

ALPHABETOMANIA: From "A" to "Z"—or is it "Zed"?

by Jason B. Alter

The mere letters of the alphabet can be used creatively in the ESL classroom. There is the standard mind-boggler of asking the students to recite the alphabet backwards, starting with "Z," for example. The pronunciation of each letter in itself often requires practice by the class. But here I am suggesting a letter-by-letter exercise, with one or two admittedly far-fetched extrapolations.

The Honolulu newspapers often have a section labeled "E-1," and this label set my TESL mind working. How about a quick run through the alphabet, using this seemingly bare-boned "E-1" prototype? English lends itself to a myriad of language-learning/teaching possibilities, and the TESL practitioner has only to select from the cornucopia to motivate his students to a turn.

- A-1 There's the sauce, of course. (Cf. "on/off the sauce.") Also, the notion that "A-1 means "top-notch." And then, isn't that one of Lawrence Welk's trademarks: "A-one, a-two, a-three...."?
- B-1 Vitamin B-1. Cf. "I'd rather see one than *Be one*."
- C-1 Tell me if you *see one*. Homonymous proclivities should be encouraged. Cf. "Nancy *won*."
- D-1 Sandra *Dee won*. It was a windy *one*. (This is a once-over-lightly treatment; the list of elaborations could go on and on. The aim is to involve the student, not to lecture to him/her.)
- E-1 He tried hard, and *'e won*. Andy *won*. Cf. E-1 rank in the Army.
- F-1 He flew an F-1. She'll get an "*F one* of these days.
- G-1 *Gee, one* just left. It's a dingy *one*. (Here, I limit myself to the A-1, B-1, C-1 category; one could of course proceed to A-2, B-2, C-2, etc., with G-2 being an obvious example.)
- H-1 Hawaiian example: the name of our freeways. Cf. minimal-pair possibilities of "H": "each," "ouch," "itch."

- I-1 *I won*, for a change. Did you *eye one*?
- J-1 *Jay won* the whole shooting match. *O.J. won* the Heisman Trophy. He's here on a *J-1* visa.
- K-1 Give *Kay one* of the apples. They might *o.k. one* of the proposals.
- L-1 I'll ride on the *el one* of these days. Cf. "tell one," "sell one," "fell one," etc.
- M-1 He fired an *M-1* rifle. She'll wear a *diadem one* day.
- N-1 We'll go there *again one* day. *End one*, and begin another.
- O-1 *Oh, one* glass is plenty. *Oh, won* again, did you?
- P-1 *Pappy won*. She's the happy *one*.
- Q-1 Thank *you, one* and all. Get in *queue one*. *Cue one* another.
- R-1 They *are one*. They *Are won* over easily.
- S-1 *Finesse won*. They enjoyed the school's *largesse one* time.

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- T-1 *Tee one* off. *Tea won* out over coffee.
- U-1 *You won*. Did they give *you one*? "*U*" *won*, rather than "non-U."
- V-1 It's a heavy *one*. *TV won*, not radio.
- W-1 Is the form *W-1* or *W-2*? I'll *double you one* time.
- X-1 *X one* of them out. His *ex won* the case.
- Y-1 *Why one* would complain is beyond me. The "*Y*" *won* the game.
- Z-1 It's an easy *one*. *Fonzie won*.

There are cultural nuances to expatiate upon in most, if not all, of the examples. Sentence-making, rhyming, and insights into colloquialisms are attendant activities. Go for it!