

Frequently Asked Questions about Braille

Revised: April 2014

Library Services and Procedures

Question: Does the MBTBL loan braille materials?

Answer: Yes, the library has many braille titles for loan.

Question: How will I receive books?

Answer: Braille titles are mailed through the U.S. Postal Service in reusable black containers. Some titles may require several containers and delivered over several days.

Question: How do I return braille books to the library?

Answer: Each container includes a reversible pre-addressed paper mailing label. Each mailing label includes a round punch-hole located along its shorter edge. Your mailing address appears when the punch hole is on the label's right-hand edge and the label color is white. Slide the mailing label out from the braille container's label holder. Turn the mailing label so the library's address is visible. The punch-hole will be located on the label's left side. The label color will be yellow. Return the mailing container to U.S. Postal Service mailbox or post office. You will not have any postal charges to return library materials.

Question: How do I find which titles are available in braille from the MBTBL collection?

Answer: Patrons with Internet access may search two catalogs:

- The [MBTBL online catalog](#) lists titles in the library's collection and if a copy is available. Anyone may search this catalog by author, title, subject or keyword. Registered patrons may add book requests to their online account with a user name and password.
- The [NLS catalog](#) includes titles found in the MBTBL catalog and titles produced by other sources, which are available through interlibrary loan. The MBTBL staff will process interlibrary loan requests for you. Personal requests cannot be placed on this catalog.

Both catalogs include links for braille titles with electronic files.

NLS regularly produces two publications listing braille titles: *Braille Book Review* and *Braille Books*.

- [Braille Book Review \(BBR\)](#) is published six times a year and includes recently produced braille titles available for loan. *BBR* is available in braille or large print. The braille format of *BBR* includes an order form to request audio books announced in *Talking Book Topics*. Electronic braille issues are available via [MN BARD](#).
- [Braille Books catalogs](#). Every two years, the NLS compiles a list of braille books added to the collection during that period. Titles are sorted into several subject categories.

A comprehensive catalog of braille titles does not exist in braille or large print. The MBTBL loans braille copies of the catalogs. Large print copies may be kept. Electronic braille files for catalogs produced after 1992 are available via [MN BARD](#).

The MBTBL staff helps patrons locate authors, titles and titles by subject. Contact MBTBL by telephone: 1-800-722-0550, email: mn.btbl@state.mn.us or send your inquiries to the library at 388 SE 6th Avenue, Faribault, MN 55021-6340.

Question: What is the loan period for braille books?

Answer: Titles are loaned for six weeks. Upon request, titles may be renewed.

Question: What happens if braille books are not returned?

Answer: If library materials are not returned, no additional titles will be sent. The MBTBL collection includes one copy of most titles. We ask everyone to be considerate of others and return titles promptly. MBTBL does not charge overdue fines.

Question: Are magazines available in braille?

Answer: Yes, NLS produces braille magazines. [Visit our Magazines webpage](#) for information about braille magazines.

Question: Is it possible to have print information produced in braille for me?

Answer: The Communication Center, State Services for the Blind, [Braille and Audio Transcription](#) section transcribes print texts into braille. Transcription services are available to the library patrons and to the public. Transcriptions provided to non-braille users are provided for a fee.

The National Federation of the Blind website includes a [list of braille transcription providers throughout the United States](#).

Learning Braille

Question: I am a visually disabled adult. Should I learn braille?

Answer: Learning braille requires some study and practice. Not every braille user chooses to read braille books. Some use braille as a daily living aid to braille lists of addresses and telephone numbers; reminder notes, and labels replace printed lists. The American Foundation for the Blind discusses the possibilities of braille for adults on their webpage titled "[All About Braille.](#)" (See the section titled "Learning Braille as an Adult.")

Question: As a visually disabled adult, are instructors available to teach me braille?

Answer: Several Minnesota organizations provide braille instruction and other independent living skills. Visit the following websites for information about the services they provide:

- [State Services for the Blind](#)
- [Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind](#)
- [Vision Loss Resources \(VLR\)](#) offers several programs to residents of Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Washington and Wright counties.
- [Hadley School for the Blind](#), located in Illinois, provides correspondence courses.

