THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

NOTE TAKING: CREATING NOTES FOR OTHERS

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Welcome back. Coming up, Note Taking: Taking Notes for Others, a session recorded on Tuesday, 23rd February 2021, presented by me and introduced by Dave Williams.

Dave Williams: Hello and good evening. A very warm welcome back to the Braillists Foundation Tuesday evening Braille Master Classes. I'm Dave Williams, the chair of the Braillists Foundation, and it's my pleasure to welcome you all again and this time every Tuesday for what has become a very popular series of sessions exploring different ways and means in which we might use our Braille skills to better effect.

If you haven't been to all the sessions, I would urge you to visit the braillists.org Media page which is braillists.org/media, so really easy to remember, and you will find there recordings of our previous Master Class sessions covering all sorts of subjects, using a Braille hand frame, getting going with Braille music, how to use Braille to learn a language, what you might do if you wanted to use Braille to deliver a presentation, whether that be using PowerPoint or perhaps other forms of public speaking. So, lots of material there to dig into, all completely free of charge. There will also be transcripts of those sessions as well so if you or someone you know is deaf-blind, then you will be able to access those transcripts in due course.

We've also got handouts that accompany the sessions and they really just summarise the key points and give you links to further resources. So, do make use of the handouts as well. If you want to discuss anything that comes up at any of our Tuesday evening Braille Master Class sessions, you're very welcome to join us on the Braillists forum, braillists.org/forum. It's just a simple Google group. You can use it via email if that is easier for you and that's where we sometimes have some lively discussion about all aspects of Braille.

So, a little bit of housekeeping before we get going. Don't forget of course this and all our sessions are run in line with the Braillists moderation policy. So that everybody can hear everybody else, we try to adopt a fairly family-friendly environment and we request that you remain muted unless invited to do otherwise. There will be opportunities to ask questions during the session, at which point we'll give you some instructions for how you can raise your hand and then you will be able to be acknowledged by our moderator this evening, which is Ben. Hello, Ben.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Hello, Mr. Williams. How are you doing today?

Dave Williams: I'm very well. Looking forward to this one. It's a little bit more technical, this one. So, tonight's session is all about how you would use Braille to make notes for others and specifically making notes for sighed people. So, if you are a Braille user and you are required to make notes, how do you make your notes look good, particularly if you are using a Braille device that only has a very simple scratchpad or very basic note taker built in. We're going to be hearing about some techniques. We're going to be hearing about a system called Markdown which enables you to make your notes look every bit as good as though you created them in Microsoft Word on a laptop but you did it all in your Braille device. So, we're going to be hearing about that very shortly.

So that we minimise the risk of any technical issues, because there is some live demonstration as part of this and a screen reader involved, we've got two recorded segments that we're going to share with you. The first one is going to run for around 25 minutes and then we'll take a bit of a break and if anyone has got any questions about that content, then we'll take those at that point. Then we'll play you the second segment and then there will be loads of time at the end for any final questions.

So, I hope that's all clear. So, how you use Braille to make notes that look great, that you can then share with your sighted colleagues, friends and so on.

So, without any further ado, I'm going to put myself on mute and we are going to hand over to Matthew.

Matthew Horspool: Good evening, welcome to this session entitled Note Taking: Taking Notes for Others.

Before I get started with this, I just want to clarify what exactly it is that I mean when I say taking notes for others. In this session, we're going to be talking about the situation where you are the designated note taker in a team. So, for example, you might be the secretary in a meeting, typing up some minutes, or you might be on a team working on a collaborative project and you've got to write down some notes from a team meeting that you're having or write some notes from a brainstorming session that has taken place.

What we're not going to be talking about in this session is the type of collaborative note taking that sometimes happens where you have, say, a Google doc open and everybody has the opportunity to just write things into the shared Google doc that's open on the screen. This is something we may come back to in a future session but it's not something that's going to form the cut and thrust of this session.

Surprisingly blind people get asked to take notes quite often, certainly in my experience. I get asked to take notes quite often. People regularly comment on the quality of my note taking and I get told that I am probably the best listener out of everybody in a meeting. So, the skill of being able to take effective notes and notes that make sense not just to me but to a sighted person as well is a skill that I've honed over many years and I'm still honing it today but hopefully I'll be able to share some wisdom that I've accrued and some handy tips on how to do it in Braille as we go through.

So, before we actually get into any meaty stuff, I think it might be worth taking a step back and talking about why is it that we're actually talking about making these notes look presentable, because the whole point of UEB surely is that if you write notes in Braille in UEB, you can back-translate them into print and they will look okay.

This is true, as far as it goes. The point of UEB is that the coding elements have been standardised. So, this is true. If you back-translate a BRF file into text, all of the writing will be accurate, assuming that you have used the correct Grade 2 in the first place.

However, what you might lose is a sense of style, is a sense of format and what you might find is that the style of notes that you find helpful in Braille are not necessarily the same style of notes that somebody might find helpful in print.

