & special characters
- Languages written with the Latin alphabet

Ancient Latin alphabet
The earliest known inscriptions in the Latin alphabet date from the 6th century BC. It was adapted from the Etruscan alphabet during the 7th century BC. The letters Y and Z were taken from the Greek alphabet to write Greek loan words. Other letters were added from time to time as the Latin alphabet was adapted for other languages and many letters had several different shapes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AA</th>
<th>BB</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>FF</th>
<th>GI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>ks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other versions of the Latin alphabet
Ancient Latin, Irish Uncial, Old English

Roman alphabet for Latin
The Romans used just 23 letters to write Latin:

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z

There were no lower case letters, and K, Y and Z used only for writing words of Greek origin. The letters J, U and W were added to the alphabet at a later stage to write languages other than Latin. J is a variant of I, U is a variant of V, and W was introduced as a 'double-v' to make a distinction between the sounds we know as 'v' and 'w' which was unnecessary in Latin.
Modern Latin alphabet
The modern Latin alphabet consists of 52 letters, including both upper and lower case, plus 10 numerals, punctuation marks and a variety of other symbols such as &, % and @. Many languages add a variety of accents to the basic letters, and a few also use extra letters and ligatures.

The lowercase letters developed from cursive versions of the uppercase letters.

Uppercase
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Lowercase
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Accented letters & special characters

Accented letters
Many languages supplement the basic Latin alphabet with a variety of accented letters:

Á á acute È è grave Í í circumflex Ô ô tilda Ù ū ring Ý ý umlaut / diaeresis
Â â ogonek Œ œ caron Î î macron Ø ø horn Ù ū breve YY hook
Â̱ â̱ inverted breve Œ̋ œ̋ double grave Í i dot above Ø ø slash Ú ū double acute YY dot below
Č č cedilla Đ đ bar Ll l middle dot Θ theta middle tilde T t slash Đ đ top bar

These accented letters can have a number of different functions:

- Modifying the pronunciation of a letter
- Indicating where the stress should fall in a word
- Indicating emphasis in a sentence
- Indicating pitch or intonation of a word or syllable
- Indicating vowel length
- Visually distinguishing homophones

How to type accented letters in Windows, Mac and HTML

Some extra letters
Dð pþ bŠ ã ẽ eœ ë ì ñ ň ň ë e œ
eth thorn yogh wynn schwa dotless i eng

Eth, Thorn, Yogh and Wynn were used in Old English; Eth and Thorn are also used in Icelandic; the dotless i is used in Turkish, and the schwa is used in Azeri. The other letters are used in a number of West African languages, particularly in Ghana.

Ligatures (two or three letters joined together)
These are used in a number of languages including French, German, Icelandic, Croatian and Dutch:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Æ æ} & \quad \text{Dz dz} & \quad \text{Dž dž} & \quad \text{IJ ij} & \quad \text{Lj lj} & \quad \text{Nj nj} & \quad \text{Œ œ} & \quad \text{Œœ ₀lœ} & \quad \beta \\
a-e & \quad d-z & \quad d-ž & \quad i-j & \quad l-j & \quad n-j & \quad o-e & \quad o-l & \quad f-s \\
ff & \quad fi & \quad fl & \quad ffi & \quad ffl & \quad ft & \quad št \\
f-f & \quad f-i & \quad f-l & \quad f-f-i & \quad f-f-l & \quad f-t & \quad s-t \\
\end{align*} \]

Click here to find out how to type ligatures in Windows, Mac and HTML

Further information about diacritics and their usage
http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/dia/diacritics-revised.htm,

Some of the languages written with the Latin alphabet
Afaan Oromo, Afrikaans, Albanian, Aromanian, Aymara, Azerbaijani, Breton, Catalan, Cebuano, Chechen, Cheyenne, Cimbrian, Choctaw, Comanche, Cornish, Corsican, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Ewe, Faroese, Fijian, Filipino, Finnish, French, Frisian, Galician, German, Guarani, Hausa, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Icelandic, Ido, Indonesian, Interlingua, Irish, Italian, Jèrriais, Kashubian, Kiribati, Kurdish, Latin, Latvian, Lingua Franca Nova, Lithuanian, Lojban, Lombard, Luxembourgish, Malay, Maltese, Manx, Māori, Mi'kmaq, Nahuatl, Navajo, Naxi, Norwegian, Occitan, Old Norse, Piedmontese, Polish, Portuguese, Quechua, Romanian, Saami/Sami, Samoan, Scots, Scottish Gaelic, Serbian, Sioux, Slovak, Slovene, Slovenio, Sorbian, Southern Sotho, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Tahitian, Tatar, Taiwanese, Tlingit, Tongan, Turkish, Turkmen, Uyghur, Vietnamese, Volapük, Walloon, Welsh, Wolof, Yoruba, Zulu

Other alphabets
Armenian, Avestan, Bassa (Vah), Beitha Kukju, Coptic, Cyrillic, Elbsan, Etruscan, Fraser, Georgian (Asomtavruli & Nuskhakhucuri), Georgian (Mkhedruli), Glagolitic, Gothic, Greek, Hungarian Runes, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Irish, Korean, Latin, Manchu, Mongolian, 'N'Ko, Old Church Slavonic, Ogham, Old Italian, Old Permic, Orkhon, Pollard Miao, Runic, Santali, Somali, Sutton SignWriting, Tai Lue, Thaana

Home | News | Writing systems | Book store | Language learning | Tower of Babel | FAQs | Puzzles | Links | Multilingual pages | About this site | Contact

Help to support omniglot - make a donation

Copyright © Simon Ager 1998-2005