THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

AN INTRODUCTION TO BRAILLE LABELLING

Matthew Horspool: This episode of BrailleCast Extra is made possible thanks to a grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. For more information about the Trust, visit its website at wcmt.org.uk.

Welcome back. Coming up this time, an Introduction to Braille Labelling, which, thanks to the marvels of technology is actually presented by me but it's introduced by Dave Williams.

Dave Williams: Hello, good evening and a very warm welcome to the Braillists Foundation Tuesday training Master Class. This week we're going to be talking about all things Braille labelling and our presenter this week is Matthew Horspool. Matthew is a Braille transcriber, has a background working in education, is also a passionate user of Braille music and works as the secretary on our board of trustees. So, looking forward to labelling with Matthew.

Before we get started, just a little bit of housekeeping to make you aware of. This session, as with all the Braillists' sessions, is run in line with our moderation policy. So we do invite you to remain muted for the most part so that everybody can clearly hear what is being spoken. That's especially important for people dialling in on the telephone. However there will be opportunities to ask questions and we do encourage you to interact and so if you want to participate at any point, then you can raise your hand and you do that, if you're dialling in on the phone, you press that star key followed by the number nine key. On Windows, hold down the Alt key with the letter Y. On Mac hold the Option key with the letter Y. And of course if you are on an iDevice, press the More button and you'll find the Raise Hand button in there.

So when you are invited to unmute, you should get a message on your screen to do so and helping us with moderation duties this evening is Holly. Good evening to you, Holly.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Hello.

Dave Williams: So, Holly, you're going to be keeping an eye out for those hands and then you'll let us know who's coming up and who's going to be next.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes.

Dave Williams: So that's the housekeeping out of the way. Before we go to Matthew, I just want to make you aware of some of our other events. So this is our fifth Tuesday evening Master Class. You can find the previous four on our Media page. So if you go to braillists.org/media then you can listen to recordings of our previous sessions covering the Orbit Reader, slate and stylus, Braille music and there was another one that I should remember. I think it was Braille and languages, yes, learning how to use Braille for learning languages. Those sessions are available to listen to on demand from braillists.org/media. Or you can pick them up on our BrailleCast podcast feed.

If you'd like to join us next week, we'll be talking about the Cranmer Abacus and this is one of the items that we have been distributing through our equipment program and if you're not aware of that, at the Braillists Foundation, we are making available some low-cost equipment. It's free to you for attending a Braillists session or to subscribers of the Braillists newsletter.

And finally, last thing from me is just to remind you that on Thursday evenings we have our Braille Book Club. This is an opportunity to read Braille with other Braillists. There's absolutely no pressure. You don't have to read. But it's a great place if you've got questions about reading Braille and they're a really friendly bunch and I'm sure they'd make you very welcome if you'd like to join the Braille Book Club on a Thursday evening from 6pm. And on Fridays we have our Open Forum session which is just a general catch-up, can be to do with Braille, can be to do with all things tactile but it can just be a general "How are you," winding down for the weekend.

Those people asking about Braille For Beginners which finished last week, we do plan to start a new Braille For Beginners course in January and details of that will be available through our newsletter. So if you're not already, do sign up for the newsletter and you can do that on the braillists.org website.

Alright, I think that's just about everything from me. So I'm going to hand it over to Matthew Horspool who will tell us all about using Braille for labelling. Matthew.

Matthew Horspool: Well, good evening, everyone. It's wonderful to be here. I'm sure I'm a familiar voice to many people in the Braillists calls but it's quite exciting to be on this side of the microphone. I'm normally doing research or writing notes or answering technical questions and looking up answers to questions on behalf of other people. So it's really good to be doing my own session. It really actually feels quite different so we'll see how we go.

As Dave said, I'm going to be talking about Braille labelling. It's fair to say that the majority of this session is probably going to be talking about labelling around the kitchen and things like that and domestic household objects. We're not going to talk too much about labels that can go through the washing machine or things like that. There are some strategies which I will touch on briefly at the end but if you're looking to label your clothes and things like that, then there may not be an awful lot here for you but stick with it anyway because you might pick up a few tips along the way.

The way I'm going to do it, I think, depending on how time goes and how questions are going, is split it up into sort of three segments of ten to 15 minutes each and then at the end of each segment, open it up for questions and there'll be about five to ten minutes for questions within each section.

Before I really get started though and talk about labelling, I think it's important to address the elephant in the room which is why would you want to use Braille for labelling anyway because you've got all sorts of technology out there. You've got the iPhone and on the iPhone you've got Seeing AI and you've got all the apps, Aira, Be My Eyes, all of these apps. You've got things like the PenFriend. You've got this whole load of technology. So why would you want to use Braille?

The first thing I'd say is that Braille doesn't have to be exclusive. You might find that you need to use technology in order to actually make the Braille label in the first place. If you need to know what a jar is, you might use Seeing AI to find out what the jar is and then write a Braille label. The reason why you'd want to do that is because the Braille label might be quicker than using Seeing AI every single time. So we're not actually trying to tell you that Braille is the only thing you should use but what we can tell you is that Braille is low-cost. You can pick up a Braille labeller for about £30. You can pick up ten rolls of tape to use with the Braille labeller for about £15. So admittedly some iPhone apps are free but this is a very low-cost entry and certainly cheaper than buying something like a PenFriend.

It's low maintenance or at least it can be low maintenance and there's no inherent reliance on batteries and I think this is really important because if you're looking in the freezer for something and your iPhone battery is dead and the only way that you can use your labels is by using an iPhone, then you're basically stuck going hungry until your iPhone is sufficiently charged. You don't have this problem with Braille.