For example, in my experience when I take notes in Braille, they tend to be quite dense notes with quite a lot of paragraphs but not much space between the paragraphs. The paragraphs are indented by maybe one or two cells. There's not a huge amount of delineation between, say, when the paragraph ends and where a list starts and when we go back from list mode back into paragraph mode. There is some delineation in headings but generally not by anything other than space so there might be a blank line and then the heading starts in cell one or there might be a centred heading. But it's very rare that I use typographical devices because they don't have the same meaning in Braille that they do in print. And there are devices which I use in Braille which simply don't work in print. For example, if I can't remember how to pronounce a word, I'll probably write it in Grade 1 or some hybrid form of Grade 2 which is not technically correct according to the rules of UEB but that make sense to me in my head and it's my notes so it doesn't really matter. It probably would get back-translated properly into text but it wouldn't stick out in the print.

What sighted people need, or at least in my experience of sighted people, in order to make sense of notes is they need very clear delineation between paragraphs, they need very clear indications of when have we got lists and when have we not got lists. They need things in italics, they need things in bold, clear headings marked with different colours or different font sizes, for example. All of this stuff needs to be done in order for the notes not to look like this great big mass of text which nobody really wants to look at, because what I find with sighted people is if they see this huge dense piece of text, even if it's only a page, if it's a page of dense text, it's very off-putting whereas if it's a page of nicely formatted text with nice bits of bold and bullet points and headings, it looks a lot more attractive and they're more likely to read it and they're more likely to be able to spot the most important things in the notes.

So, in the remainder of this session, we're going to be talking about an open standard called Markdown and Markdown will allow us to achieve this. It will allow us to embed formatting information in a semantic way and when I talk about semantic, we're talking about what does this thing do rather than what does this thing look like. So, we're not talking about a bold passage of text, we're talking about an emphasised passage of text. We're not talking about something that's underlined and a few point sizes higher, we're talking about a heading. Markdown allows us to embed this semantic information in a very straightforward way that actually you may find makes your Braille files more navigable. So, you may actually find that it helps you as well. It allows you to write in a style that is actually not all that dissimilar to the style that you would be writing in anyway. It's extremely portable. If you learn how to do it on one Braille display, you'll be able to transfer those skills onto another Braille display that you have in the future. It's very well recognised. You'll be able to import it into apps on iOS. You'll be able to copy it into Word documents and things like this. So, all in all, it's a very useful skill to have and it's a very useful skill to be able to Braille in it.

As I say, it's very well recognised. You might get to a point where actually you have a Braille display connected to your computer and you use the input keys of your Braille display in something like Notepad and you're writing Markdown on the computer that you can then go ahead and import into other apps or convert into, say, Microsoft Word.

So, I've touched on this already but Markdown is a text-based language. We're not talking about writing this in Microsoft Word natively. We're talking about writing it in a text editor, like the equivalent of Notepad on Windows. It will also work in the note taker of the Orbit Reader and the note taker of other Braille devices. So, for example, the recently released Humanware Brailliant BI X series that can only save as text files, no problem. You can write Markdown syntax in your text files, copy those text files back to the computer and then use a tool to convert them into Microsoft Word and we'll come onto that a little bit later in this session.

To start with though, I'm going to go into my living room and actually show you how to do this on the Orbit Reader.

And thanks to the magic of recording, here I am already in my living room with my Orbit Reader on my lap. I decided since I was being recorded anyway, I might as well give you some atmospheric difference, just to break the recording up a bit. We'll see how successful it was when we get to the question and answer session.

Anyway, I've got the Orbit with me. I'm going to turn it on. I'm going to hold down the power button as you normally would and with any luck, there we go, it's come on and it's telling me I'm actually in the File Explorer at the moment. That's fine. I'm going to just find a file. I'm going to just get out of the File Explorer and go to WelcomeG2. It's just a nice place to start. I'm going to press space with N for New and that's going to create a new file.

Okay. Here I am and you can hear the cursor blinking. When I go to create a new file, by the way, it's going to create it in the folder that I am currently in, so I'm currently on the root of the SD card in, say, WelcomeG2.brf but if I was reading, say, Peter Pan in the Children's folder and I press space with N, it would create a new file in the Children's folder.

I'm going to pretend that I'm writing a set of Braillists minutes and the Orbit Reader uses the first few characters of the file as its file name. So, I'm just going to type in Grade 1, M-I-N-U-T-E-S, and then a dot which in US computer Braille is a 4 6, and the letters B-R-F so I have "Minutes.brf" and I'm going to press the dot 8 key or the Enter to drop onto a new line.

So, here I am, minutes.brf and now the file will be saved as minutes.brf. You do have to write that in computer Braille, otherwise you'll get funny characters popping up in your file names.

