

Proposal to encode four Latin letters of Benjamin Franklin's reformed alphabet

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1. Introduction

Benjamin Franklin's reformed English alphabet introduced six new lowercase letters. Two are already representable in Unicode - U+0265 LATIN SMALL LETTER TURNED H and U+014B LATIN SMALL LETTER ENG. Four are not. They represent the vowel Franklin illustrated with John/folly and awl/ball, and the consonants /sh/, voiceless /th/, and voiced /dh/.

The four letters have twice been the subject of Unicode proposals. N3555 (2008) placed them provisionally at U+1E0E0..U+1E0E3 in a broad exploratory collection. L2/22-215 (2022) repropoed them at U+AB6C..U+AB6F. Neither document led to encoding. The first did not advance past feedback and later work concentrated on Teuthonista; the second received substantive Script Ad Hoc requests for better evidence, glyphs, naming, user-community identification, representability analysis, and SMP allocation. UTC #173 recorded the discussion but no acceptance action. No later revised Franklin proposal was located through 2026-08-30.

The proposed characters are needed for scholarly and archival interchange (not for a revival of a historic spelling system). The letters are stable, atomic, attested in running text, and repeatedly exchanged today through lossy substitutes.

The evidence now available is materially stronger than in 2008 or 2022. Franklin used the letters in a printed alphabet table and several pages of running reformed text in 1779. Editions in 1806 and 1906 reproduced that material. The characters appear in a 1970 journal devoted to spelling reform, a 2025 Linguistic Society of America paper, and Gary D. German's 862-page 2026 monograph, which presents newly digitized manuscripts, systematic IPA analysis, and a 442-word glossary. Online publishers and reference sites independently resort to asterisks, improvised approximations, page images, per-glyph SVGs, or blank table cells.

The major parts of this proposal are compiled with AI assistance, using the model OpenAI ChatGPT 5.6 Sol “Extra High” (all AI generated text parts are thoroughly checked and adjusted manually where appropriate).

2. Proposal and review history

2.1 N3555 / L2/08-428 (2008)

Michael Everson's N3555, dated 2008-11-27, was explicitly an exploratory individual contribution. On its Benjamin Franklin page it proposed four names and the provisional positions U+1E0E0..U+1E0E3. Its summary form marked the submission incomplete, said more information would be provided later, supplied no published samples for this subset, and did not address processing behavior.

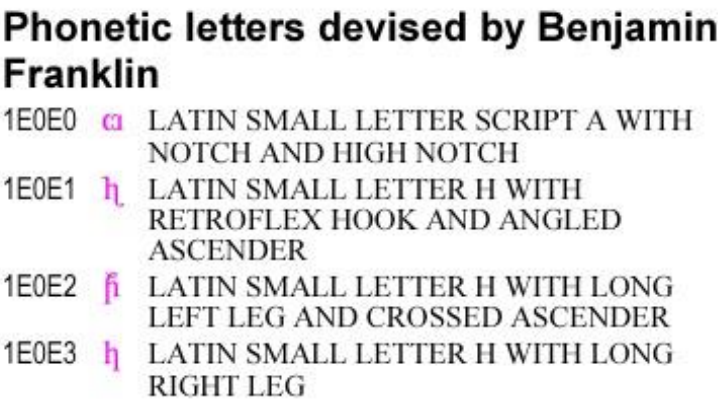


Figure 1. N3555's four exploratory Franklin entries at U+1E0E0..U+1E0E3.
Source: N3555 / L2/08-428 (2008), p. 10.

2.2 L2/22-215 and the 2022 Script Ad Hoc review

Nikita Manulov's L2/22-215, dated 2022-07-29, was a complete four-character proposal. It used U+AB6C..U+AB6F and supplied the 1779 source.

Issue	L2/22-248 feedback	Response in this draft
Prior art	Cite N3555; glyphs and two names overlap.	Cited and compared in Sections 2 and 7.
Glyph quality	Low-resolution images; improve glyphs and de-italicize.	Higher resolution primary scans and upright reference glyphs from the supplied BenjaminFranklinProposal Regular font are embedded.
Identity	Explain the user community and why encoding is needed.	Sections 4-6 identify editors, historians, linguists, archives, digital-humanities projects, and accessibility users; digital failures are documented.
Representability	Ask whether existing characters can represent the forms.	Section 7 compares alpha, h, eng, turned h, eth, thorn, and sequences; none are canonically equivalent.
Allocation	If eligible, use the SMP rather than the BMP.	U+1DFB2..U+1DFB5 in Latin Extended-G are proposed.
SH/TH/DH design	The 1779 forms and descriptions do not support 'serif' or the proposed leg distinctions as stated.	Functional names avoid unstable anatomy; Section 8 specifies the historically meaningful top-left and lower-right features.

