

CORE SUBJECTS: ENGLISH, SPELLING, LANGUAGE

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF AVIATION

is the first step in understanding people who fly. All pilots know that clear communication is key to staying safe in the air. Pilots need to talk to other pilots and air traffic controllers in a concise way that everyone can understand. Miscommunication can cause problems when they are 10,000 feet in the air, taxiing across a runway, and everywhere in between.

While the language of aviation worldwide is English, pilots have developed a sort of universal code to help keep their communications as clear as possible to anyone listening. Pilots use a phonetic alphabet when saying anything they need to spell out, substituting a particular word that begins with the letter they need. Civilian and military pilots around the world—from Albany to Zurich—use the same words for each letter, such as “alpha” for “A” and “zulu” for “Z.”

Add a twist to your next English or spelling lesson. Teach students the phonetic language used by pilots. Explain the need for clear communications regardless of native language or regional accent.

Here is the phonetic aviation alphabet:

A Alpha	R Romeo
B Bravo	S Sierra
C Charlie	T Tango
D Delta	U Uniform
E Echo	V Victor
F Foxtrot	W Whiskey
G Golf	X X-ray
H Hotel	Y Yankee
I India	Z Zulu
J Juliet	
K Kilo	3 Tree
L Lima (LEE-muh)	9 Niner
M Mike	0 Zero
N November	All other numbers
O Oscar	use standard
P Papa	pronunciation
Q Quebec (kuh-BEK)	

PRACTICAL USES

Pilots most frequently use the phonetic alphabet to identify specific airplanes. In the U.S. most aircraft are registered with the Federal Aviation Administration. They provide what is often referred to as the “N” number, since all U.S. airplane registrations start with that letter. An aircraft’s N-number is made up of some combination of letters and numbers painted or affixed to the airplane, similar to a car’s license plate, but large enough to be visible when the airplane is in flight.

ACTIVITY: Radiospeak

Photocopy this activity for classroom use.
Go to www.aopa.org/path for student worksheets.

TEACHERS:

From this activity, students will learn how to use the phonetic alphabet .

SPELL OUT THE FOLLOWING WORDS USING THE PHONETIC ALPHABET:

1. PILOT
2. AIRPLANE
3. SCHOOL
4. Name of your school mascot
5. Your city or town
6. Your first name

HOW WOULD YOU IDENTIFY THE FOLLOWING AIRCRAFT WHEN TALKING TO AN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER ON THE RADIO?