Now, though, we're going to come onto Markdown, the joys of Markdown. We've already touched on the fact that in order for this to work properly on the computer, you need to write in computer Braille. Thankfully, we're not going to write Markdown in computer Braille for the purposes of this little demonstration. However, you could write in computer Braille if you wanted to and then you wouldn't have to translate. You would have to be careful though because one of the things that sighted people like and with very good reason is for your notes to be properly capitalised and if you write in computer Braille, I find I forget to write my capitals. So, if you are going to do it in computer Braille, please remember to put capitals in and otherwise do it in UEB and we'll talk about how to convert that UEB back into text later on in the session.

So, I'm writing a set of Braillists Foundation minutes and I'm going to give them a title of Braillists Foundation Minutes and I'm going to talk as though this is already a Microsoft Word document or perhaps a web page or something which means that I'd like this title to be at a heading of level one. You might be thinking, well, I'm on an Orbit Reader that doesn't have headings. How do I do this? Well, I'm going to type a hash symbol in Braille and that, when it gets converted back into text, in Markdown, is the symbol for a heading at level one. So, to do a hash in UEB, because I'm going to be working in UEB, I'm going to do a 4 5 6 in one cell and a TH sign. Then for Markdown reasons, I'm going to do a space. So I have 4 5 6, TH sign, space. So, hash sign and then space and now I'm just going to type as fast as I can Braillists Foundation Minutes. New line, new line.

We definitely need to do two new lines. The way Markdown does paragraphs is that you have to put one blank line, so two new lines to make paragraphs. You don't indent your paragraphs, you do two new lines and everything in Markdown is a paragraph. A list item is a paragraph, etc. So a heading is a paragraph.

So, I've got a paragraph. The first thing I'd like to put in these minutes is a list of everybody who was present at the meeting and I'd like that list to be titled with "Members Present" and I'd like "Members Present" to be at heading level two.

To do a heading level two, I simply have to do two hash signs. So, I'll do this. I'll do 4 5 6, TH, 4 5 6, TH, space. I'll just type now "Members space Present", new line, new line.

Now I want a list. I could actually just write a bullet here and because I'm converting it into a Microsoft Word document, the bullets would work. However, it may not be styled up as a list properly and we really want it to be styled up as a list for semantic purposes. So, instead of using bullets, I'm going to use asterisks and to do an asterisk in UEB, you do a dot 5 followed by an IN sign. So, I've done dot 5, IN, space and our chairman is Dave Williams, brackets, chair, new line, new line. Asterisk, so dot 5, dot 3 5, space. Matthew Horspool, and I'm writing in Grade 2 UEB, brackets, secretary, new line, new line. Asterisk, so dot 5, dot 3 5 (the IN sign), space and I'm going to type in Grade 2, Ben Mustill-Rose. New line, new line.

For the purposes of this particular meeting, I'm going to pretend that this is everybody who is present. There may in fact be other people present but let's go with it for the purposes of this.

So, now I'd like to create another heading and let's say we talked about the future of the Braillists, so "Braillists' Future" and I want this to be a heading level two as well, so I'm going to do 4 5 6, TH, for a hash sign, and then 4 5 6, TH for another hash sign, so double hash, space and then "Braillists' Future", new line, new line.

What we're going to talk about in this fictitious meeting that we're having is the Braillists Constitution and we're going to talk about updating the Braillists Constitution. Now, the Braillists Constitution is a title, a bit like if you're writing Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone, it's the name of a title. In the sighted world, it's quite common to put titles in italics and this is where Markdown and UEB sort of collide a bit.

What you'd really like to be able to do is put in UEB italics signs for the title of this book or the title of this Braillists Foundation Constitution in this case. If you were tech-savvy, you could do this and then you could open the BRF file in something like Notepad and do a find and replace and you could make do and mend with this. It's not really the way you want to be doing it though, because really you want the translation to be as automatic as possible and also if you're working on something like a Brailliant BI X, for example BI 20X or BI 40X or something like the BAUM VarioUltra or the Focus 40 5th Gen, or any of these displays which have a slightly more advanced scratchpad than the Orbit Reader, or even for that matter the Orbit Reader 20 Plus which has translation on the fly, when it translates into text, so in other words, you're using the translation on the device rather than the translation on the computer, it will lose those UEB italics signs and UEB bold signs and things. So, instead of using UEB italics signs, what we really want to be doing is using Markdown italics signs. The Markdown italics signs are two underscores at the start of the italicised text and two underscores at the end of the italicised text and in UEB, to do an underscore, you do dots 4 6 followed by dots 3 6. So, 4 6, hyphen, and we'll do that twice.

So, I'm going to actually type a paragraph of text. I'm going to type dot 6, "Dave proposed amending the" and now I'm going to type Braillists Foundation Constitution. So, I'm going to type dots 4 6, dots 3 6 (4 6, hyphen) and then another 4 6, hyphen, and then dot 6, Braillists, space, dot 6, Foundation, space, dot 6, Constitution, and I'm going to italicise this full stop. I know some people italicise their full stops, some people don't italicise their full stops. I think actually technically you're not supposed to italicise your full stops but a die-hard transcription habit of italicising full stops. So, I'm going to put "Braillists Foundation Constitution", full stop, 4 6, 3 6, 4 6, 3 6 and that has closed the italics. That has finished the italics.

