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The military phonetic alphabet was created to properly exchange communication by radio or telephone. More accurately known as International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet (IRDS), it consists of 26 code words that substitute each letter of the alphabet. The phonetic alphabet is often used by military and civilians to communicate error-free spelling or messages over the phone. For example, Alpha for "A", Bravo for "B", and Charlie for "C". Additionally, IRDS can be used to relay military code, slang, or shorthand. For instance, Bravo Zulu meaning "Well Done". History of the Military Phonetic Alphabet
The earliest phonetic alphabet was created in 1927 by the International Telecommunication Union. Its codewords consisted of cities across the world: Amsterdam, Baltimore, Casablanca, Denmark, Edison, Florida, Gallipoli, Havana, Italia, Jerusalem, Kilogramme, Liverpool, Madagascar, New York, Oslo, Paris, Quebec, Roma, Santiago, Tripoli, Uppsala, Valencia, Washington, Xanthippe, Yokohama, Zurich. Its military use wasn't pertinent until the coming of World War II. "Able Baker" By 1941, the first two radiotelephonic alphabet codes were created: "Able" and "Baker" to represent the first two letters of the alphabet. The Royal Air Force used a radiotelephony system similar to the U.S, but it was clear the Allies needed a streamlined form of communication. After criticism for its English-prominent words, Able Baker was modified to incorporate code words with sounds in English, French, and Spanish and later approved by 31 countries. Able Baker has been modified several times before established as the universal IRDS during the Cold War in the 1950s. IRDS, developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), is used by both the United States and NATO. Only four words - Charlie, Mike, Victor, and X-Ray - are still used from the Able Baker alphabet. The Military Alphabet
The current military phonetic alphabet with letter characters, telephony, and pronunciation. CharacterCode WordPronunciation AAlphaAL fah BBravoBRAH voh CCharlieCHAR lee DDeltaDEL tah EEchoEKK oh FFoxtrofFOKS trot GGolfGolf HHotelHO tell IIndiaIN dee ah JJulietJEW lee ett KKiloKEY loh LLimaLEE mah MMikeMike NNNovemberNOH vem ber OOscarOSS car PPapaPAH pah QQuebeckh BECK RRomeoROW me oh SSierrasee AIR ah TTangoTANG go UUniformYOU nee form VVictorVIK ter WWhiskeyWISS key XY-RayEKS ray Y'YankeeYANG kee ZZuluZOO loo Common Military Alphabet Phrases
11 Bravo - Army Infantry
40 Mike Mike - 40 Millimeter Grenade or M203 Grenade Launcher
Bravo Zulu - Good Job or Well Done
Charlie Foxtrot - Cluster F**k
Charlie Mike - Continue Mission
Echo Tango Sierra - Expiration Term of Service (someone who is about to complete their tour of duty)
Lima Charlie - Loud and Clear
Mikes - Minutes
November Golf - NG or No Go (fail)
Oscar Mike - On the Move
Tango Mike - Thanks Much
Tango Uniform - Toes Up, meaning killed or destroyed
Tango Yankee - Thank You
Whiskey Charlie - Water Closet (toilet)
Whiskey Pete - White Phosphorus
Whiskey Tango Foxtrot - WTF
The NATO phonetic alphabet is a spelling alphabet used by airline pilots, police, members of the military, and other officials when communicating over radio or telephone. The purpose of the phonetic alphabet is to ensure that letters are clearly understood even when speech is distorted or hard to hear. The importance of this universal code cannot be overstressed. Men's lives, even the fate of a battle, may depend on a signaler's message, on a signaler's pronunciation of a single word, even of a single letter. (Fraser and Gibbons 1925). More formally known as the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet (also called the ICAO phonetic or spelling alphabet), the NATO phonetic alphabet was developed in the 1950s as part of the International Code of Signals (INTERCO), which originally included visual and sound signals. "The phonetic alphabet has been around for a long time, but has not always been the same," says Thomas J. Cutler in The Bluejacket's Manual. He continues: Back in the days of World War II, the phonetic alphabet began with the letters "Able, Baker, Charlie," K was "King," and S was "Sugar." After the war, when the NATO alliance was formed, the phonetic alphabet was changed to make it easier for the people who speak the different languages found in the alliance. That version has remained the same, and today the phonetic alphabet begins with "Alfa, Bravo, Charlie," K is now "Kilo," and S is "Sierra," (Cutler 2017). In the U.S., the International Code of Signals was adopted in 1897 and updated in 1927, but it wasn't until 1938 that all the letters in the alphabet were assigned a word. Today the NATO Phonetic Alphabet is widely used throughout North America and Europe. Note that the NATO phonetic alphabet is not phonetic in the sense that linguists use the term. It's not related to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is used in linguistics to represent the precise pronunciation of individual words. Instead, "phonetic" here simply means related to the way letters sound. Here are the letters in the NATO phonetic alphabet: Alfa (or Alpha)BravoCharlieDeltaEchoFoxtrotGolfHotelIndiaJuliet (or Juliet)KiloLimaMikeNovemberOscarPapaQuebecRomeoSierraTangoUniformVictorWhiskeyX-rayYankeeZulu
