Kathy—SPEVI Presentation

Good morning, as I speak I will be using a powerpoint to highlight aspects of my presentation. As each slide changes I will announce the slide number to assist those following with braille or electronically.

### Slide 2

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you this morning on a topic I am passionate about—braille, and in particular the Australian Braille Authority, or ABA as it is known and its role in the development and maintenance of braille codes as used in Australia. Secondly I would like to introduce you to the latest document published by the ABA: The Rules and Guidelines for Formatting Braille, the importance of following and teaching these concepts, as well as some basic formatting principles.

I will begin with two quotes which highlight the magic and wonder of the ability to read braille:

### Slide 3

Helen Keller: “Literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disenfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourses of my book friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness.”

### Slide 4

Jim Fiebig: “There is a wonder in reading braille that the sighted will never know: to touch words and have them touch you back.”

### Slide 5

SPEVI’s position statement on the role of Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairments) states that the SPECIFIC skills of Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) ensure that they are able to (amongst other things):

Teach braille (as necessary) … Specialist teachers (Vision Impairment) not only are trained in the Unified English Braille (UEB) literary code but also understand the theory of teaching braille and have the experience and knowledge to teach braille.

My topic today relates to the first part of this statement: are trained in the Unified English Braille (UEB) literary code, and how the work of the ABA plays an integral role in this area.

I have been involved in braille for nearly 30 years and during that time been privileged to have involvement with the ABA, the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities commonly referred to as Round Table and the National Braille Music Camp. I have observed firsthand how reading and having access to braille in whatever format enriches the lives of blind and low vision adults in the same manner as access to printed material enriches my life.

Last week I went met a couple of blind friends for lunch at a café in Sydney. The menu was in print, the online menu was inaccessible and there wasn’t time to mock up an electronic version. My friends had to endure me reading out the menu and prices to them, which I personally find very difficult to do.

Compare that with, early last year, I arranged to go out to dinner with a blind friend visiting Adelaide. Being prearranged, I had the time to access the menu online and braille a copy for her. She delighted in reading ALL the options and was able to independently choose her meal and wine option, making choices according to her taste and budget without embarrassment.

As educators, NEVER underestimate the importance that braille has not just as a reading medium but a means to enriching so many aspects of a person’s life.

As stated earlier, I am a transcriber and also coordinate the Accessible Formats Production team at South Australian School for Vision Impaired or SASVI. As a team we produce materials in a variety of accessible formats for vision impaired and blind students attending schools across South Australia including SASVI and its two secondary programs.

I have an ongoing passion in encouraging our teachers, support staff and transcribers in having a sound knowledge of the braille they teach and use. To that end I have been active in the work of the ABA. This involvement has ensured that SASVI’s staff have access to the most up-to-date information available.

I am currently a member of the ABA executive and have been asked to speak to you today on their behalf.

### Slide 6

So, who are the Australian Braille Authority, or ABA?

To quote from the ABA website: brailleaustralia.org

“The Australian Braille Authority (ABA) oversees the development and maintenance of braille codes and specifications used in Australia, acts as a braille accreditation body, and promotes braille as the primary literacy medium for people who are blind, deafblind, or have severe vision impairment.”

### Slide 7

New Zealand has an equivalent body, the Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust or BANZAT. Their website can be found at: www.banzat.org.nz

Both the ABA and BANZAT have representation on the International Council on English Braille or ICEB the body which is responsible amongst other things for the development and maintenance of Unified English Braille as used in both Australia and New Zealand.

More on that later.

### Slide 8

Again, I ask the question, who are the ABA and what do they offer?

The ABA operates as a subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Its terms of reference may be found on the brailleaustralia.org website.

The Round Table is a trans-Tasman body and membership consists of various organisations involved in the production, distribution and use of alternative format materials such as braille, audio, large print and electronic text.

The national committee of the ABA is made up of representatives from each Australian Round Table member organisation which is involved in production, teaching or the use of braille.