Then I'm going to type, "in particular, comma, he wanted to add a section about." I'm writing all in Grade 2 still, by the way, and I'm going to pretend that he wants to add a section about conflicts of interest. We actually do already have a conflicts of interest policy but we have to make something up for the purposes of the demonstration.

This is when, if you were writing notes for sighted people, it may be helpful to put the words "conflicts of interest" in bold, so that if they're looking at these notes very quickly, they can go, "Ah, right, okay, conflicts of interest, yes, that makes sense," and so on.

So, I'm going to put "conflicts of interest" in bold. In order to do this, again, I could use UEB bold signs but I don't want to because they would get lost in translation, potentially, so I need to use Markdown bold signs and Markdown bold signs are actually a double asterisk at the start of the text and a double asterisk at the end of the text. So, I'm going to type an asterisk which we already know in UEB is dot 5 and the IN sign, dot 5 and the IN sign, so two of them. This is how we know it's not a list because if it was a list, it would be one asterisk.

So, I've done my two asterisks and I'm going to just type, with no spaces after the asterisk, "conflicts space of space interest." I'm going to bold my full stop. I don't know necessarily that you should but I'm going to. So, "conflicts of interest", full stop, dot 5, dots 3 5, so dot 5 and IN sign, dot 5 and the IN sign. That has closed the bold. New line, new line, because we want to start a new paragraph.

Now, I'm going to say, with no formatting or anything, "Matthew thought this was a long overdue idea, full stop." New line, new line. So, just a normal paragraph there, nothing untoward, we don't need to do anything. We can just write in Braille as normal.

Now, let's assume the discussion didn't go very well and we need to make another heading at a level below this to talk about this. So, we want a heading at level three. To do a heading at level three, we need to do three hash signs and again, a UEB hash sign is dots 4 5 6, and the TH sign (4 5 6, 1 4 5 6). So, I'll do that now, 4 5 6, TH, 4 5 6, TH, 4 5 6, TH space capital conflicts space of space capital interest. Enter, enter. "The following additional points were made, colon." And I'll keep going.

What I now want is a numbered list. So, I'll do enter, enter and if I want a numbered list, I don't actually have to do anything special, I can just type numbers. So, I'll type number one, full stop, "The charity commission want us to have this policy," full stop, new line, new line. Number sign two, full stop, "We think it is a good idea," full stop, new line, new line. I'll pretend that's all we've got in this set of minutes and I'll type, "The meeting closed at 7:30 pm," full stop.

So, I've now written this set of minutes which is of course very fictitious and very incomplete but it's enough information for us to now go back upstairs and convert this into a Markdown file and then ultimately back into a Word file. So, I'm just going to save this before I do that. It will vary on your Braille display but on an Orbit Reader, you can press the Select key, the first item in the menu is Exit and I believe you can just press the Select key on that and that has now put me in a readable version of the file.

So, if I now press the dot 7 key, I've got minutes.brf and if I arrow up, I've got manuals and if I arrow down, I go back to minutes and if I arrow down again, I get music. So, yes, it's saved a file called minutes.brf in the root directory of the SD card. I'll just turn the Orbit Reader off and take it upstairs.

Ben Mustill-Rose: A great first half of a presentation there from Matthew Horspool who has actually joined us mid-presentation. Lovely to have you here, Matthew. Dave, I think the plan is to maybe take a couple of questions?

Dave Williams: Yes. So, Jess has raised her hand and if you would like to ask a question about anything you've heard so far, remember that the aim of the game here is to prepare minutes that are going to look great for a sighted colleague, so that's why we've been adding all these extra codes into our document that we've created on the Orbit Reader and then we're going to hear in a moment Matthew converting that document into a form that is going to look very visually attractive.

Let's go to those hands, Ben. We'll take a couple of questions and we've got some activity in the chat.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So we're going to go to Jess first.

Jess: I'm a bit confused with all this. So, the Markdown thing that Matthew's talking about, is that a separate program that you need to download or is it already in the Braille reader?

Matthew Horspool: Markdown is just the code. So, the codes that we've been writing like the star sign and the hashtags and things, Markdown is like a language, if you like and so you need a program to interpret that language on your computer but you don't need a program to interpret it on the Braille display.

So, you could be on the train, writing in Markdown, and then when you get home, you put the Markdown file through a computer and it will turn it into a nice looking Word file. So, it's literally just the codes.

Jess: So, do you need a Markdown program on your computer? Is it just called Markdown?

Matthew Horspool: You do. Well, it's called Pandoc and it gets covered in the second half of the presentation.