The NATO phonetic alphabet has a variety of applications, most of these relating to safety. Air traffic controllers, for example, often use the NATO Phonetic Alphabet to communicate with pilots, and this is especially important when they would otherwise be difficult to understand. If they wanted to identify plane KLM, they would call it, "Kilo Lima Mike." If they wanted to tell a pilot to land on strip F, they would say, "Land on Foxtrot." Cutler, Thomas J. The Bluejacket's Manual. 25th ed., Naval Institute Press, 2017.Fraser, Edward, and John Gibbons. Soldier and Sailor Words and Phrases. George Routledge and Sons, 1925. Adapted from Getty Images So, your biggest question right now is probably, "What are the NATO alphabet words?" Well, here they are:nato alphabet tableThis work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-ND 4.0). Please credit WordFinder by YourDictionary.NATO numbers table(CC BY-ND 4.0)These 40 words allow people in the military, aeronautics, commercial airline and other such industries to effectively communicate with each other, reducing the potential risk for disastrous mistakes.Playing NATO Words in Word GamesKnowing about the NATO phonetic alphabet is all well and good. But, with this being WordFinder, what we'd really like to know is what the words mean and if they can help us in any word games. That's why we compiled this list to teach you more about each word. The majority of NATO words are legal for games like Scrabble or Words With Friends. The NATO alphabet words that are not allowed, however, are marked with an asterisk (*) below.Alfa: This is a different spelling of the word "alpha," which represents the first or highest member in a group or list. This spelling was actually created specifically for the NATO phonetic alphabet to ensure that non-English speakers would correctly pronounce the word.Bravo: "Bravo" is a word you use to express approval or to celebrate someone's accomplishment. In Scrabble and Words With Friends, it's a great word to play the rarer V tile.Charlie: This is a word that's mostly likely playable in Scrabble and Words With Friends because of the NATO alphabet. Typically, names or any type of proper nouns are banned in these games. But, because "Charlie" serves as a normal word in the NATO alphabet, the games added them to their dictionaries.Delta: Delta is most commonly known as the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet. It's also a landmass that builds up where a river empties into a different body of water. For word games, it's a convenient word to use some common letter tiles.Echo: An echo is the repeating of a sound that has already been made by something. It's also the imitating or repeating of someone's words or ideas, either to support or mock them. Foxtrot: This is another word that people might not initially assume is playable in Words With Friends and Scrabble. The foxtrot is a type of dance, but in word games, it's a handy word for adding an extension to another word on the board, using the valuable X tile or even scoring a bingo.Golf: Golf is a sport that originated in Scotland and is now popular worldwide. Played on a large outdoor course, the goal is to use golf clubs to knock the small, aerodynamic golf balls into holes on the field.Hotel: As anyone who's done a lot of traveling would know, a hotel is a large building filled with bedrooms meant for temporary lodging. India: India is a large country in South Asia. It borders other prominent Asian countries, such as China, Pakistan and Nepal, as well as the Indian Ocean, which is named after the country.Juliett*: Juliet is an English name that means "youthful." For the NATO alphabet, a second T was added to the name to prevent any non-English speakers from pronouncing the name with a silent T.Lima: Though it's valid in Scrabble, Lima has no real definition other than Peru's capital city. The word is similar to "Charlie" in that it's a proper noun that serves as a regular word in the NATO alphabet.Mike: Mike is the shortened