There's no equipment required to read the label and this is sort of the same as not being reliant on batteries really but it's extended further. It means that for example if your PenFriend has been left in a drawer and you can't remember which drawer you've left your PenFriend, you don't have to turn the house upside-down to go and find the PenFriend because your labels are in Braille and therefore you can just go and read the Braille label. You might struggle if you've lost your labeller to actually write the labels in the first place but there's alternative strategies you can use until you've found the labeller.

The labels can be easily accessed by others. This is important. I regularly have blind friends come stay to me and they want to be able to use what's in my kitchen effectively and I use labels on things like the washing machine to label the start button and things like this. Okay, I could use a PenFriend and that would work fine but they would have to learn how to use the PenFriend and they wouldn't be able to use their own PenFriend because the labels are stored on the PenFriend and not on the label.

So for example if I was using a PenFriend to make audio greetings cards, that wouldn't work at all. I'd have to send a PenFriend with it but I would be able to do them in Braille and the recipient would be able to read the Braille, assuming that the Braille is correct and they know Braille and all of this sort of thing.

The last point is that Braille is actually relatively unobtrusive. You can get clear labels and in fact the majority of Braille labels are clear and they can be resized very easily so you can make a very small Braille label or in fact you can make a very large Braille label and you can get as much information on a label as you need, virtually. Sometimes there's so much information that it won't fit but even then you could for example label something up and then have a file on the computer which says, "The long version of this label is this," and so on and so on.

So let's move on to some specific ways in which we can write labels and I'm going to start by talking about labelling tape. I'll just go and fetch a roll of labelling tape from behind me. You won't be able to see it of course but it means that I can feel it during the demonstration and describe it a bit better. These rolls of labelling tape come in a little cartridge but the cartridge is not terribly important. It's just a roll of tape, 3.5 metres long and it's either 9mm wide or 12mm wide. It's available from RNIB in packs of ten. The thing about this, because it's only 9mm or 12mm wide, you can only get one line of Braille so they're particularly useful for food boxes, jars, tubs, CD cases, DVD cases, controls on equipment, basically anything where the label is going to occupy one line. You probably don't want to use labelling tape for addresses or greetings cards or anything like that. We'll come on to how to do that a bit later on.

I talked about the two widths. There's also two colours. You can either get clear labelling tape from RNIB or you can get black labelling tape from RNIB and I should just say, I'm talking about RNIB because they sell it exclusive of VAT. You might find that there are other brands of tape that you prefer and as long as it's 12mm or 9mm, that's absolutely fine. You go and use whatever tape you like. You can buy it on Amazon if you want to.

The colour of tape, it doesn't really matter what colour you buy as long as you're happy with it. Some people who sight-read Braille prefer black tape because they find that they can see the dots more easily. People who touch-read Braille, it doesn't really matter but if you're a blind person in a house with a sighted person, you might find that the sighted person doesn't thank you for using black tape because it obscures the print writing underneath it, where if you use clear tape, then the writing underneath will still be visible so it won't obstruct a sighted person's use of the same product.

The width of tape is slightly more important. It depends on the product you want to use. The Braille labeller which we used to call the Dymo gun colloquially, it actually takes both widths of tape so you don't really need to worry about that. You just buy whichever tape is easiest and some people have a preference for 12mm tape because it's slightly wider so there's more margin and you've got more grip. I personally prefer 9mm tape because it's a bit narrower, you've got less margin and therefore it fits into tighter spaces. Really, it doesn't matter if you're using the Dymo gun. Either size will work.

In the case of Braille writing frames however, you do need to be careful. Now, it may come as a surprise to some people that you can use Dymo tape in a Braille frame. There are some Braille frames in which you can't use Dymo tape at all so you need to be a bit careful. I have a four-line Braille frame on the desk behind me. I'll go and get it and flap it about so you can hear it. It's a metal four-line frame and it only has a slot in it for 12mm tape so if I tried to use 9mm tape, I could do it because the slot's too wide so if I was really careful about the positioning of the tape, I could use 9mm tape but it would probably slip and it wouldn't work terribly well. So if I was going to use that four-line slate, my best bet would be to use 12mm tape.

The big plastic A4 frames from the Worth Trust which are being given away by the Braillists Foundation, these frames actually have slots for both, 12mm tape and 9mm tape and I'll come onto this a bit later on but the 12mm slot is at line nine of the slate and the 9mm slot is at line 19 of the slate and I'll talk more about that later on but if you've got a slate and you want to have an explore and see if you can find where the Dymo slots are, then feel free, especially if you already know how a Braille labeller works.

The labelling tape adapter for Perkins braillers, you can't actually get this anymore, I don't think, although Dave may want to correct me in the Q&A later on. But the labelling tape adapter for the Perkins actually can take both because you can move the tape up and down in the adapter. There's also an electronic device called the 6Dot Braille label maker. This is made by Logan Technologies and is the most expensive way of making Braille labels by far. It costs- I've got it actually written down in my notes, £499 exclusive of VAT. If you have a use for this particular device, by all means get it. It's actually quite a good device. I've used one and don't actually have anything bad to say about it but it is expensive. It's basically an electronic version of the Dymo gun. It has a Perkins keyboard on it and an electronic embossing head and it does make extremely good labels but it only takes 9mm tape. So please be extremely careful if you get the 6Dot label maker not to buy 12mm tape. It's too wide and it won't fit and it will give you a headache when it comes to using the machine.