Jess: Okay, thank you. I'll wait for that.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks, Jess. It's always worth clarifying those questions as well because it's one of those things where if one person thinks it, it's probably going to be more than one.

Dave Williams: Let's take another question.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to Theo.

Theo: So, I'm wondering, if I want a machine that has the choice of writing a text or a BRF file, what would be the best and easiest one when it came to conversion?

Matthew Horspool: That's a slightly nuanced question. It depends on the quality of the translator in your note taker and it depends on the quality of the translator on your computer. My preference would probably be to save as a dot txt if you're given a choice because it's one less thing to have to do on a computer but if you have more up to date translation tables on your computer than you do on your note taker, then you might want to save as a BRF and do the translation on the computer.

Theo: Okay, thank you.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to Margaret next.

Margaret: I'm speaking from Maine in the US. I'm just thrilled to be part of this wonderful collection of webinars. I'm a bit confused. What about those of us of a certain age and a bit of stubbornness who've learned to read UEB but haven't quite managed to write in it yet? It sounded like there was a distinction between Markdown signs and UEB markdown signs or did I understand that right? Could you clarify?

Matthew Horspool: Yes, absolutely. Once the Braille file has been translated into a text file that the computer can read, what we need to end up with are hash signs and asterisks and underscores and all of these other signs that I've talked about. Because the standard code is UEB and I know UEB best, because I'm quite young, I wrote it in UEB with the UEB hash sign and the UEB underscore and the UEB asterisk. If you want to write it in, say, EBAE or British Braille or anything like that and you can find the appropriate signs in that Braille code for a hash or what I think you might call a pound in the US, then by all means use them and they should translate properly but I don't know, for example, if an underscore readily exists in EBAE without going into computer Braille. It's a bit hit and miss but hopefully that sort of answers your question.

Dave Williams: So we'll leave questions for now. Let's play out the second section. I think it runs about 13 minutes and then we'll have plenty of time at the end and we'll get through as many questions as possible.

Matthew Horspool: Thanks to the magic of recording technology, here I am, back upstairs at my desk and I'm going to copy the file that I've just created on my Orbit Reader to my computer for onward processing.

Obviously the steps are going to vary slightly depending on which Braille display you've got but hopefully there's some good conceptual information here that will apply to all Braille displays. So, I'll turn the Orbit Reader back on and it says minutes.brf on the Braille display because I'm still in the File Explorer. That's fine. I'm just going to press the space and dot 7 and dot 5, all at once, and what's now flashed up on the display is two colons and a space and in Grade 1 "Mass Storage Mode".

This is the mode that I want to be in. You could alternatively take the SD card out of your Orbit Reader and put it into your computer. That would also work. But we're going to assume that you don't have an SD card reader in your computer.

So, the Orbit is now in mass storage mode. I'm going to take the cable that came with my Orbit Reader, although any micro USB would do. I'm going to insert it into the Orbit Reader with the teeth pointing down so the cable is now in and I'm just going to lean down and plug it into one of the USB ports on the computer.

There we go.

JAWS: [INAUDIBLE] USB Drive E select what happens with removable drives.

Matthew Horspool: If you were paying attention and bear in mind I'm using JAWS with Eloquence, JAWS 2021, for those who are interested, you heard, "USB Drive E, choose what happens with media."

Because I heard it say USB Drive E, I'm actually going to go to the Run dialog box with Windows key R, and type E colon and press Enter.

JAWS: USB Drive E items [INAUDIBLE].

Matthew Horspool: If I arrow down in this list (JAWS: Children [INAUDIBLE] three of 14 Manuals four of 14 Music five of 14 Reference six of 14), you might recognise some of these folders as folders that you've seen when you're browsing through your SD card. I'll keep going down (JAWS: RNIB seven of 14). We can ignore all these (JAWS: minutes.brf 12 of 14) and there we are, minutes.brf, and I'm going to copy this into my documents folder. So, I'm going to do Control-C and I'm going to open documents in what I think is the normal way to do it. I don't actually use the Documents folder on a regular basis. So I'll press Windows E, file explorer (JAWS: File Explorer item list box) and arrow a few times (JAWS: Downloads Documents three of 31), documents, press Enter (JAWS: Documents) and Control-V to paste (JAWS: minutes.brf 19 of 19).

I now have minutes.brf pasted from the Orbit Reader onto the computer. I can now Alt-tab (JAWS: USB Drive E) back to the drive E and alt-F4 out of it and at this point, if I wanted to, I could actually switch the Orbit Reader off and disconnect it from the computer. When I turn the Orbit Reader back on, it will be back in stand-alone mode which is fine. If you use the Orbit Reader with your phone, now that you've put it in mass storage mode, you will need to put it back into Bluetooth mode in order to use it with your phone and instructions to do that can be found in the iOS Master Class, a recording of which is available on the Braillists website.