form of Michael. Michael originates from Hebrew and means "Who is like God?" It's also an informal abbreviation for the word "microphone."November: November is the 11th month in the Julian calendar. What's interesting about it is that it means "nine," as it was originally the ninth month of the Roman calendar.Oscar: This word is the same case as "Lima." The name is most commonly associated with the Academy Awards, as the trophies awarded for that ceremony are called Oscars. Regardless of what it's known for, it was the perfect O word to include in the phonetic alphabet.Papa: This word, meaning "father," originated in France. Originally, it referred to "father" in the sense of the pope and the papacy.Quebec*: Quebec is the largest Canadian province by area and the second largest by population. It is also home to a large population of native French speakers.Romeo: Romeo's literal meaning is someone is from Rome or Italy. While not a common name today, it is still well-known thanks to William Shakespeare's classic play, Romeo and Juliet.Sierra: Sierra is a female name that's popular in America, but it is also a specific type of mountain range. A sierra range is one that, from a distance, has a jagged, almost sawtooth-like appearance.Tango: A tango is a type of dance that originated in Argentina. The dance is designed for and performed by pairs of dancers, which is how the idiom "it takes two to tango" came to be.Uniform: This word of Latin origin denotes that multiple things or people are the same and consistent with each other. That is why we call a set of clothing used to identify members of a group the same word.Victor: "Victor" is a person's name, but "victor" is whoever bests an opponent in a competition. So, even if you aren't named Victor, you can become a victor by using the words in this list to win your next game.Whiskey: Similar to "foxtrot," playing "whiskey" is a great way to make extensions or possibly get a bingo. It's a longer word, and it makes great use of some of the more uncommon letters, such as K, W and Y. Yankee*: Yankee is an old term used to describe someone from the northeastern United States. Before that, it was used by Dutch settlers as an insult to the English.Zulu*: The Zulu is a Nguni ethnic group. In fact, they are the largest nation of people in South Africa. The name also refers to the native language that the people speak.How the NATO Alphabet Came to BeDuring the early 20th century, when the radio and telephone became essential tools for communication, it became clear that people needed a system to make sure messages were understood correctly. Many letters sound similar over calls, such as "s" and "f" or "b" and "v." It was also easy to confuse words that sound similar but mean different things, such as the number "nine" and the German word "nein."Starting With the ICAO Phonetic AlphabetTo remedy this, many organizations created their own phonetic alphabets. One of these was the International Commission for Air Navigation (ICAO), which adopted one of the first systems. Their system became a popular standard. It was adopted and modified by many other organizations across the world. It even served crucial roles in both World Wars.Introducing the NATO Phonetic AlphabetIn 1956, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted the ICAO's system, albeit with a few modifications, to create the NATO phonetic alphabet. Since NATO is an intergovernmental organization, the system was easy to distribute to every country that wanted to use it. The alphabet's words are also easy to remember, say and hear for people who don't primarily use English, making it the ideal international system. There are still other phonetic alphabets in use. And, the ICAO's system still works in tandem with the NATO alphabet. That said, the current standard is to follow NATO's guidelines and the NATO phonetic alphabet in most cases.More Word Lists to StudyThe NATO phonetic alphabet is an invaluable tool for millions of people around the world. Even in the digital age, communicating over the phone and radio are essential. This list of alphabet words helps everyone speak the same language. Knowing what other people mean is important, which is why slang terms often become points of confusion. If you often find yourself puzzled by modern slang, we have a few word lists that can help you. Take a look at our New York slang and our Gen Z slang lists to get started.Zac Pricener has been a content creator for the past eight years. He's a bit of an all-around nerd, and he has a bad habit of working movie and TV show references into conversations whenever possible.

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