The Round Table holds a conference in April or May each year, and the ABA traditionally holds its annual meeting on the Saturday before the conference begins.

SPEVI is a member of Round Table, and as such has representation at the annual meeting as part of the ABA national committee.

Also, many of the private and government bodies involved in the education of students with vision impairments in Australia are also members of Round Table and as such also have representation at the ABA annual meeting.

I am not here to talk about Round Table as such, but there are many crossovers between Round Table and SPEVI in relation to education. Just this morning at breakfast I had a discussion on the work that Round Table is currently doing to resolve an issue with a major Australian education publisher in not releasing its PDF files for use of students with vision impairment. Being part of Round Table has enabled us to use the network of education agencies to discover that this is not an isolated issue with this particular publisher, and hopefully a resolution will be forthcoming soon.

Representation through SPEVI as well as educational organisations means that many of the Australian delegates here today, ARE represented on ABA, not only through SPEVI but also the organisation they work for. Education is heavily represented on ABA.

### Slide 9

The national committee elects an executive each two years at the annual meeting. Under the ABA’s terms of reference at least half of the executive must be touch readers.

The current ABA executive consists of:

The Chair: Jordie Howell, a braille reader and adult braille trainer with Vision Australia. Jordie is also a talented musician, a transcriber and teacher of braille music. Jordie also chairs the ICEB Braille Music Committee.

Correspondence Secretary: Leona Holloway, formerly a team leader and transcriber with Vision Australia. Leona is currently a research assistant with Monash University in Accessible Graphics. Leona is the public relations officer with ICEB and Australia’s official representative on the ICEB Code Maintenance Committee.

Christine Simpson: Past Chair, braille reader. Christine is the editor of the Rules of Unified English Braille as published by ICEB.

General Members consist of:

Sam Taylor: braille reader, musician and technical advisor with Pacific Vision

Ross de Vent: braille reader, musician, braille music transcriber

Josie Howse: Manager of State Braille and Print with NSW Department of Education and Communities.

And myself: Kathy Riessen, transcriber and coordinator of Accessible Formats Production with SA School for Vision Impaired

The executive meets monthly via Teleconference.

### Slide 10

The ABA’s terms of reference also give provision for the formation of Regional Braille Forums or RBF. An RBF consists of people interested in the promotion of braille within a geographical area. Currently there are two functioning Forums in Australia, the Queensland Regional Braille Forum and the Sydney Regional Braille Forum. Each forum may appoint a voting delegate on the National Committee of the ABA. It is worth considering becoming active in one of these Forums or forming one of your own in your area. Information and contact details may be found on the brailleaustralia.org website.

The current convenors of RBFs are Julee-Anne Bell in Queensland and Sandra Robertson in NSW

The convenors are also invited to attend the monthly executive meetings.

So, what does the ABA do?

### Slide 11

One function is to oversee the development and maintenance of Braille codes and specifications used in Australia.

As stated previously, the ABA has representation on the International Council on English Braille. ICEB is currently has 8 member countries: Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, USA, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria and Ireland.

UEB, the code now used in both Australia and New Zealand was developed by the ICEB to unify the braille codes used in English speaking countries across all genres: literary, mathematics and computer notation, with the exclusion of music which has its own international notation.

Some of you may still remember trying to use the hybrid of codes as used in Australia prior to 2005. Australia used a hybrid of UK Literary, Australian mathematics (loosely based on the UK code) and US Computer code. New Zealand followed the US in their Literary, Mathematics (Nemeth) and computer codes.

With the rapid development of computerised translation and the ability to electronically share braille files, a universal or unified English code was seen to be necessary to meet the needs of this changing electronic world.

The inclusion of technical symbols and electronic addresses are becoming the norm rather than the exception, and UEB allows even the youngest of readers to read and write these without having to learn another code or a different set of rules.

### Slide 12

The UEB project began in 1992 and was not considered substantially complete until 2004.

During this time the ABA hosted a number of workshops around Australia to introduce the concept of how a Unified Braille Code would impact readers.