So let's address those in order then and talk about the Braille labeller. We call it the Braille labeller. We can't call it the Dymo gun because if you type Dymo gun into the RNIB product search, you're not going to find it. You have to type "Braille labeller" or the specific product code is DL65. I can't actually pronounce the name of that manufacturer. It's Reizen or Reeson. R-E-I-Z-E-N RL350. I guess Reizen is a manufacturer of conventional print labelling equipment and they've made a special one for Braille.

The one that I have is made out of metal and is ancient. I don't even know how old this thing is. My mum bought it so she could label things up for me when I was a child and I'm 28 now so, I mean, this would be at least 20, probably more like 25 years old, to be honest with you. It still works so that gives you an idea of the longevity of the machine. The modern ones are plastic. I have seen one. They're considerably lighter and they feel considerably more flimsy but they actually work really rather well. They had one at the school that I worked at and I used it, under duress, I have to say, because I thought my metal one was much better but actually theirs stood up to scrutiny pretty well.

So a description of this machine, it looks like a gun hence the Dymo gun. It has a fairly large hefty trigger on the underside of it and I tend to hold it with my three fingers, my index finger, my middle finger and my ring finger, on that gun and my thumb on the top of the unit so I can squeeze it together. The little finger kind of just doesn't really do anything. It just sort of flaps about and possibly actually could go on the trigger as well if I wanted it to. Assuming the trigger's on the underside, where my thumb is on the top of the unit, my thumb is actually resting on a door and we'll talk more about the door in a second, and just above the door, sort of furthest away from me is a dial and the dial has Braille letters printed all the way around it. So A, B, C, D, E, F, G right the way through W, X, Y, Z and then it has "with", "the", "and", "in", "of", "for", "er", "st", "ing", "ed", lower f, lower e, lower c, middle c, dots for six, I think that is, a full stop, a dot 6 and a number sign. I'll test you on all of those later.

There is a handout available for this session. It actually doesn't list all of the symbols that are available on the Dymo gun. The point there is that it can do most but not all of Grade 2 so you can do some Grade 2 on this thing.

The door is how you insert labels. So if you feel towards the end closest to you, there's a notch in the labeller. You can flip the door up, using that notch and this exposes a hole and if you're not careful, the door plops down as has just happened but what you can do is insert the tape into the hole. Now, you need to be very careful, because the tape is in a cartridge, what's just happened is that I've lost the end of the tape. So it's a good idea to hold the cartridge actually by the end of the tape, rather than by the cartridge itself and then just let the cartridge flop into the labelling machine, rather than trying to drop it in and then find the end of the tape. Otherwise you'll lose the end of the tape and if the end of the tape goes into the cartridge, it can be very hard to find it again.

Then lay it flat against the labelling machine and thread it underneath. There's a little thing that you need to thread it underneath and keep threading it through and feel. In the middle of the dial, there's a hole where you can feel the tape coming through and basically keep threading it until you feel the tape coming through and then if you want to be pernickety about it, you can then pull it back slightly until the tape is just flush, just flush with the edge there but you don't have to be that pernickety if you don't want to. You'll just waste some Dymo tape if you do that.

So I have now done this. I will close the door of the Dymo labeller and begin to Braille. Now I tend to reset mine. Next to the number sign, in between the number sign and the A, there's a little rectangle. The rectangle is a pair of scissors and we'll talk more about that in a second but for now I'm going to label up some spaghetti Bolognese so I'm going to move the dial two clicks to the right which puts me on the letter B and squeeze the trigger hard. You do need to be fairly hard. I don't know whether that's because it's an old labeller or because you just have to be fairly hard. I'm not quite sure. But squeeze the trigger and that'll make your letter B. If we move then round, I'll find the letter O. I'm deliberately not slowing this down. This is genuinely how slow it is. Okay. O, M, N, L. M, N, O. I'll shift it back until I can find the letter G. And I will stop at that point. I'll move the thingie back round to the scissors and squeeze at that point. There's enough label tape coming out of the machine now so if I squeeze on the scissors and then pull on the tape, the tape will come free of the machine. Sometimes it takes a bit of effort to pull the tape but that's how that works.

The thing to note is that even to write B-O-L-O-G, which is one, two, three, four, five letters, took quite a long time, relatively. I batch cook so generally when I've got to label up Bolognese, I've got to label eight or nine boxes of Bolognese. If you imagine writing the word Bolognese in full eight or nine times on a Dymo machine, that takes a long time. I don't recommend it. I could write B-O-L-O-G and that makes it slightly shorter. I actually don't even bother with that. I just write B-O-L and that is enough. I think that's the first thing, the key thing for me to understand about labelling is that the label is designed to give you the information that you need about your products. So as long as you understand your labelling system and anybody else who uses your labelling system understands it, you don't have to worry about using the right contractions, you don't have to worry about putting a dot six at the start to make it capital. You don't have to worry about a full stop at the end. You don't have to worry about the right spelling. You don't even have to write it out in full.

If you wanted to, you could write S-B for spaghetti Bolognese. If you wanted to, you could write S-P-A-G. It really doesn't matter. You use whatever is comfortable for you, as long as it makes sense and the fewer cells it occupies, the better, therefore, number one you're not wasting as much tape and number two, it takes less time to do it.

