



INTRODUCTION

ALPHABET

The Latin alphabet was derived from the Etruscan alphabet some time before the seventh century BCE. The Etruscans were a people in pre-Roman Italy.

Their alphabet owes much to the Greek alphabet. In turn, the Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet. Phoenician traders had spread their system of writing throughout the Mediterranean region. The Phoenician alphabet itself can be traced to the North Semitic alphabet, which was used in Syria and Palestine as early as the eleventh century BCE, and is considered to be the earliest fully developed alphabetic writing system.



An Etruscan couple reclining on a funerary sarcophagus. Archaeologists have recovered a treasure trove of everyday objects from Etruscan tombs. The Etruscans buried these items so that the deceased could use them in the afterlife.

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Look at the English alphabet in the left column, and at the Latin alphabet in the right one. The Latin alphabet is accompanied by the names of the Latin letters (in parentheses).

English Alphabet		Latin Alphabet		
Uppercase	Lowercase	Uppercase	Lowercase	Letter Name
A	a	A	a	(a “äh”)
B	b	B	b	(be “bay”)
C	c	C	c	(ce “cay”)
D	d	D	d	(de “day”)
E	e	E	e	(e “eh”)
F	f	F	f	(ef)
G	g	G	g	(ge “gay”)
H	h	H	h	(ha “hah”)
I	i	I	i	(i “ee”)
J	j			
K	k	K	k	(ka “kah”)
L	l	L	l	(el)
M	m	M	m	(em)
N	n	N	n	(en)
O	o	O	o	(o “oh”)
P	p	P	p	(pe “pay”)
Q	q	Q	q	(qu “koo”)
R	r	R	r	(er)
S	s	S	s	(es)
T	t	T	t	(te “tay”)
U	u	U	u	(u “oo”)
V	v	V	v	(u consonant)
W	w			
X	x	X	x	(ix “eex”)
Y	y	Y	y	(upsilon)
Z	z	Z	z	(zeta “dzayta”)

The English alphabet is derived directly from the Latin alphabet. This accounts for the great similarities between the two alphabets. There are 26 letters in the English alphabet and 24 in the Latin. The differences are the following:

- The letter **W**, **w** (which is the doubled letter **v**) is missing in the Latin alphabet.
- The letter **J**, **j** is a more recent invention. In fact, it appears in Latin texts written during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as well as in many modern editions of ancient Latin texts. It is used to indicate the semi-vowel **i**, sometimes called consonantal **i**. The consonantal **i** is