In May 2005, the National Committee of the ABA agreed to adopt UEB as the code used in Australia. The transition was rapid and within a couple of years all students in Australia were using UEB exclusively.

New Zealand soon followed with voting to adopt UEB in November 2005.

Since then, all member countries of ICEB have adopted UEB, some sooner than others. The ability to purchase resources from overseas to supplement those produced in Australia or New Zealand is exciting.

### Slide 13

As we know, language is continually changing, and UEB needs to be continually monitored and adapted as changes arise and questions are asked. This is the responsibility of the ICEB Code Maintenance Committee chaired by Phyllis Landon from Canada.

The committee corresponds via listserve. Each country has a voting representative as well as observers on this list. Leona Holloway is Australia’s voting representative, and each of the executive act as observers. New Zealand is also represented on this committee.

As issues or suggestions arise with UEB they are debated and then voted upon. Final decisions are then ratified by the ICEB executive before being added to the Rules.

### Slide 14

A new exciting project of the Code Maintenance Committee is the revision of the Technical Guidelines. Bill Jolley of Australia was appointed to lead this project at last year’s ICEB General Assembly. Bill is a life-long braille reader with a degree in mathematics and a strong interest in this project.

Maths, science and other technical material does not have a code separate to UEB, rather a greater variety of symbols need to be recognised and learnt.

The current Technical Guidelines document was written before the finalisation of the Rule Book and there are a number of aspects which need urgent revision as well as more examples.

Information on this project will be posted on the OZBRL listserve as it gains momentum. I would encourage those of you who are using and teaching Maths and science to note the areas where you find the current documentation either ambiguous or inadequate and communicate this to an executive member of the ABA or to OZBRL.

### Slide 15

Another committee of the ICEB is the Braille Music Committee which is chaired by Jordie Howell.

Again this committee has representation from all ICEB countries.

The committee has been working on the impact of UEB on braille music as well as international collaboration in updating the International Braille Music Code.

As you can see, Australia through the ABA is heavily represented on ICEB to ensure that the braille codes used both, UEB and Music, continue to meet the needs of the braille reading community in Australia.

### Slide 16

There are a number of means which ABA uses for communication. Information can be found on the “communications” page of the brailleaustralia.org website.

By subscribing to the OZBRL listserve you will receive up-to-date information on braille and braille events. The list can be used to post braille queries or look for availability of particular braille titles. This is also a good forum to share news and information about braille and braille related events, such as annual or regional meetings. It is not a high traffic list, so it doesn’t tend to fill the inbox, but is invaluable to subscribe to if you want to keep up-to-date with what is happening with braille in Australia.

The ABA facebook page lists various media items relating to braille, celebrates events and gives notice of meetings and other relevant events. A monthly summary is posted onto OZBRL for those who do not subscribe to Facebook.

Contact details for each executive member as well as the Regional Braille Forum convenors are on the brailleaustralia.org website. Feel free to contact any of us and we will bring any ideas or issues you may have to one of our monthly meetings.

### Slide 17

The brailleaustralia.org website is an important means of communication. It is regularly maintained by Leona Holloway and has a number of links to resources available for those interested in braille. Resources may be freely downloaded in PDF or .brf format. Although they are free for you to download and print or emboss for use, please respect that they are still protected by copyright to the organisations which have published them.

The following publications of the ICEB are references rather than teaching resources. These documents are relevant for use in New Zealand as well as Australia:

* The Rules of Unified English Braille, edited by Christine Simpson. THE RULEBOOK. This resource lists all the rules of UEB and how they should be applied.
* Guidelines for Technical Material. This was in fact produced before the Rulebook was finalised and as stated earlier, a revision is in progress.
* World Braille Usage: this updated edition was produced in 2013 as a joint collaboration between ICEB, Perkins School for the Blind and the Library of Congress. It lists basic information on braille codes for 133 languages world wide and where to find more information.
* IPA, International Phonetic Alphabet, a code for the phonetic symbols used by linguists.