So, I have a BRF file already to go. There is a free tool available from the American Printing House for the Blind called Send To Braille. The purpose of Send To Braille is to take any file, like a Microsoft Word document or a text file or a Rich Text or whatever, and convert it by means of the Pandoc program which we'll talk about later on and the Liblouis Braille translator into a BRF file.

Luckily for us, this free tool can also convert a BRF file back into text and I'm going to do this now. I'm on minutes.brf in my Documents folder. I'm going to press the Applications key (JAWS: Context menu open O) and I'm going to press the letter N which is the shortcut for Send To (JAWS: Back from braille E) and you'll notice the first item there is "Back From Braille". If I keep going down (JAWS: Device E braille E), I'll see Braille. So, if I wanted to convert it to Braille, I could go there. But I'm going to go back up (JAWS: Back from braille E) to Back From Braille and I'm going to press the Enter key (JAWS: Leaving menus documents item new multi select list box minutes.brf).

Basically it's done. If I actually down arrow once now (JAWS: minutes.brf.txt 19 of 20), I have a TXT file which I can press Enter on (JAWS: minutes.brf.txt notepad edit computer braille) and it's opened up in Notepad and if I just read through it (JAWS: minutes beta RF).

We can ignore the first line, because it's trying to convert computer Braille into UEB. "Minutes beta RF" is actually the name of the file and we had to do this to make the Orbit Reader give it a proper name so actually I'm going to go onto the next line (JAWS: Number new line) and I'm going to do a Control-Shift-Home to go to the top of the file (JAWS: minutes beta RF) and delete that minutes.brf. But I'll just have another look and see what we've got (JAWS: number braillists foundation minutes). Okay. This looks very familiar with the hashtag there. (JAWS: Number number members present) And if we look (JAWS: number space M E M B E R S space P R E S E N T), it's kept all my capitals (JAWS: star Dave Williams chair star Matthew Horspool secretary star Ben Mustill-Rose number number Braillists future Dave proposed emending the Braillists Foundation constitution i particular he wanted to add a section about star star flicts of interests star star).

So there's a few interesting things that have happened here. Some of these are my spelling mistakes (JAWS: Dave proposed emending). Dave proposed amending, I've spelled incorrectly. So, I could correct this at this juncture (JAWS: M Dave proposed amending the Braillists Foundation constitution i particular he wanted). "I particular", I think I made a mistake there. I'll just add an N, "in particular he wanted" (JAWS: to add a section about star star flicts of interest star star). To add a section about (JAWS: star star colon f foxtrot). Now then, yes, so because I put a star, I actually can't use the CON sign in "conflicts of interest" but I had forgotten about this so it's put a colon in. I should stress as well that Send To Braille is using Liblouis 3.12. The latest version of Liblouis is 3.16, so there are some oddities in translation but I think this is a legitimate mistake. So, I'll delete this thing and I'll type in C-O-N.

(JAWS: To add a section about star star conflicts of interest star star Matthew thought this was a long overdue idea number number number conflicts of interest the following additional points were made one the charity commission wants us to have this policy two we think it is a good idea the meeting closed at 7:30pm.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, so, by and large, this has translated nice and neatly. A few problems, mostly my spelling mistakes and some poor contraction use, but by and large that's worked. So, I'll press Alt-F4 and save that document.

The final step on this journey is to convert this document which is now a text file into a Microsoft Word document and we're going to use the Pandoc program to do this.

The first thing I'm going to do is actually rename it because currently it's called minutes.brf.txt and I'd like it to be called minutes.md, md standing for Markdown. So I'll press F2 on this and just back out and type MD and press Enter.

JAWS: Rename dialog if you change a file name extension the file might become unusable are you sure you want to change it yes button alt plus Y).

Matthew Horspool: Okay, yes, I am, so I'll press Enter.

(JAWS: Documents item two multi select list box minutes.brg.txt available on this device 22 slash zero.

Matthew Horspool: It has worked.

JAWS: Minutes dot md available on this device.

Matthew Horspool: There we go, fantastic. Now, I'm going to go into the Run dialog again with the Windows R command and type CMD and press Enter. This is a command prompt. If you're familiar with the command prompt, you'll know what to do here. If you're not familiar with the command prompt, there's a few commands that you need to know about. If you need to change drive, you just type the drive letter followed by a colon and press Enter. If you want to change directory, as in our case we do, you type CD space and then the name of the directory. So, you could type CD C colon backslash program files backslash whatever. There is a short code in Windows 10 called Documents so I'm going to type CD space documents and press Enter (JAWS: [INAUDIBLE] documents). And you'll notice it's put me in the documents folder.

I've already got Pandoc installed. Pandoc, by the way, spelled P-A-N-D-O-C. If I didn't have it installed, I would need to install it but that's a very painless process. There's an installer that does this for you. So, I'm going to type Pandoc, P-A-N-D-O-C space minutes.md space which was the name of the minutes file that we made. So, I do recommend keeping these names very short. Just call it "Minutes". Eventually you'll need to rename it and call it, for example, "Minutes 23 February" or whatever the meeting happens to be but in this case, just call it "Minutes" and do your renaming afterwards because it'll make it easier on the fingers when you have to type. So, Pandoc minutes.md dash O which is the output so that says to send it to a file. So, dash O space minutes.docx, which is the extension for a Microsoft Word document and press Enter.

