STARTER GUIDE

THE PHONETIC ALPHABET FOR HAM RADIO

Over the radio, B, D, E, P, T and V all sound alike. Phonetics swap each letter for a word that can't be mistaken, so your call sign gets through the first time.

Printed from www.cqdeck.com/learn/phonetic-alphabet. The page always has the latest version.

Spell your call sign

Type a call sign to see how to say it. If you've saved yours on CQDeck, it's already filled in.

YOUR CALL SIGN, OR ANY WORD

N0CALL

Type a call sign to hear how to say it.

The alphabet

Hams use the same alphabet as pilots and the military, often called the NATO alphabet.

Capital letters show which part to stress.

The phonetic alphabet

LETTER	WORD	SAY IT
A	Alpha	AL-fah
B	Bravo	BRAH-voh
C	Charlie	CHAR-lee
D	Delta	DELL-tah
E	Echo	ECK-oh
F	Foxtrot	FOKS-trot
G	Golf	GOLF
H	Hotel	hoh-TELL
I	India	IN-dee-ah
J	Juliet	JEW-lee-ETT
K	Kilo	KEY-loh
L	Lima	LEE-mah
M	Mike	MIKE
N	November	no-VEM-ber
O	Oscar	OSS-car
P	Papa	pah-PAH
Q	Quebec	keh-BECK
R	Romeo	ROW-me-oh

LETTER	WORD	SAY IT
S	Sierra	see-AIR-ah
T	Tango	TANG-go
U	Uniform	YOU-nee-form
V	Victor	VIK-ter
W	Whiskey	WISS-key
X	X-ray	ECKS-ray
Y	Yankee	YANG-key
Z	Zulu	ZOO-loo

The official spellings are Alfa and Juliett, so that speakers of other languages say them correctly. Either way, they sound the same.

Numbers

- Say each digit on its own: “November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.”
- Say “zero,” never “oh,” so it can’t be mistaken for the letter O.
- Some hams say “niner” for nine, a habit borrowed from aviation. “Nine” is fine too.
- For frequencies, say “point” for the decimal: “one four six point five two.”

When to use them

- When you check into a net, or call someone for the first time.
- When someone asks you to repeat your call sign, or the signal is weak or noisy.
- When you spell a name, a street or anything else that could be misheard: “My name is Sam, Sierra Alpha Mike.”

- On a clear local repeater with friends who know you, plain call signs are fine. Switch to phonetics when it helps.

Tips

- Learn the standard words first. You may hear longtime hams use others, like “Kilowatt” or “Radio,” but the standard words are the easiest to understand, especially for hams whose first language isn’t English.
- Say your call sign at an even pace, a little slower than normal speech. It’s the one thing the other station has to write down.
- Practice out loud until your own call sign comes out without thinking. Spelling license plates on a drive is a good drill.

Sources

NATO phonetic alphabet (Wikipedia) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_phonetic_alphabet