### Slide 18

Resources published by ABA or Roundtable are:

* Unified English Braille: Australian Training Manual. This manual is a UEB learning program for teachers, transcribers or anyone wanting to learn braille in a systematic way. It was based on the UK Primer which had for many years been used. This was the book I used to originally learn braille, and we appreciate the generosity of RNIB in allowing us to adapt their existing resource. The Training Manual was recently updated in September 2016 to correct some errors and add some new words to the Shortform list which were approved by the ICEB Code Maintenance Committee. New Zealand have produced an equivalent Training Manual for their use.
* The online UEB training course developed and conducted by RIDBC uses the information and exercises from the UEB Training Manual. These two resources can work very well when used in conjunction with each other to learn braille.
* ABA Rules and Guidelines for formatting braille. More on that later.
* Duxbury Braille Producer’s Manual. This was a Trans-Tasman collaboration. Whilst it is current to DBT 11.1 most of the information is still relevant for the current version of DBT 12.1 sr1.
* ABA Braille Music Addendum.

### Slide 19

ABA acts as a braille accreditation body,

Each year the ABA in conjunction with BANZAT conducts the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in UEB. As far as I am aware, this is currently the only formal accreditation for proficiency in both braille and its formatting conventions available in Australia.

The examination is held in the first two weeks of October each year. It is an open book examination. All candidates begin with 100 marks, and marks are lost for errors in translation as well as incorrect braille formatting.

The examination is coordinated in Australia by Josie Howse from State Braille and Print in NSW. The time and effort she and her team put in each year is substantial. Maria Stevens coordinates the examination as held in New Zealand.

### Slide 20

The proficiency examination consists of three sections

* A print passage to be transcribed into braille.
* A braille passage to transcribe to print.
* Finally a braille passage to proofread against an original print copy.

All braille must be manually written, that is, no translation software may be used.

Braille readers who wish to sit the test are provided with their materials in braille appropriately marked up uncontracted or contracted braille depending the section of the examination.

### Slide 21

The same passages are set for both Australia and New Zealand, but each country conducts and marks the examination separately.

Australian candidates are assessed and marked according to Australian formatting rules and guidelines. New Zealand candidates are assessed according to New Zealand formatting standards, and have an additional section which includes Maori.

Information and sample papers are available on the on the brailleaustralia.org website.

New Zealanders should direct their enquiries to their local authority.

Whether your role is teaching or transcribing the rigorousness of this test is worthwhile doing.

### Slide 22

The current version of the Duxbury Braille Translator or DBT is 12.1 sr1. This includes an Australian Template developed by the ABA based on the formatting rules and guidelines.

You are encouraged to use the ABA template which can then be customised for local preferences.

Queries on using the Australian Template can be referred to Leona Holloway or myself. It is anticipated that the ABA workshop at this year’s Round Table conference to be held in Perth in May will be on the Australian Template and what each style means.

### Slide 23

Duxbury is continuously improving the translation integrity of DBT. ABA liaises regularly with Duxbury to resolve any translation issues.

I would encourage you to post any queries or issues you find on OZBRL or send them to Leona. By posting on OZBRL you may find that others may also have the same query. These are then noted, tested and passed onto Duxbury.

### Slide 24

I have listed this separately as ABA considers learning braille music an important part of the education program.

Braille Music is an International code and separate to UEB.

The Braille Music Addendum was written to give information on:

* Australian best practice in formatting braille music based on the UK standards
* UEB in relation to musical notation
* Some guidelines how to present theory questions.

The Addendum is a working document and will be revised as needed.

### Slide 25

My other focus this morning is formatting.

* Good print formatting allows easy navigation.
* Good braille formatting allows easy navigation.
* Whether print or braille you need to be able to easily find page numbers, chapters, headings, question numbers, answers, etc, etc.
* It is just as important to know how to format braille as knowing correct braille code.

