

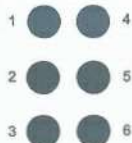
"A Touching Story" - The Story of Braille

The Origins - Braille is a system of touch reading and writing for blind persons. Raised dots represent the letters of the alphabet, punctuation marks and symbols to show letter groupings. Louis Braille, the inventor of today's Braille system, built on an idea of Charles Barbier, a French army officer, who had developed a system of "night writing" so that soldiers could communicate safely in the dark. Blind from birth himself, Louis Braille had been looking for a way that blind people could read and write. He adapted Barbier's 12-dot cell and modified it into a smaller 6-dot cell, so that the dots could be felt in one touch of a fingertip.



The stamp pictures Louis Braille, and shows a frame with 6-dot cells and a stylus, as well as embossed letters in Braille.

The Braille Cell

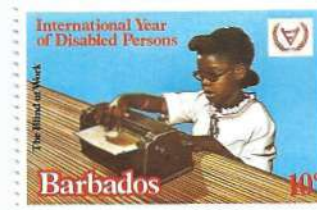


The 1993 £10 stamp shows the letter T E N in Braille

Producing Braille – The simplest way to write Braille is to use a pointed stylus to push dots into thick paper, which rests on a frame with an indented surface. This method is still the main Braille writing tool in the world today, though the letter need to be written backwards. During the 19th Century, inventors started making machines to speed up the writing process. The first mass-produced Braille writer was not available until the 1890s.. Developments since have made the writers more efficient and easier.



Using a writing frame and stylus



Using a modern Perkins Brailler, which has six keys, each producing one dot in a fixed position on a Braille cell



Reading Braille – Braille is read by moving the hand/s from left to right along each line. Both hands are usually involved, and reading is generally done with the index fingers. The average reading speed is about 125 words per minute. The change to a 6 dot cell was crucial because it meant that a fingertip could encompass the entire cell unit and move rapidly to the next.

Braille is read by moving the hand/s from left to right

The Braille Book – Braille books are large and heavy. Modifications to the Braille system have reduced the space needed by using contractions – a single cell can be used to stand for commonly used words such as 'and', 'the', as well as common letter combinations within words like 'ing', 'er'. This helps to reduce the size of the books as well as make reading quicker.

Today – Many users create Braille on a computer with a Braille embosser

