



**World Blind Union  
Union Mondiale Des Aveugles  
Unión Mundial de Ciegos**

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**The Importance of Braille Literacy  
WBU Press Release: World Braille Day  
January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Toronto, Canada:** On January 4<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate World Braille Day and the huge impact that Louis Braille's invention has had on the lives of blind people all over the world. Braille always has been and always will be more than just a tool for blind individuals who use it. Braille represents competency, independence, and equality.

Braille is not a code to be deciphered but it is a method of reading and writing that is equal in value to print for sighted people. The way in which blind and partially sighted people develop literacy skills may differ, but the goal is the same: to use reading, writing, and other literacy tools to gather and understand important information and to convey important information to themselves and to others.

A lot has changed since Braille was invented almost 200 years ago, both in technology and educational practices. Nowadays, various students have access to different kinds of devices such as refreshable braille displays and/or braille note takers (a dedicated computer for braille users). The books in Braille that are used now are often produced by high-speed braille embossers using translation software that converts the printed word into Braille cells. However, the fundamental importance of Braille remains unchanged and as important as ever.

There is a real concern in the blind community that there is less support for teaching, using and investing in Braille, particularly among educators and governments, due to the belief that technologies such as e-books, audiobooks, and screen readers can replace Braille. This issue is a worldwide concern, in developed and developing countries alike. "Other formats such as audiobooks, which are generally cheaper than Braille, cannot replace Braille and advances such as the newer and more affordable refreshable Braille displays will support Braille

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literacy in the future,” said Kevin Carey, the new Chair of the World Braille Council.

While advances in technology are welcome, we recommend that technology should be used to enhance the use of Braille, not to replace it. Evidence supports our belief that those who have the opportunity to fully acquire Braille reading and writing skills attain better literacy, better education, and employment outcomes than those whose learning has been primarily supported by spoken word technology.

Literacy – the ability to read and write – is vital to a successful education, career, and quality of life in today’s world. Whether in the form of curling up with a good book, jotting down a phone number, making a shopping list, or writing a report on a computer, being literate means participating effectively at home and in society.

The World Blind Union strongly recommends that all blind and severely partially-sighted children be given the opportunity to learn and become proficient in Braille reading and writing skills and that they receive instruction from those who are thoroughly trained and qualified to teach Braille.

We also strongly recommend that all blind persons have access to a variety of books and publications in braille that are up-to-date. This recommendation can be achieved in part by governments ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty, which allows for copyright exceptions to facilitate the creation of accessible books and other copyrighted works and for the import and export of such materials across national boundaries.

To read our revised Position Statement on Braille Literacy, which includes a full list of our recommendations as well as a description of the Braille alphabet, please [click here](#).



The **World Blind Union (WBU)** is the global organization representing the estimated 285 million people worldwide who are blind or partially sighted. Members consist of organizations run by blind people advocating on their own behalf and organizations that serve the

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blind, in over 190 countries, as well as international organizations working in the field of vision impairment.

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