When I began transcribing in 1988, on the Perkins, I was taught a method of formatting which was based on the British system and assumed this was how everyone formatted. As I became involved with transcriber’s across Australia through the National Braille Music Camp and Round Table, I discovered that others formatted differently. Added to this was the development of computerised translation where an American style formatting was the default. The ABA developed a formatting guide in the 90s, but this quickly became outdated as its information was based on the original DOS version of DBT and it was very narrow in its scope.

### Slide 26

Finally, once UEB, its rules and training manuals were finalised, the ABA was able to spend the time developing a new document: The ABA Rules and Guidelines for formatting braille.

This project took a couple of years to finalise and it was completed in May 2016.

The main editor was Leona Holloway

The working party consisted of: Christine Simpson, Josie Howse, Shirley Henderson and myself plus additional editorial assistance from Colleen Flood. The late Linda Triasmono was originally part of the team before her health precluded her involvement.

We had representation from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia as well as a mix of education and adult braille readers: a broad mix which created some lively debate.

The ABA held a workshop in May 2016 as part of the Round Table Conference to present the newly finalised rules and guidelines. The documents for this workshop are available on the brailleaustralia.org website in both print and braille.

### Slide 27

To summarise some of the major rules and guidelines.

Rules are not negotiable, guidelines give preferred options.

**Rule:** Indent the first line of a paragraph by 2 cells.

Note: unlike print, braille has limited formatting options. Blank lines are NEVER used to indicate a new paragraph. These are reserved for specific purposes, such as defining headings, stanzas in poetry or a change between one formatting style and another.

As soon as students are expected to write in paragraphs, they can be taught how to braille a paragraph. New line, space, space, begin brailling. Simple.

### Slide 28

Shown is a part of a braille page with two paragraphs. Full cells have been used to create words to highlight that even without words, a paragraph can be easily identified.

### Slide 29

Lists: Lists may be numbered questions, bulleted items, ingredients in a recipe, map keys etc.

**Rule:** The runover of a list must be indented in braille.

**Guideline:** Indent the runover by 2 cells or to the size of an attention mark or counter.

### Slide 30

Shown is a part of a braille page showing two list items, numbered 1 and 2. The runover for each has been indented by 2 cells.

### Slide 31

On the screen is shown is a bulleted list, where the runover has been indented to the size of the attention mark, in this case a bullet.

### Slide 32

**Rule:** Hierarchy of Lists. Hierarchy is shown with indentation.

**Guideline:** The level of indentation for each hierarchy level may be variable between organisations, but consistency must be maintained within a document.

### Slide 33

Shown is a list with hierarchy.

Question 1 begins at the margin with a 2-cell indentation on runover.

Parts a and b, are indented 2 cells, that is, they begin in the 3rd cell. Part b runs over, again with a 2 cell indent.

Sub-part i is further indented by 2-cells beginning in the 5th cell.

The important thing with this example is not that 2-cells were used for each indent or runovers. Some organisations choose to use a larger indent. The important things is that parts a and b are indented from the question number and part i is further indented.

Note: with numbered or lettered lists, regardless of what the print shows there must be some form of punctuation between the number or letter and the text of the list item. This is usually a full stop or bracket. When writing answers, students should be taught to follow the same protocol.

### Slide 34

Now that we have looked at the 2 basic forms of text paragraphs and lists, I would like to talk about one of the most important aspects of formatting, navigation. Formatting is not just how a page looks but the creation of easy navigation through a document.

**Rule:** Navigation Line. The top line of each braille page is reserved as the navigation line.

The following information may be found on the navigation line:

Left corner: print page number. If the number has no prefix, this indicates the top of a new print page, an alphabetic prefix indicates the continuation of a print page which started on a previous braille page.

Centred: running title giving information where in a document you are: eg Harry Potter. ch2

Right corner: braille page number

In a formal volume of text, roman numbers are used for preliminary pages and Arabic numbers for the main body of the text. In this way a reader can very quickly scan the right corners of pages to find the first page of a novel or textbook.