JAWS: New line [INAUDIBLE] documents.

Matthew Horspool: You didn't actually hear it say anything. You just heard it say new line C colon backslash users backslash mhors backslash documents and you might be thinking, oh, well, that's not worked then. It has worked. Don't worry. It has worked. If it didn't work, you would know about it because it would actually say it's not worked but it didn't say that, it says it's worked so we're all good.

I'm going to Alt-tab back to my documents folder.

JAWS: Documents documents item two multi select list box minutes dot md 20,

Matthew Horspool: Notice I'm on minutes.md and I'm going to up arrow once and see what we can find.

JAWS: Minutes dot docx.

Matthew Horspool: And I'll press the Enter key on minutes.docx and see what happens.

JAWS: At start [UNSURE OF WORD] minutes dot docx compatibility mode word edit.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, so it's come up in Word. Let's have a look at what we've got. If I up arrow--

JAWS: Heading level one Braillists Foundation Minutes.

Matthew Horspool: That looks good. I'll just down arrow through this file.

JAWS: Heading level two members present level one bullet dave williams chair bullet matthew horspool secretary bullet ben mustill-rose.

Matthew Horspool: You have to ignore the inconsistency buzzer there.

JAWS: Level zero heading level two braillists future dave proposed amending the braillists foundation constitution in particular he wanted to add a section about conflicts of interest matthew thought this was a long overdue idea heading level three conflicts of interest the following additional points were made level one one the charity commission wants us to have this policy two we think it is a good idea level zero the meeting closed at 7:30pm.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, so doesn't that look nice? This is all nicely done. So, let's just check that the italics and the bold came out. I'll turn quick nav keys on in JAWS, there are equivalent keys in NVDA, and do a shift-H.

JAWS: Heading three conflicts of interest.

Matthew Horspool: Let's do another shift-H.

JAWS: Heading two braillists future.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, and turn quick nav off.

JAWS: Dave proposed amending the braillists foundation constitution.

Matthew Horspool: Okay, so if I start here: Dave proposed and do an insert-F on "proposed".

JAWS: [INAUDIBLE]

Matthew Horspool: Okay, that's not italicised.

JAWS: Amending [INAUDIBLE].

Matthew Horspool: Okay, well, for some reason that's come out in bold rather than in italics but it did work.

JAWS: Foundation constitution period in particular comma he wanted to add a section about conflicts of [INAUDIBLE].

Matthew Horspool: Okay, so, italics haven't quite worked as we expected and this is because of a problem in Markdown. Markdown has various different flavours and I think probably I'm working in a slightly different flavour of Markdown to the flavour of Markdown that Pandoc was expecting. But nonetheless you'll notice that it has worked. We've got some sort of emphasis there and actually all I would really need to do to work out that problem is just to do a quick Google search on italics in Markdown and that would sort out that problem. I'd just work out what the correct syntax is.

At this point in proceedings, I think it would be appropriate to open up for questions, so I'll pass it back to Ben.

Ben Mustill-Rose: A really, really informative presentation there, Matthew, and I think it's probably one of those things where it might seem a little bit daunting at first but actually when you stick at it, Markdown for me is incredibly useful and I use it quite a lot at work.

I believe we've got around about ten minutes for questions. We do already have a couple of raised hands. If anyone else wants to ask a question, it's Alt-Y on Windows, Option-Y on Mac, star nine if you're dialling in on a phone or if you're on an iDevice such as an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch. You can press the More button which is in the bottom right hand of your screen and then find the Raise Hand button.

So, we're going to go to Alan Dyte first and then Debbie.

Alan: My hand is up by mistake. I don't have enough knowledge to ask any questions at this time.

Ben Mustill-Rose: No problem. We're going to go to Debbie next and then to someone who has dialled in by phone and their phone number ends in 596.

Debbie: It's Debbie from Canada. You might have covered this already, Matthew, but regarding the discrepancies between the italics and bold, particularly the italics in UEB, I'm assuming, you mentioned near the end of the recording, it's a Markdown problem and not a UEB problem.

Matthew Horspool: Yes. So, firstly, hello, Debbie, good to have a former President of Braille Literacy Canada on the call.

I think there were two problems rolled into one. The reason why I didn't want to use UEB italics signs and UEB bold signs is because, particularly if you were working on something that wasn't an Orbit Reader that was doing the translation on the fly, it could potentially be translating into a format that can't actually accept italics and bold and so the UEB bold and italics sign would just get lost in translation, before I even got to the Markdown stage, whereas if you put the Markdown italics and bold signs in, then they will stay because they're punctuation and therefore they'll get translated. It's not a perfect setup, it's just the least worst option, I think.