Question: I do not have vision loss but I would like to learn braille. Are braille courses offered for sighted people?

Answer: In Minnesota, [Volunteer Braille Services](#) provides training to prospective transcriptionists at their Golden Valley office.

For information regarding online braille courses visit [Perkins Scout](#), the [Texas School for the Blind](#) or the [Hadley School for the Blind](#).

Question: I would like to braille materials for others. Are there requirements that I must meet?

Answer: Yes. The [NLS Braille Literacy circular](#) provides information on transcription training and certification requirements for literary, math/scientific notation and music. Individuals who wish to transcribe print into braille should take an NLS transcription course. Braille transcription requires accuracy and knowledge of braille rules. Braille cells may be used in different contexts and have different meanings. Transcription errors may cause the reader to misinterpret the text.

Question: I read braille very well. What are the requirements to become a braille proof-reader?

To learn more about receiving a proof reader's certificate, [visit the National Federation of the Blind's "Literary Braille Proofreading Course Information" webpage](#).

General Questions about Braille

Question: Who invented braille?

Answer: Louis Braille (1809-1852), blinded in childhood, invented the tactile reading and writing system now known as braille. While a student at the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris, Braille heard a soldier discuss a tactile night writing system; then devised his own tactile system and taught schoolmates. More information about Louis Braille and his invention is located on the [Duxbury Systems](#) and [American Foundation for the Blind Braille Bug](#) webpages.

For more general information about the history of braille, visit the [NLS Factsheet "About Braille"](#).

Question: What is braille?

Answer: Braille is a tactile or touch-based reading and writing system which uses combinations of raised dots to represent letters and punctuation, as well as, math, science and music symbols. A braille cell resembles the number six on a domino.

Question: In writing, when should the word "braille" be capitalized? I have seen it written as both uppercase "Braille" and lowercase "braille."

Answer: If you refer to Louis Braille, the inventor, Braille is capitalized because it is a proper name. When referring to the tactile reading and writing system, the word braille is not capitalized. For further information on this topic, [open BANA's PDF titled "Capitalization Style for the Word 'braille'"](#) (requires Adobe Reader).

Question: What is the difference between uncontracted and contracted braille?

Answer: Uncontracted and contracted braille refers to the rules used to transcribe print text into braille. Uncontracted or alphabetic braille text is brailled letter-by-letter from the print into braille. In addition to letters it also includes the braille characters for numbers, monetary denominations and letter capitalization.

Contracted braille or literary braille may be compared to shorthand used by sighted individuals. 189 braille characters are used to represent words and common letter combinations to save space and increase reading speed.

More information about uncontracted braille is provided in [BANA's PDF titled "Braille Codes Update 2007"](#).

Question: How many braille codes exist?

Answer: In addition to literary braille, braille codes have been developed to accurately denote computer programming, math and science, and music notations. Literary braille is used in combination with these specialized codes. In the United States braille guidelines, codes and rules are established by the [Braille Authority of North America \(BANA\)](#).

Question: Do all countries use braille?

Answer: Yes, the braille alphabet is used worldwide. Contractions that represent the common letter combinations found in each language have been developed. For more information, [visit the Perkins Library's "World Braille Usage" webpage](#).

Question: Are there other tactile reading systems in use today?

Answer: Yes. Moon Format is a tactile reading system used primarily in Great Britain. Webpages by the [Royal National Institute for the Blind](#) and [Moon Literacy.org](#) offer additional information.

Where to Purchase...

Question: Where could I purchase braille supplies?

Answer: Two Minnesota sources known for selling braille aids and appliances are [The Low Vision Store](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota and [The Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind](#) in Duluth, Minnesota.

The NLS publication, ["Braille Literacy: Resources for Instruction, Writing Equipment, and Supplies"](#) lists additional resources.

Question: I would like to purchase personal copies of braille books for personal use or for gift-giving.

Answer: The Perkins School for the Blind provides a list of braille and print/braille producers on their [Perkins Scout webpage](#). Several of the listed sources sell titles; others loan items.