### Slide 35

**Rule:** Print Page turnovers

Print page turnovers are shown at the exact point where a new print page begins.

Where a page turnover occurs partway down a braille page a turnover is shown by a row of hyphens with the new page number on the right.

### Slide 36

Shown is the top section of a braille of page.

The first line is the Navigation Line and shows the print page (pp) on the left of the braile page (bp) on the right and the running header is in the middle.

On the fifth line is a row of hyphens immediately followed by the numeric indicator and a full cell indicating where a page turnover occurs. In this instance the turnover has occurred in the middle of a paragraph and the paragraph continues as if no break occurred.

### Slide 37

**Rule:** Headings. Headings are formatted according to their hierarchy or importance, not necessarily how they appear in print. A heading is preceded by a blank line UNLESS it immediately follows another heading.

### Slide 38

**Rule:** Use the following hierarchy of headings:

**Heading 1 (main heading)** Centred with at least 6 cells either side

**Heading 2 (2nd level)** Blocked cell 5

**Heading 3 (3rd level)** Blocked cell 3

**Heading 4 (4th level)** Blocked cell 1

### Slide 39

Shown is a braille page with a heading 1 and heading 2. Note how they clearly stand out as a combination of a blank line before each plus indentation.

### Slide 40

Shown is a braille page with a heading 3 and heading 4.

### Slide 41

**Rule:** Poetry

* Use a list style format
* A blank line is left between stanzas

### Slide 42

**Guidelines:** Poetry

* Print layout is used as a guide in determining the braille layout.
* Poetry in print is presented in a variety of ways. Some can have multiple indents. Some may be written around a shape. The formatting document has a variety of examples which demonstrate various approaches to formatting poetry.

### Slide 43

**Rules:** Drama

* Regardless of print layout, the name of each speaker begins at the margin with the runover indented. [Similar to a list format]
* There must be a clear distinction between the speaker’s name and the dialogue.

### Slide 44

**Guidelines:** Drama

Use the print as guidance to how stage directions are shown with regards to brackets, italics, capitals etc.

Stage directions on their own line are formatted as an indented paragraph beginning in cell 7, with runovers in cell 5.

### Slide 45

Shown is part of a page of braille with drama.

The first speaker is followed by a colon before his/her dialogue. The runover of the dialogue is in cell 3.

This speaker isT followed by a stage direction in brackets. The stage direction begins in cell 7 with the runover in cell 5. You can see how the formatting makes easy distinction of the stage direction.

The next speaker has a short stage direction such as “softly” in brackets following his/her name. The colon is shown after the closing bracket before his/her dialogue begins.

Note: The paragraph format beginning in cell 7 with runover in cell 5 format used for the stage direction is the same format the guidelines suggest for use with footnotes and similar references.

Note: Textbooks with poetry and drama are often annotated with line numbers, marginal notes, additional highlighting, arrows pointing to various aspects of a poem or play, all sorts of graphical information. The Formatting Rules and Guidelines document includes suggestions or guidelines of how this type of material may best be represented in braille.

### Slide 46

What I have presented this morning, covers just a small aspect of the Rules and Guidelines. There is a lot more I could say, but little time.

For further information goto the brailleaustralia.org website.

By using the “site map” link, you can find braille formatting under “About braille”

### Slide 47

Available for download in either PDF or .brf format are: The ABA Rules and Guidelines for Formatting Braille 2016 plus the documents for the ABA Formatting Workshop held May 2016 as part of the Round Table conference.

### Slide 48

I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. SPEVI considers the teaching of braille is important to the lifelong literacy of blind and very low vision students. I have had the privilege through my involvement with ABA, Round Table and the National Braille Music Camp to see how the ability to both read and write braille fluently enriches the lives of the many blind adults I call friends.

As a print reader, I cannot imagine a world without the printed word. This concept is no different for a braille reader.

Thankyou.

Any questions?

Kathy Riessen, January 2017