# Alfa bravo charlie

**“Sorry, did you say ess for sugar? Or eff for Freddy?”**

That might clear up one confusion, but the best way to be sure your letters are not misheard is to use the standard radio spelling alphabet.

That's the one used by police, emergency services, the military, air traffic controllers, radio operators and anybody else keen to avoid misunderstandings.

Students of all ages can enjoy having a go at memorising the alfa bravo charlie style alphabet.

It is fun and gives a useful lifetime skill, whether spelling out a name or giving a car registration number.

Use the official alphabet approved by the International Civil Aviation Organisation – the UN agency. This is also sometimes known as the NATO phonetic alphabet, though really it is a spelling alphabet, not a phonetic one.

**Age range:** 7–19

**Curriculum links:** PSHE

## The NATO phonetic alphabet

A - Alfa

B - Bravo

C - Charlie

D - Delta

E - Echo

F - Foxtrot

G - Golf

H - Hotel

I - India

J - Juliett

K - Kilo

L - Lima

M - Mike

N - November

O - Oscar

P - Papa

Q - Quebec

R - Romeo

S - Sierra

T - Tango

U - Uniform

V - Victor

W - Whiskey

X - X-ray

Y - Yankee

Z - Zulu

## Classroom activities

Try out different methods to memorise the words and then discuss the best method.

* Break your students into groups and give them five or six letters each. They can then make flashcards by drawing pictures or finding pictures in magazines or on the internet.
* Spell out your name, and then ask students to spell out their names.
* Drill the alphabet around the class, forwards and backwards, picking letters at random. Repeat them over and over. Concentrate on the ones they find hardest, not just the ones they are sure of. Drill it until it is hard wired into their heads, so they produce it automatically and instantly.

Use it as a homework or out-of-class exercise. But return to it throughout the term too, for revision and consolidation. You can surprise students and give them a quick test.

Talk about the way the alphabet is designed. The aim is to have things unambiguous and as clear as possible under radio interference or other poor audio conditions. Talk about how easy it would be to mishear b for p - but not bravo for papa.

## Did you know?

Although all the words are all immediately recognisable to native English speakers, the idea is that they are also understandable for French and Spanish speakers. Notice the non-standard spellings. Alfa would normally be spelt alpha, which is not helpful for Spanish speakers. And note the end letter on Juliett which helps the French remember to pronounce the final t.

For anyone who gets seriously interested in spelling alphabets, there is a wealth of background and history, including variants and previous versions dating back to World War I, at the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia: [NATO phonetic alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_phonetic_alphabet)

### Credits

This resource was written by P. J. White.