The Script Ad Hoc report was presented to UTC #173. The minutes explicitly record acceptances for other items where the committee took an action; they contain no Franklin acceptance action or consensus. The most accurate status is therefore: reviewed, revision requested, not accepted, and not formally rejected.

3. Proposed repertoire

1DF00

Latin Extended-G

1DFFF

	1DF0	1DF1	1DF2	1DF3	1DF4	1DF5	1DF6	1DF7	1DF8	1DF9	1DFA	1DFB	1DFC	1DFD	1DFE	1DFF
0																
1																
2												ɸ				
3												ɸ̇				
4												h				
5												ḣ				
6																
7																
8																
9																
A																
B																
C																
D																
E																
F																

The proposal follows the semantic order in figure 2 - OH, SH, TH, DH. The names are deliberately functional. They identify Franklin's system and sound-label, avoiding the unstable glyph anatomy that caused difficulty in L2/22-215 and L2/22-248. This functional naming has a Unicode precedent in the likewise functionally named ‘Archaic letters for Volapük’ in Latin Extended-D—LATIN CAPITAL/SMALL LETTER VOLAPUK AE, OE, and UE—as proposed in L2/11-137 and retained in the revised L2/11-202.

Names such as FRANKLIN OH are considered to be preferable to names like LATIN SMALL LETTER ALPHA WITH NOTCH... because alpha is a misleading unification cue and because the 2022 review found the descriptions of the h-like terminals unreliable.

The forms are based on Franklin's printed letters and preserve the OH notches, distinguish SH from ordinary h, give TH and DH the historically supported top-left distinction, and avoid treating the lower-right hook as unique to only one of TH/DH where the sources show it more broadly. The notched terminal of DH should not be named or normalized as a long serif.

Block: Latin Extended-G

Code	Glyph	Proposed name	Franklin's value	Identity note
U+1DFB2	œ	LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN OH	vowel in John, folly; awl, ball	Franklin's new low/back vowel letter
U+1DFB3	ƒ	LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN SH	/sh/ as in ship, wish	distinctive h-derived letter; not U+0283
U+1DFB4	h	LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN TH	/th/ as in think	voiceless dental fricative letter
U+1DFB5	ħ	LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN DH	/dh/ as in thy	voiced dental fricative letter

3.1 Relationship to the complete six-letter innovation

Franklin function	Representative form	Unicode representation	Action
OH vowel	new notched a/alpha-like form	none	encode U+1DFB2
short uh vowel	turned h	U+0265 LATIN SMALL LETTER TURNED H	no new character
SH consonant	new h-derived form	none	encode U+1DFB3
NG consonant	eng	U+014B LATIN SMALL LETTER ENG	no new character
TH consonant	new h-derived form	none	encode U+1DFB4
DH consonant	new h-derived form	none	encode U+1DFB5

4. Historical background and primary attestation

Franklin designed the reformed alphabet in the 1760s as a practical spelling reform. The surviving documentary record includes his alphabet table, correspondence written in the reformed mode, and later editorial reproductions. The four proposed characters are not ornamental signs: they occupy alphabetic positions, have specified sounds, and occur inside words and continuous prose.

4.1 The 1768 correspondence and 1779 printed edition

The central primary source is 'A Scheme for a New Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling' in Benjamin Vaughan's 1779 Political, Miscellaneous, and Philosophical Pieces, pp. 467-478. The foldout table labels the six newly devised letters and explains their pronunciation. The ensuing material includes examples, Mary Stevenson's letter of 26 September 1768 written substantially in the reformed alphabet, and Franklin's longer response of 28 September 1768. All four proposed letters occur as ordinary running text.

TABLE OF THE REFORMED ALPHABET.

To face page 357,
Vol. II.

