

Alphabet Counting

The purpose of this activity is for educators to become aware of the different skills involved in counting by inviting them to use a new counting system. In this activity, educators will use the alphabet to count and solve simple addition and subtraction problems.

Key Concepts

- Experience how young children learn to make connections between quantities, number words, and numerals through counting.
- Recognize different strategies children use when learning to count.

Materials and Setup

- Small items to count (for example, blocks, pencils, paperclips, counting bears, rocks)
- Paper and pencil for notes
- Dot-pattern cards



15–30 minutes



Large group



In-person or virtual professional learning

Activity Instructions

This activity works best with a facilitator who guides the large group through each step.

- If you are a facilitator, consider using these instructions as talking points.
- If you are doing the activity on your own, working and reflecting with a partner may be helpful.

Learning About the Alphabet World

In this activity, you will use the alphabet to count sets of items. The purpose of this activity is to help you become aware of the different skills involved in counting by inviting you to use a new counting system. To do this, we will learn a new counting system—the alphabet counting system. Instead of numbers, we will use letters to count sets of items.

Let's begin by singing the alphabet song together.

1. Using the alphabet as a count list, what is the first letter in the count list?
2. Using the alphabet as a count list, what is the last letter in the count list?

Counting Fingers and Toes

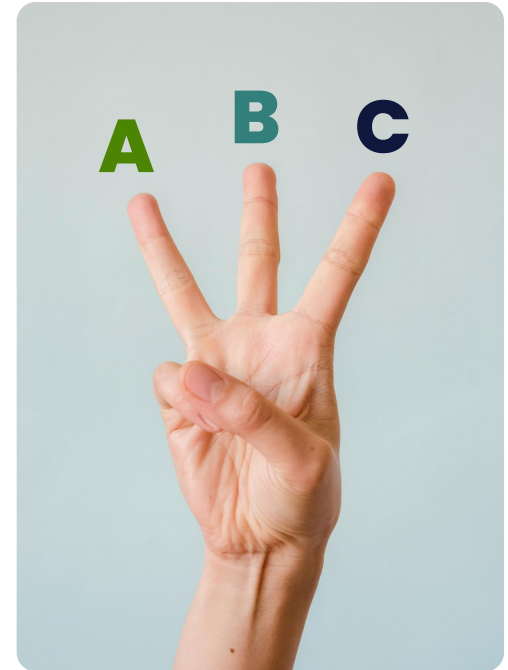
Let's use the alphabet counting system to count our fingers and toes. For example, "A" finger is equivalent to one finger. "B" fingers are equivalent to two fingers.

3. How many fingers do you have on one hand?
4. How many fingers do you have on two hands?
5. How many fingers and toes do you have altogether?

Counting Sets of Items

Take some small items and one container.

6. Put "D" items in your container.
7. Put "L" items in your container.
8. Put "F" items in your container.



Addition and Subtraction

Solve the following addition and subtraction problems using the alphabet counting system. Use any strategies and materials that you need to solve these problems. For example, use small items, your fingers, or paper and pencil.

Solve the following addition problems:

9. $C + A =$
10. $D + C =$
11. $B + G =$

Solve the following subtraction problems:

12. $D - A =$
13. $I - D =$
14. $K - H =$

Reflect and Discuss

Reflect on and discuss these questions with a partner or in a small group.

1. What strategies or materials did you use to solve the alphabet math problems? How did the strategies resemble those that children use when they learn to count?
2. In what ways did your knowledge of the alphabet help you when using the alphabet list to count?
3. How did you feel while learning to count using this new counting system? What might this tell us about how children feel when learning to count using the number system?
4. How might this experience affect your approach with children as they learn to count?
5. How does this experience relate to your work with multilingual learners who may be learning to count in more than one language?

Child Activities

For activities that support children's learning about number and counting, explore the books and related activities below.

- 0 to 3 years: [Banana for Two](#) ([Plátano para dos](#) in Spanish) by Ellen Meyer and the activity [Exploring Ones and Twos](#) ([Explorando uno y dos](#) in Spanish)
- 3 to 5 years: [10 Minutes Till Bedtime](#) ([10 minutos hasta la hora de acostarse](#) in Spanish) by Peggy Rathmann and the activity [One to Ten](#) ([Uno a diez](#) in Spanish)
- 6 to 8 years: [A Chair for My Mother](#) ([Una silla para mi madre](#) in Spanish) by Vera B. Williams and the activity [First to 100](#) ([Primero a 100](#) in Spanish)

Answer Key

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|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. A | 8. This is equivalent to 6 items. |
| 2. Z | 9. D |
| 3. E | 10. G |
| 4. J | 11. I |
| 5. T | 12. C |
| 6. This is equivalent to 4 items. | 13. E |
| 7. This is equivalent to 12 items. | 14. C |