Incidentally I forgot to add, if for some reason you do want to put a space on a label, I don't bother with Bolognese, I just do B-O-L, B-O-L, B-O-L eight times and I don't tend to use the scissors after each one. What I tend to do actually is just write it all out as one string, use the scissors on the Dymo gun to chop that bit of tape off and then use regular kitchen scissors to chop the individual labels up. I find that I don't need a space there because the letter L does not use dots four, five and six so there's enough space in between without putting a space there, if you see what I mean, for the scissors to make a clean cut.

If I'm writing for example "Sweet and Sour Pork" which I would abbreviate to S-S-P, in that case I would put a space and you'd do that by half squeezing the trigger. So if you squeeze it hard, you get a thing. If you half squeeze it, you get a space.

So that is how to use the Braille labeller. I will open up for questions in just a second but before I do that, I just want to show how to use a frame to do this and I'll do it in the Worth Trust frame but it doesn't actually matter which frame you do it in.

The most important thing to remember when you're using a Braille frame to do labels is that you're punching down. It's a downward writing frame and therefore you want the sticky part of the label, which has got a backing sheet on it, to point upwards, not downwards and this means that the roll, the cartridge that the roll is in, it needs to unroll from the bottom rather than unrolling from the top. This is something that I got wrong when I did it for the first time and I therefore got all of my labels, they were perfect but they didn't work because all the dots had come out on the backing sheet rather than on the sticky side.

So the way I tend to do it is open up the frame and I'll do it on the 12mm slot because I happen to have a 12mm roll of tape. Even though I prefer 9mm, I have one 12mm roll that I'm desperate to get rid of so I'm just using it till it runs out basically. What I do is making sure that the tape is the right way up, thread it through the left-hand Dymo slot, pull it through in a straight line on the underside of the frame and then thread it back up through the right-hand Dymo slot and then hold it in place. Then go back to the left-hand side and pull the roll of tape.

This will make sure that the tape is nice and tight and it's very important that the tape is nice and tight, otherwise you'll get dodgy labels. Then what I tend to do to stop the tape from slipping is I tend to be quite forceful with the heel of my hand and press down on the frame with one hand, with the heel of the hand, quite firmly so that the labelling tape doesn't slip and then I can use a stylus with the other hand to actually write the label out.

I've realised in all of that description that I didn't actually explain how to find the Dymo slots and again this will depend on which frame you're using but if you're using the frames from the Worth Trust, these are the frames that the Braillists are giving out, if you feel down the right-hand side, you've got the line numbers. On mine I've got two, four, six, eight. If I keep feeling down, I will get to ten but in between eight and ten, you should feel a slot and it's quite a wide slot. It sort of feels like one of the Braille cells, except it's a bit wider and it's in the margin. So it's sort of directly underneath or maybe slightly to the left and underneath the number eight. It's identifiable because it's ever so slightly raised. There's an almost imperceptible raised line next to the slot and so that may help. Then on the left-hand side there is a similar slot after the Braille cells are finished with a similar raised line.

To find the slot for line 19, you keep going down and so you get to 14, 16, 18 and again you find a smaller slot. This slot is almost the same size as one of the Braille cells and in fact you could be forgiven for thinking that it is one of the Braille cells but it's also got that imperceptible raised line and that indicates it's a Dymo slot and again if you follow along, there's a similar slot at the other end.

So I've now been talking for 25 minutes which means that I'm only going to split this session into two, rather than splitting it into three but I wonder if there are any questions on what I've said so far, please feel free to raise your hands in the usual way.

Dave Williams: Thank you very much, Matthew.

Holly Scott-Gardner: We do not have any raised hands right now.

Dave Williams: I believe we do. I think James Bowden's hand may be raised.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, James, we're going to invite you to unmute.

James Bowden: Hello, everyone.

Matthew Horspool: Hello, James.

James Bowden: Great presentation there, Matthew. Couple of points. I also prefer the 9mm clear tape and it's possibly worth mentioning, if you're labelling CDs, I tend to do it on the spine edge of the box but on the actual inlay tray and 9mm tape fits, 12mm does not fit and the same would be true if you actually labelled the spine itself. That's the first point. The second point is on the Braille labelling machine, when you use the scissors, I don't know if you mentioned this, Matthew, but you actually get two cuts on the tape. One is a complete cut so the tape comes away and on mine anyway, there's a little second cut about maybe 4mm away so you've got a little flap that you can use to pull off the backing tape. Otherwise it's a nasty fingernail exercise to try and get the backing off.

Matthew Horspool: That is a good tip. Thank you. I think both blades on my labelling machine have worn out. The first one works just well enough for me to prise the tape off the machine and I think my second blade has worn to the point where it doesn't work. Either that or older labelling machines didn't have that blade. But, yes, I have seen it. The 6Dot label maker also has this. It makes a nick in the tape and it is incredibly useful and it does make life a lot easier.

James Bowden: One of the things that I point out to people about the Braille labeller is the fact that the letters are also in print. You may have said it and I might have missed it but it's really important, I think, so that sighted people can make Braille labels without having to know Braille which I think is a really useful thing.

Matthew Horspool: I didn't and I will make a note so we can update the handouts but, yes, thank you. I didn't mention that but it is a very good point and it's how my mum used to use it because my mum didn't really know Braille but she used to label my tapes in Braille and she used to do it because the letters were in print.

James Bowden: Yes. I know you said you probably wouldn't want to use it for greetings cards but I know many sighted people that do to add Braille to a greetings card and I think we'd probably agree that it's lovely to receive Braille however it's been created.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, I do agree with that.

I'm not sure if there's any more. Is there anything else, James?