Characters.	Sounded respectively, as in the Words in the Column below.	Names of Letters expressed in the reformed Sounds.	Characters.	Manner of pronouncing the Sounds.
<i>o</i>	Old.	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	The first Vowel naturally, and deepest sound; requires only to open the mouth, and breathe through it.
* <i>cz</i>	John, folly; awl, ball.	<i>cz</i>	<i>cz</i>	The next requiring the mouth opened a little more, or hollower.
<i>a</i>	Man, can.	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	The next, a little more.
<i>c</i>	Men, lend, name, lane.	<i>e</i>	<i>e</i>	The next requires the tongue to be a little more elevated.
<i>i</i>	Did, sin, deed, seen,	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	The next still more.
<i>u</i>	Tool, fool, rule.	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>	The next requires the lips to be gathered up, leaving a small opening.
* <i>u</i>	Um, un; as in umbrage, unto, &c. and as in er.	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	The next a very short vowel, the sound of which we should express in our present letters thus, uh; a short, and not very strong aspiration.
<i>h</i>	Hunter, happy, high.	<i>huh</i>	<i>huh</i>	A stronger or more forcible aspiration.
<i>g</i>	Give, gather,	<i>gi</i>	<i>gi</i>	The first CONSONANT; being formed by the root of the tongue; this is the present bard g.
<i>k</i>	Keep, kick.	<i>ki</i>	<i>ki</i>	A kindred sound; a little more acute; to be used instead of the hard c.
* <i>sh</i>	(sh) Ship, wish.	<i>ish</i>	<i>ish</i>	A new letter wanted in our language; our sh, separately taken, not being proper elements of the sound.
* <i>ng</i>	(ng) ing, repeating, among.	<i>ing</i>	<i>ing</i>	A new letter wanted for the same reason:—These are formed back in the mouth.
<i>n</i>	End.	<i>en</i>	<i>en</i>	Formed more forward in the mouth; the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth.
<i>r</i>	Art.	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	The same; the tip of the tongue a little loose or separate from the roof of the mouth, and vibrating.
<i>t</i>	Teeth.	<i>ti</i>	<i>ti</i>	The tip of the tongue more forward; touching, and then leaving, the roof.
<i>d</i>	Deed.	<i>di</i>	<i>di</i>	The same; touching a little fuller.
<i>l</i>	ell, tell.	<i>el</i>	<i>el</i>	The same; touching just above the gums of the upper teeth.
<i>s</i>	Essence.	<i>es</i>	<i>es</i>	This sound is formed by the breath passing between the moist end of the tongue and the upper teeth.
<i>z</i>	(ez) Wages.	<i>ez</i>	<i>ez</i>	The same; a little denser and duller.
* <i>h</i>	(th) Think.	<i>eh</i>	<i>eh</i>	The tongue under, and a little behind, the upper teeth; touching them, but so as to let the breath pass between.
* <i>h</i>	(dh) Thy.	<i>eh</i>	<i>eh</i>	The same; a little fuller.
<i>f</i>	Effect.	<i>ef</i>	<i>ef</i>	Formed by the lower lip against the upper teeth.
<i>v</i>	Ever.	<i>ev</i>	<i>ev</i>	The same; fuller and duller.
<i>b</i>	Bees.	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	The lips full together, and opened as the air passes out.
<i>p</i>	Peep.	<i>pi</i>	<i>pi</i>	The same; but a thinner sound.
<i>m</i>	Ember.	<i>em</i>	<i>em</i>	The closing of the lips, while the e [here annexed] is sounding.

Figure 2. Franklin's Table of the Reformed Alphabet, as reproduced in the 1806 collected works.

Source: *The Complete Works in Philosophy, Politics, and Morals of the Late Dr. Benjamin Franklin*, vol. II (London, 1806), table facing p. 357. This reproduction preserves the six new letters and their sound descriptions.

Kenshtyn, Septembyr 26, 1768.

Diir Syr,

yi hav transkryib'd iur alfabet, &c.
buitfi yi hink myit bi cvo syrovis tu hoz, bu
uifi ta akuyir an akiuret pronynsiesiyn, if
hat kuld bi fixs'd; byt yi si meni inkcan-
viiniensis, az uel az difkyltis, hat uuld
atend hi brinj iur letyrs and arhagraft
intu kamyn ius. aal cur etimalodfiiz
uuld be last, kansikuentli ui kuld nat
asyrteen hi miiniy cvo meni uyrds; hi
distinksiyn, tu, bituiin uyrds cvo difyrent
miiniy and smilar scaund uuld bi iusles,
ynles ui livin ryiters pyblifi nu iidisiyns.
In fiart yi biliro ui myst let piipil spel cin
in heer old ue, and (az ui fyind it iisiefst)
du hi seem cureselves.—With ease and with
sincerity I can, in the old way, subscribe
myself, Dear Sir,

Your faithful and affectionate Servant,

M. S.

Dr. Franklin.

