

Does English Need a New Alphabet?

By Alex Bellos

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw was a passionate campaigner for spelling reform. When he died in 1950, he left money in his will for the creation and promotion of a new alphabet. The result was Shavian, a phonetic alphabet of 48 letters.

Here are five phrases in English, listed randomly, using both the Shavian and Roman alphabets. Match the Shavian to the Roman versions.

You will also notice that some Shavian letters come in pairs, such as **S** and **ʒ**, and **J** and **ɾ**. By thinking about the sounds these letters make, what is the Shavian letter for “b”?

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| 1. ɔ ɔɾ1 ʒɔɾ11 | a. this is Shavian |
| 2. /ɥ ʒɾɾ ɔɾ1ʒ | b. the cat slept |
| 3. J ɾɾɔ | c. to learn |
| 4. ɔɾ1 ɾɾ ɾɾɾɾɾ | d. we have cats |
| 5. 1 ɾɾɾ | e. for ever |