James Bowden: Yes, actually, for those who are concerned about wasting tape, you can actually reverse feed the tape before cutting by about just under two cells and then you'll get the end of the label quite close to the last cell you wrote.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, and the scissors on mine are knackered basically so I tend to open the door, slide the tape back to the point just where it's not protruding any more, write my label and then cut using some other means rather than the built-in scissors and I think they do wear out eventually.

James Bowden: That's interesting because mine, Matthew, is possibly older than yours. I remember buying mine last century and the scissors are still working.

Dave Williams: Any more questions for Matthew at this point? It's Alt-Y on Windows, Option Y on Mac, star nine if you're dialling in on the phone, press the More button on iDevices followed by the Raise Hand button. If there aren't any more question then we will come back to you, Matthew.

Matthew Horspool: Well, there aren't at the moment. I'll give it another couple of minutes because James raised a good point about labelling CDs and putting the label on the spine. It's something that I was going to mention and actually forgot to mention. Apart from abbreviating, the other really important thing with labelling is that you get used to putting the labels in a consistent place. So I talked about batch cooking and I talked about labelling up boxes. I basically put food in Tupperware boxes and then label the lid of the box. But I always make sure to put the Braille label on the top of the lid and towards the top left-hand corner and that way, when I'm rummaging through the freezer- and, by the way, the tape does work in the freezer. You have to be a bit careful when you apply it because the adhesive isn't necessarily all that strong so if the lid of the box is a bit wet then the label might fall of. But assuming that the box is dry, it'll work fine and it'll hang around in the freezer no problem. But with cold fingers, you don't want to be faffing about wondering where on earth you've put your label so always for me it's in the top left-hand corner. If a better place works for you, if it works better on the front of the box or on the bottom right-hand corner, I don't really mind, but it's important to be fairly consistent with the way you do that.

Last call for questions.

Dave Williams: I think we can carry on, Matthew.

Matthew Horspool: I don't think we've got any. That's fine. So I shall carry on and I'm not going to talk in this session about the labelling tape adapter for the Perkins. I do have one and if there's any particular questions about that, then please hold fire and ask at the end, if there's time. But I really don't think you can buy it so I'm not going to dwell on it for now, other than to say that if you are fortunate enough to have one, it's a bit finicky to put it in the Brailler but once it's in, it does work and it does work rather well and you get reasonably good quality or, well, you get whatever Perkins' quality dots you've got, depending on how old your Perkins is.

So I'd like to move on and talk about self-adhesive labelling sheets, speaking of the Perkins brailler. Self-adhesive labelling sheets, some people call it Brailon. That is not correct and I wouldn't be pernickety about it except that Brailon is something else and I remember just after I left the school that I worked at, my successor phoned me about a month after I left and said, "I've just ordered some Brailon and they've sent me the wrong product," and I said, "No, no, they haven't, it's just we all call it the wrong thing." So it's not Brailon.

It's not acetate. Some people call it acetate. Acetate is like what you'd use on a projector screen and I'll come back to that a bit later but acetate doesn't have a sticky back. So it's sticky-backed plastic, basically. Self-adhesive labelling sheets is what RNIB calls them. They're available in packs of eight from RNIB in Perkins size and they're also available, if you want to put them through the embosser, if you have an Index Basic which takes tractor-fed paper and you want to do tractor-feed labels, you can do this. They are available from Techno-Vision Systems in packs of ten and they measure 8.5 by 11 inches which is US letter size on a slightly wider backing sheet. So if you for some reason particularly wanted 8.5 by 11 labelling sheets and you wanted to put them in a Perkins, you could buy those from Techno-Vision and rip them up and put them in the Perkins and they would work fine.

It's sticky-backed plastic that I would use for greetings cards because they're a huge sheet. As I say, 8.5 by 11. Perkins is 11.5 by 11. That's wider than A4, to give people some perspective. A4 measures 297 by 210mm which is just shy of 12 inches by 8 and something inches, I think. So Perkins is definitely wider than A4. So you could put whatever you want. I used to use it for certificates when I was brailling, "Congratulations on 100% attendance," and things like that. We used to laminate the certificate and we used to make the label on sticky-backed plastic and it meant that we could get all the text nicely centred and everything worked out.

When I was doing big labels like that and it was important to centre them, I actually used to draft them out on paper first because the thing about stick-backed plastic and also the thing about Dymo tape is that it is plastic and so the dots last a long time. The downside of the dots lasting a long time is that if you make a mistake, it's very difficult to get rid of the dots. So I used to do a mock-up of the label on a piece of paper first and then if for some reason the mock-up didn't work, I could just make a new mock-up on a new piece of paper and then only when it was absolutely ready to go, would I then transfer it very carefully onto the sticky-backed plastic.

So there's not really an awful lot more to say about this because it just works like Braille paper. You can use it in a frame if you want. Most frames are not probably wide enough to take the 11.5 by 11 sheets. People who are listening in from America, you are very lucky because I think you can get Library of Congress 40 cells by 25 line slates. So if you're one of those fortunate people that have 40 cell by 25 line slates, please email help@braillists.org and tell me where you got it because I'd quite like one but you would be able to use the RNIB 11.5 by 11 labelling sheets. The rest of us who are using A4 slates, the sheet will hang out the end. That may not be a problem. You could cut the sheet in half and you may want to do that anyway if you're doing greetings cards and then it would fit in the slate nicely. Just be aware of how many lines you've got and how many cells you've got because the slates may have more or less cells or lines than the sheet has got. So what I would actually do is put the sheet on top of the slate first and count around it. If you've got margins, count what those margins are so you know how many cells or lines to cut off the end of the sheet.