Figure 3. Running text in Franklin's reformed alphabet in the 1779 edition.

Source: Vaughan (ed.), *Political, Miscellaneous, and Philosophical Pieces* (1779), p. 472. The h-derived SH, TH, and DH letters and the OH vowel occur within words, demonstrating character use rather than isolated chart display.

4.2 Manuscript evidence and modern archival work

The Founders Online edition identifies a phonetic alphabet document dated approximately 20 July 1768 and explains that lowercase roman and italic characters were cut from Franklin's designs. The Library of Congress finding list records the 1768 scheme, examples, and related Stevenson/Franklin letters. German (2026) reports a newly identified manuscript letter and table at the American Philosophical Society, together with two additional manuscript sources digitized for the first time. The evidence therefore extends beyond the familiar 1779 plate.

4.3 Reprint tradition

The alphabet and correspondence were republished in the 1806 Complete Works and in Albert Henry Smyth's *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5 (1906/1907), pp. 169-177. These editions required typeset or facsimile reproduction of the same special letters. They are evidence of continuing scholarly transmission, not independent inventions.

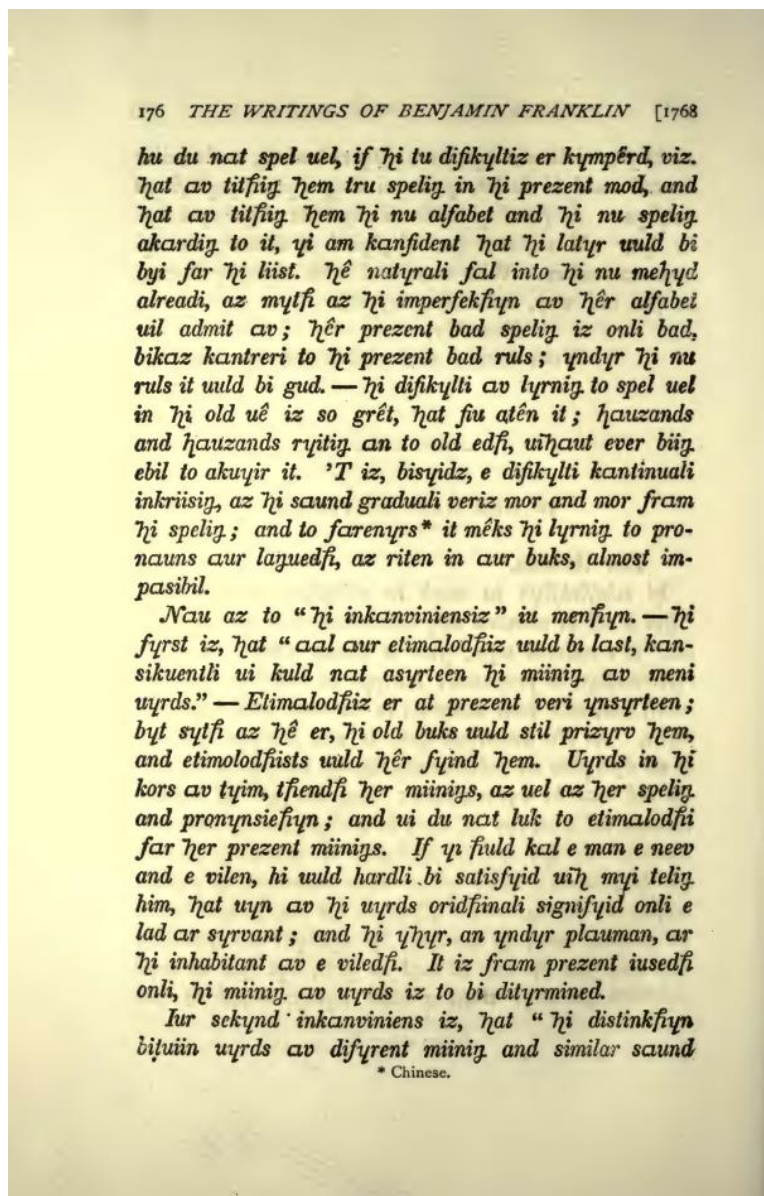


Figure 4. Reformed-alphabet running text in Smyth's early twentieth-century edition.

