UEB in a Nutshell

Background to UEB

Braille is the most commonly used method for tactually representing written English. As a living worldwide language, English is constantly evolving. For example, numbers and capital letters now appear frequently within words, study materials are becoming more diverse and visual, and Web addresses commonly occur in news articles and information handouts. The Australian Braille Authority (ABA) has the responsibility to guide the development of Braille codes in order that Braille can remain the primary literacy tool for blind people.

Currently, English-speaking countries employ several different Braille codes according to subject matter. While the literary codes are fairly similar, the maths, sciences and computer codes differ markedly between countries. Also, the same print symbol might be represented in Braille in different ways depending on whether the literary or another code is being used.

In 1992, the Braille Authority of North America began a project with the aim of creating one Braille code which could be applied across all subject areas except music. In 1993, other English-speaking countries, including Australia, became interested in the project and it was internationalised under the auspices of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB).

In early 2004, ICEB met and agreed that the Unified English Braille Code was sufficiently complete for recognition as an international standard, which member countries could choose to adopt as their national code if they wished.

What does UEB look like?

For the most part, readers who are already familiar with literary Braille will have little trouble switching to UEB as:
1. **no new contractions:** There are no new contractions in UEB. Nine contractions currently used have been abolished in UEB.
2. **contractions retained**: All other 180 contractions, wordsigns and shortforms are unchanged, although there are restrictions on the use of some shortform extensions.
3. **Sequencing removed:** Sequencing, the practice of writing some words unspaced from others, has also been removed.

There is no separate mathematics, computer science or chemistry code, simply

UEB symbols for symbols used in maths and science and rules for the representation of maths and science notation. This means that UEB is one code, with the more technical aspects being extensions of the base code.

The music code, which has already been standardised internationally, will remain unchanged.

What are the advantages of UEB?

Having one English Braille code rather than various subject-specific codes in different countries will mean that any English-speaking Braille reader will be able to utilise Braille resources in every subject area, regardless of which country produced the Braille. This will be particularly advantageous to us in Australia, as we currently use a hybrid code containing various elements of both the American and British codes, with our own unique formatting guidelines and maths code.

UEB also eliminates the ambiguity caused by multiple meanings of symbols in the current codes, which will make Braille easier to learn. It also means that transcription from print into Braille will be quicker and cheaper because of the reduced number of exceptions. Back translation, the process of transcription from Braille to print, will also be more accurate, which will be particularly beneficial to blind students in mainstream settings.

What are the disadvantages of UEB?

A small disadvantage of UEB is that it takes more space than grade two Braille. UEB was not designed with space-saving in mind; rather, the priorities were simplified rules and reduced ambiguities. It is estimated that literary material may be about 3% longer using UEB when compared with current literary Braille. That is, just 3 pages in a volume of 100 braille pages.

What happens next?

At its annual meeting to be held in Sydney on Saturday 14 May 2005, the ABA will consider the proposition that Unified English Braille be adopted in Australia. Those eligible to vote are those members of the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc. who have an interest in the production, teaching or use of Braille, and each state and territory branch of the ABA.

If UEB is adopted at this meeting, it will be phased in over a period of years, according to an implementation timetable to be developed by the ABA. The phase-in period will be long enough to ensure minimal disruption to those students completing their secondary or tertiary education, and to ensure enough time for teachers and others working in the blindness field to properly learn the code.

How do I learn more and comment?

Familiarise yourself with the code

The National Information and Library Service is assisting with production of materials in UEB to help familiarise Braille readers, transcribers, proofreaders and teachers with the new code. Two new titles produced in the code have recently been added to the library collection: *Swimming Upstream* by Anthony Fingleton and *Last Tango in Toulouse* by Mary Moody. Library members may also request Braille copies of the key UEB specification documents or ask for student or personal notes to be produced in the code.

Attend a workshop

State and territory subcommittees of the ABA will be conducting workshops to familiarise people with the code. Participants will be guided through the sample materials written in UEB. For contact details of the ABA in your state or territory, please contact Leona Holloway, the ABA secretary at (03) 9864 9701 or leona.holloway@nils.org.au.

Join Ozbrl

Ozbrl is an email discussion list devoted to Braille-related issues in Australia. New information and minutes are distributed through Ozbrl and list members are encouraged to participate in discussions. To join, simply send an email to: ozbrl-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

For more information

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Chair of the

Australian Braille Authority, Bill Jolley, on (03) 9807 5137 AH or email wjolley@bigpond.com.

For more information on Unified English Braille, including code specifications and samplers, see http://www.iceb.org/ubc.html.

UEB at a Glance

Contractions that have changed

-ble- (⠿⠿⠿)   com- (⠿⠿⠿)   -dd- (⠿⠿)

-ation- (⠿⠿⠿)   -ally- ()   o'clock (⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿)

to (⠿⠿)   into (⠿⠿⠿)   by (⠿⠿)

Sequencing has been abolished

The following words must now be written with spacing as in the print:

and	for	of	the	with
a	to	into	by	

Some new symbols

Some of the most commonly used new or changed symbols in UEB are:

⠿⠿	**@** at sign
⠿⠿	• bullet
⠿⠿	— Dash
⠿⠿	° Degrees
⠿⠿	$ Dollar
⠿	. full stop and decimal point
⠿⠿	% percent sign
⠿⠿	/ forward slash
⠿⠿	\ backslash
⠿⠿	(opening round parenthesis
⠿⠿	) closing round parenthesis

UEB also introduces the concept of applying modes to a symbol, word, or passage and thereby uses a common system for indicating bold, italics, block capitals and grade one mode. The termination symbol is applied after the last word in a passage. For example:

⠿⠿	boldface symbol indicator
⠿⠿	boldface word indicator
⠿⠿	boldface passage indicator
⠿⠿	boldface terminator (to be placed after the last word in a bold passage)
⠿⠿	italic symbol indicator
⠿⠿	italic word indicator
⠿⠿	italic passage indicator (to be placed after the last word in an italicised passage)
⠿⠿	italic mode terminator
⠿⠿⠿	block capital passage indicator

For a full list of UEB symbols, refer to http://www.iceb.org/symbs.html.