The other really useful use of a slate- now, I must admit I don't particularly like slating labels. I do it for Dymo tape because I find it more efficient than using the labeller and I find I get better quality dots especially because I've got a good stylus. I get much better dots if I slate labels on Dymo tape than using a Dymo labeller. But I should warn you, the pressure that is required to get good labels with a stylus is quite significant. You need more pressure to do it than you do on paper and also you don't always get the same satisfying clunk. When you slate on paper, you get a nice click as the stylus goes through. You don't always get this with the plastic so you have to just hope that you've used enough pressure and it normally works. I've not had a label that's failed but it's hard work. So I wouldn't want to use a slate to do greetings cards. What I do use a slate for though is to measure up how big the greetings card is before I then braille the label in the Perkins.

So for example if I've got a tiny greetings card, I need to know that that card is only ten cells across by four lines down and then I can set the bell on the Perkins to ten cells across so then the bell dings and I don't accidentally make a label that's too big for the card. If it's a card that's considerably taller than it is wide, I might make an executive decision to put the label on sideways or something so you open the card top to bottom instead of left to right and then you can fit more words on a line or something like that.

The way I would do that- and I haven't got a card, I actually have got one, it came in the post but I didn't think to bring it up. What I have got is an A5 or so envelope. So what I'm going to do is just take- and this works best on a page slate, like the ones that the Braillists are giving away. If you put the envelope flat, or the card flat on top of the slate. Don't unfold it because really you just want to put the label on the one side of the card. You don't want to put the label on both. So leave it folded but put whatever it is on top of the slate, sort of in the middle of the slate if you can and then you'll hopefully find, assuming it's not an A4 card or bigger, you've got some cells at the top, cells at the left, cells at the bottom and cells at the right.

So what I'll do is I will hold it flat and I will actually count. I'll find the line above, the first line of cells that I can actually feel that's not obscured by paper and I'll move the left edge of the paper so that it's in line with the start of that cell and I'll start counting. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, hm, sort of 19. Sort of 19 is not good enough. You can't have a sort of cell because it will drop off the edge so really we're dealing with 18 cells here across this imaginary greetings card. Then what I'll do is I'll go back to the left, you don't actually have to go back to the left but you could do it from the right if you wanted to, and count down. I've got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, sort of 22. So again I've got 21 lines. So I've got 18 cells and 21 lines. I would count that and then I would put a full sheet of sticky-backed plastic inside the Perkins, braille the label and make sure that I don't exceed 18 cells or 21 lines. I'd probably actually make a note of those numbers so I don't get them the wrong way round. I don't want to exceed that but what I wouldn't do is cut the label first. The reason why I wouldn't cut the label first is two-fold. First of all, you might find that you don't use all 21 lines in which case you could make the label shorter. More importantly, the Perkins brailler will impose margins on your labels and particularly the left margin and even at its shortest setting, the left margin can be quite generous.

So what I tend to do is put the whole sheet in and braille the label and then after I've finished, cut the label out of the sheet and that allows the label, if it needs to, to have really tight margins and if you're careful, you really can have really, really tight margins. You don't have to have any margin around the plastic at all because they're going to be reading it from something. So there's already a surface which is going to give it that margin so you can go very close if you need to, if that's the only way you can fit the information on.

You can use any method to cut the label. Scissors will work. The thing about scissors is that I'm not very good at cutting in a straight line. I guess my mobility officer should have been better at teaching me how to do that or my art teacher or something but I really struggle to cut in a straight line. So I tend to use a paper trimmer which some people would call a guillotine. They're not that expensive. I got mine for £50 and it was only as expensive as that because I needed to able to trim 12 inch card stock. If you were only trimming A4, and Perkins either direction is slightly slimmer than A4, you could get an A4 guillotine and that would suit you just fine. You could probably get one of them for about £20 and that just makes sure that you're going in a straight line and I find that very helpful.

So this is the end of my second lecture and another opportunity for people to ask questions.

Dave Williams: So a reminder on how to do that. On Windows, hold down the Alt key and press the letter Y. On Mac, hold Option and press the letter Y. If you're on an iDevice, hit the More button followed by the Raise Hand button. Or if you're dialling in on a regular telephone, then you press the star key followed by the number nine.

If you've got a question or even just a comment actually about any aspect of any of the material Matthew has covered or perhaps anything else relating to Braille labelling as well, we've got about 15 minutes

Holly Scott-Gardner: We do have a question.

Dave Williams: Okay.

Holly Scott-Gardner: It's from Alan and I'm going to unmute.

Dave Williams: Hello, Alan.

Alan: Good evening. Matthew or anybody else, do you actually know whether the RNIB are still making the magnetic sheet labels you could put in a Perkins?

Matthew Horspool: Hello, Alan. Good to hear from you. I haven't actually spoken to you in a while so good to touch base.

I don't know. I'm wondering whether Dave or James know.

Holly Scott-Gardner: James has his hand raised.

Matthew Horspool: I think James has his hand raised. I'm also wondering, Alan, you have quite a loud microphone with lots of white noise so I wonder if you could mute while the question's being answered and then we can unmute you again to come in further.

Holly Scott-Gardner: There we go.

Dave Williams: Okay, I've gone ahead and muted you, Alan, just you've got quite a lot of white noise.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I've unmuted James.