The reason why they didn't come out properly, I did do some research after I did that recording, a very embarrassing accidental deliberate mistake, the reason why they didn't come out is because I think there are different flavours of Markdown but also I'd just got the thing the wrong way around. Italics is actually a single underscore or a single asterisk and bold is a double underscore or a double asterisk and I'd just got them the wrong way round and given you slightly inaccurate information.

Debbie: Thank you.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to go to the phone, phone number ending in 596. Then we're going to go to someone, and I apologise for mispronouncing your name, someone called [PHONETIC: Ceverin].

--596: Thank you. I've never even heard of Pandoc and where can you get it? Does it cost anything?

Matthew Horspool: No. So, there will be a handout that will be available shortly after this session. If you'd like a copy of it, either look at braillists.org/media or email us at help@braillists.org and we can send you a copy. But Pandoc is free, you can get it from, I think, pandoc.org and it's fairly painless. You get an installer and you double click on the installer or press Enter on it and then it's just a standard, please accept the licence agreement, type installer. You install it and then you can use it as I demonstrated it and there's no cost involved at all. There's no cost for any of the software that I showed in that demonstration.

--596: Thank you very much.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We have one more hand.

Dave Williams: We've got a couple in the chat and we can go through those as well.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, Ceverin, you are unmuted.

Ceverin: I think it is also one question that is in the chat. I'm also a French speaker and I use the French Grade 2. I am not very good at translating so I was wondering if the program you mentioned, to transform Grade 2 Braille into Grade 1, would also support French Braille?

Matthew Horspool: Absolutely. I'm not going to try to answer you in French. My French is very primitive but good to have you. So, the first thing to say is that Markdown itself, because Markdown is just symbols, like hash signs and star signs and things, it itself is not in French or English or whatever, it's just in whatever language you want to give it. You'd need to find out in French Braille what the signs were for an asterisk or a hash symbol or an underscore or something but once you've found those signs, you should be good to go.

The Send To Braille program is based on Liblouis and there are options to set the Braille table. So, it comes as UEB by default. You can change it to EBAE or British Braille or indeed French Grade 1, French Grade 2. It's a little bit technical. I think you've emailed help@braillists.org already. If you email again, if you get stuck, l can help you do that because you need to open a batch file and edit a line of code in order to do that and it may not be especially obvious how to do it. I'm very happy to help anybody if they want their Braille tables changing. I can do it and send a file back and go about it that way. But, yes, it's definitely possible to do it.

Ceverin: And it's called Send To Braille?

Matthew Horspool: Send To Braille. And the Pandoc program, to be honest, it's just a user interface so it might have been translated, I don't know, but it's not actually looking at the language of the document. It might give you English error messages but other than that, it will work fine with French documents.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Let's go to Dave if we haven't answered the question in the chat. Do you think we've covered that, Dave?

Dave Williams: Yes, I think so. There was this question about what's the policy of non-English Braille producers in respect of Markdown and I think Matthew has really already answered that and I suppose just to add that Markdown tends to be used by individuals, Matthew, for personal use cases. Is that fair? It's not generally something that would be used widely by a Braille production house.

Matthew Horspool: No, I wouldn't think so. I'm not entirely sure if I've properly understood the question. It might be a question that we might need to take off list. I believe you're looking to do things in Greek and things like that, so if you want to email us, if we haven't properly answered the question, we can certainly have a conversation about that.

Dave Williams: Then Russell wants to know, is there a Markdown manual somewhere.

Matthew Horspool: There are various Markdown manuals and it's a bit like, where do you learn html or where do you learn anything. There is a sort of official Markdown manual but I think if you just Google "Markdown" or "Learn Markdown", you'll find a Markdown manual and I'll put some links in the show notes to various sources of good information about Markdown.

Dave Williams: That would be brilliant. Thank you very much for that. I think we've covered everything in the chat. Let's draw things to a close and if anyone has a question that hasn't been answered in the session, maybe we can take that on email or via the Braillists forum.

Well, folks, thank you so much. Thank you very much everybody for fantastic questions and a really excellent session. It's always good when we get really insightful questions and if we didn't get to your question , many apologies. It was a busy session and you can of course contact us via the Braillists forum, braillists.org/forum. There will be a recording of this session posted to our Media page at braillists.org/media and there will be a handout that will accompany that. But if you have a burning issue that is not answered in either of those places, then do drop us a line, help@braillists.org and we will endeavour to get back to you.

Don't forget, the Braillists Foundation will be back on Thursday with our regular Braille book club. We've got our Friday open forum session and then the Braille For Beginners class continues on Monday evenings. Next week we'll be looking at making notes in Braille in a very different context.

So, once again, thank you very much to Matthew for delivering a fantastic session and Ben for your help with the moderation. From all of us on the Braillists team, take care, have a great work and until next time, bye for now.