James Bowden: So, Alan, the answer is the RNIB no longer sell the magnetic labelling tape.

Dave Williams: Do we know if anybody else has it available, Matthew or James?

James Bowden: I did buy some in the US from NFB some years ago so that might be a possible source for you.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, I've never come across it. It sounds like a brilliant idea and I wish I had come across it because it would make life so much easier in so many ways, but, no.

James Bowden: It's even thicker than the plastic tape so I don't know how much force it takes but probably quite a lot.

Matthew Horspool: Oh, yes. Did it work in a slate, do you know?

James Bowden: I've never tried. Of course make sure your slate is not steel because it will stick.

Matthew Horspool: Well, that could be an advantage, couldn't it, because it would stop-

James Bowden: Not if it's not straight.

Matthew Horspool: Well, that's true.

Holly Scott-Gardner: We also have a hand raised from Tina. I don't know if we're done with that answer.

Matthew Horspool: I think we are, yes.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Okay, so I'm going to ask Tina to unmute.

Dave Williams: Alan, if you wanted to come back on that, perhaps raise your hand again and we'll acknowledge you.

So, Tina, let's come to you.

Tina: Hello. I'm Tina. I've got a question because I've got these coffee pods and I've actually got a frame that you slot them in to. Now what I've done with that, each row has got four slots but in between each slot, it's got a gap but there's some metal bits across the top. So what I've done is used some junk mail, some of the thick card that you get shoved through the door, and I've actually brailled on that and I've punched a hole in the end of it. I've cut it to size and I punch a hole in the end. Actually one good tip for cutting, do a Braille dotted line and then you can tear along the dotted line, for cutting, which helps.

Matthew Horspool: That's a really good tip.

Tina: What I've done then, I've punched a hole in it and I've threaded a piece of wool through it and then tied it onto my frame between the rows of pods so to the left of a row of pods will be a label that I've written "Tea" on and things like that and that's how I've labelled that up.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, that's an absolutely fabulous idea. Good to hear you, Tina. Thanks for coming in and talking about that. That's a really innovative strategy and it's not a strategy that I would have thought about. It is a strategy that thankfully a friend of mine, who's much more creative, had thought about and what he did, he did a similar sort of thing to you but he actually went to the local resource centre for the blind which used to have a projector screen and doesn't anymore and he bought a load of their acetate that he used to use for the projector screen and he cut that up into label size pieces and punched a hole in and used an elastic band. That's particularly useful, yes, as you describe, for that sort of thing. It's also useful for making name tags. So I sing in the choir at the cathedral and I have a Braille name tag on my robes so that I know which robe is mine and I made that name tag in that sort of way. It's also useful on small things. My friend uses it on his spice jars because the jar itself can't take a label but it can take an elastic band with a label attached to it and the label just sort of dangles off the bottom of the jar.

Tina: That's good for bottles as well, the label with the elastic band. Then you can just take it off the jar or bottle when you renew it and that will save having to do more and more labels all the time

Matthew Horspool: Yes, and I was just going to say that. This is very good. I'm glad someone else has had this idea as well. It's excellent for reusing things. Really I should use this strategy more often. I should make these labels and use these sorts of things to label my Bolognese because it would be more sturdy than using Dymo. I'm just lazy and haven't done it but, yes, it would. It would make very good reusable labels and it would save wasting tape.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's great. Then we have a hand raised by Melanie as well so I don't know if we're done with this question.

Tina: Yes, thank you.

Matthew: Thank you, Tina, it's good to hear from you.

Tina: It's my pleasure.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm going to unmute Melanie.

Melanie: Hi. I'm not sure that this does apply anymore because it was to do with the magnetic tape. I know there was the tape that RNIB did but they also did magnetic sheets which I think may be what Alan was asking about. Rather than tapes, it was actually labelling sheets.

James Bowden: Yes, I couldn't find those on the RNIB shop either so my guess is that they don't do them but it's a great shame and it would be interesting. I don't know how you evaluate how much demand there would be for re-introducing a product like that but maybe people should email the help line and ask.

Dave Williams: If there's a lot of demand, they would certainly look into it. So if people want magnetic labels, do let help line know. It could just as easily have been a sourcing problem as a demand issue. It might be that they just haven't been able to find any that are at a reasonable price. They do subsidise some of the products and if there is a clear demand for magnetic labels, then I'm sure the products team would look again at that. So do let the RNIB help line know if you require magnetic labelling.

Holly Scott-Gardner: James has his hand raised.

James Bowden: I was just going to say, sometimes with the Dymo tape, Matthew, you mentioned the adhesive sometimes isn't very strong. You do sometimes get the case when the label falls of which is incredibly annoying. So a little tip that I was told and I use is when you've done the label, I kind of bend it backwards a bit to remove some of the curvature from when it was on the spool in the cartridge and then line it up and press down from the middle and smooth it outwards. So you're kind of pushing out any kind of air which might be trapped underneath and the label tends to stay on a lot better.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's good to know.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, that is good. I have sort of informally done that when I've noticed a label falling off but never really worked out a foolproof method of doing that so that's useful, thank you.

James Bowden: You get 19 characters along the spine of a CD, unless you start shifting the spaces smaller.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, and shifting the spaces smaller is doable.

James Bowden: Not on the frame, not for the faint-hearted.

Matthew Horspool: Well, you could do it on a frame because you could pull the tape in a certain direction. That's taxing my brain to work out which direction you'd have to pull the tape in.

James Bowden: But it's not for the faint-hearted, you're right.

Matthew Horspool: No, not for the faint-hearted but, yes, that would allow more characters.

Dave Williams: Any more questions?

Matthew Horspool: I don't think there are. While we wait and feel free to just put hands up at any point now because I'm basically just waffling for the sake of waffling at this point but just to say I've talked a lot about using self-adhesive labelling sheets for greetings card and I haven't addressed the elephant in the room which is, well, why not just put the card in the Perkins and do it directly onto the card or for that matter put the card directly into the frame and write onto the card? Actually there's no reason why you can't do this and actually, to be honest with you, when I get greetings cards, I'm generally so grateful for the greetings card that I don't comment but if it's somebody that I know well and I know they can take it, I will point out that actually I tend to prefer it when people Braille directly onto the greetings card. There's really no reason not to do it.

The only thing you'd want to be aware of when you do it is, particularly if you're doing it on a Perkins brailler, if you're using a glittery card or the card's got a decoration on it that's likely to fall off, well, two things. First of all make sure that the glitter doesn't drop into the Perkins and secondly if the decoration is 3D effectively, if it's very tactile, you have the problem of the card not rolling in to the Perkins properly so you might have to turn the card round, like I said about tall cards, and braille sideways so the fold is running horizontal left to right rather than top to bottom. That would be a way of solving that particular problem.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's good advice. We do have another hand raised from Michelle.

Dave Williams: The thing that's always entertaining about that, Matthew, is if somebody buys those shaped cards, the ones that are shaped like a Christmas tree or something and you're trying to roll that sideways into your Brailler.

Matthew Horspool: Yes, they can be a faff to get in the Perkins as well.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Michelle is unmuted.

Matthew Horspool: Hello, Michelle.

Michelle: Hi, there. Thanks for all the tips, really great. One question I have. Can you get jumbo Braille guns, Dymo guns?

Matthew Horspool: I don't believe that there is a jumbo Dymo gun. I'm happy to be corrected by people more in the know. I don't know that there ever was. However you can, I believe, still get the jumbo Braille frames.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, you can.

Matthew Horspool: So if you wanted to slate your labels in jumbo Braille that would be a way to do it. Again not for the faint of heart so this is more in the interest of completeness than as a useful practical answer for you, if you were doing large labels and you had an embosser, you could set the embosser to emboss jumbo Braille if you knew where the settings were in the menus and that would be another way to do jumbo Braille labels.

Michelle: Thank you.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Is there a jumbo Braille Perkins as well or am I wrong?

Matthew Horspool: There was.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm sure I've seen it on the RNIB website.

Matthew Horspool: There was and you could use a tape adapter in that, I suppose. I don't know if they still sell it.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Or just a sheet of plastic, right?

Matthew Horspool: Yes. I don't know if they still sell it. I don't know if there's anyone who could check that out.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm sure I've seen it. Alan has a hand raised so I'm going to unmute Alan.

Alan: Sorry for all the background noises on this microphone. Yes, you can still get jumbo Perkins brailler. They're quite expensive but they are available.

Matthew Horspool: Alan, while you're unmuted, you also sell Perkins braillers. Do you happen to by any chance have a stock of second-hand tape adapters that you could sell to people?

Alan: I do not have tape adapters, no. I only have the one personal one.

Matthew Horspool: Well, that's a shame but good to at least have that question answered before you get lots of enquiries for it.

Holly Scott-Gardner: It was worth asking.

I don't know if we have any other questions?

Matthew Horspool: No questions? We'll leave it a minute or two longer although we're at time.

Dave Williams: We are at time.

Matthew Horspool: Some more waffle while we wait for final hands to come up is that if you're slating directly onto greetings cards, I talked about my four line slate earlier on, I was reliably informed by someone who shall remain nameless, that a four line slate is very good for slating Christmas cards because it means that you can feel whereabouts on the card you are because the card is probably not going to be 30 cells across or whatever so you can feel the card underneath so you can feel how far across the card you are.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I think you should name that person who gave you that advice.

Matthew Horspool: Oh, well. Yes, it was Holly who gave me that advice.

Dave Williams: Good advice. There's always ambiguity when you're brailling on a card about how much space there is left.

Matthew Horspool: There is.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes.

Matthew Horspool: Well, I've got no more waffle and we're at time.

Dave Williams: I think we're done, guys. That's brilliant. Thank you so much, Matthew, really appreciate that and you're obviously somebody who is using labelling in anger, as it were, on a regular basis. So it's great to hear it from the Horspool's mouth, so to speak. How about that?

Matthew Horspool: What a pun, yes.

Dave Willams: I've been waiting for an hour to do that. So thank you very much, everybody, really appreciate all the great questions and if anybody has anything else or thoughts, then you can find Matthew by sending an email to help@braillists.org and that's how you get in touch with us here. If you missed any part of the session or if you wanted to listen again, we will be making this audio available on demand from the braillists.org website, braillists.org/media, where you can also find our previous sessions covering music, slating, languages and the Orbit reader. Next week James Bowden is going to be back in the room. He's a regular on this slot, James Bowden, and James is going to be showing us why in 2020, soon to be 2021, we should even contemplate still using an abacus. So all of that next week with James Bowden, at the same time, 7:30pm UK. Don't forget Braille book club is on Thursday at 6, the Stay Safe open forum on Friday from 6 and everything else, check out our newsletter which you can find from the braillists.org website.

So thank you so much to Holly for moderating. Thank you, Matthew, for presenting and all you guys for making it worthwhile. Until next time, bye for now. Bye bye.