Source: Albert Henry Smyth (ed.), *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5 (Macmillan, 1906/1907), correspondence in the section on the reformed mode of spelling.

5. Documented use by subject domain

The following inventory distinguishes direct character use from discussion that merely mentions the alphabet. It also records how digital editions handle the four missing characters. The sources span Franklin studies, the history and criticism of English orthography, linguistics, and popular reference works.

Source	Domain	Use	Digital treatment	Significance
1768 manuscripts; 1779 Vaughan edition	Primary / Franklin subject	Alphabet table plus several pages of running reformed text	All four occur in words and correspondence	Core primary attestation
1806 Complete Works, vol. II	Franklin edition	Full table and correspondence	Special typography/facsimile	Early reprint tradition
1906/1907 Smyth, Writings, vol. 5	Franklin edition	Table and running letters	Special typography/facsimile	Scholarly editorial reuse
1904 Bigelow / OLL digital ed. 2013	Franklin edition / e-book	Reformed alphabet table	New glyphs become linked asterisks; identity is lost	Direct interchange failure
Project Gutenberg e-book 2015	Franklin edition / e-book	Table and pp. 360-366 examples	Transcriber's note says six new characters and affected text are images	Not searchable or copyable as text
Founders Online	Critical archive edition	1768 phonetic alphabet document	Ad hoc approximations/sequences in the web table	Authoritative archive lacks stable characters
Library of Congress finding list	Archive / Franklin subject	Catalogues scheme, examples, and letters	Metadata only; identifies holdings	Supports archival user community
Spelling Progress Bulletin, Fall 1970	Orthography history/criticism	Figure 3 reproduces the complete table	Page/facsimile image	Direct use in a reform journal
Dawson & Joseph, PLSA 2025	History of linguistics	Figures reproduce alphabet and Stevenson letter; analytical discussion	Facsimiles embedded in PDF	Current peer-reviewed scholarship
German, 2026 monograph	Franklin / orthoepy / sociolinguistics	Two chapters, new manuscripts, IPA transcription, 442-word glossary	Scholarly transcription still needs stable character handling	Largest current specialist use case
Twilley, 2005/2006	Design history / Franklin tercentenary	Essay and redesign project devoted to the six letters	Custom artwork	Modern reuse and glyph study
Smithsonian Magazine, 2013	Popular Franklin history	Chart and letter images	Images, not encoded text	Broad educational demand
Omniglot, revised 2021	Writing-system reference	Alphabet chart and sample	Images and downloadable spreadsheet	Independent digital workaround
Wikipedia, active through 2026	Multilingual public reference	Per-character table and examples	Four proposed letters supplied as images; text extraction has gaps	High-visibility interchange/accessibility issue
Wikimedia Commons, 2023 files	Shared digital asset repository	Separate OH, SH, TH, DH SVGs plus proposal glyphs	One image asset per missing character	Multilingual pages cannot use plain text

5.1 Works having Benjamin Franklin as their subject

The primary publication, collected editions, archival catalogues, Founders Online, Twilley's Franklin tercentenary project, Smithsonian's history article, Dawson and Joseph's linguistic-biographical study, and German's monograph all reproduce or analyze the alphabet. This is not a single-source curiosity. The documentation crosses print editions, archives, museum/public-history writing, and current academic work.

German's 2026 study is especially important for current status. Its two alphabet chapters total more than one hundred pages, introduce newly digitized manuscript evidence, compare the system with IPA, and support a 442-word glossary. Even if the orthography is not a living community script, the user community is active: editors, historians of English and American English, historians of linguistics, phonologists, sociolinguists, archivists, digital-humanities researchers, and readers of scholarly editions.

5.2 Works on English orthography and spelling reform

The Fall 1970 Spelling Progress Bulletin places Franklin's table in an historical survey of reading and spelling reform and prints it as Figure 3. The publication's subject is precisely the history and criticism of English orthography. Other spelling-reform surveys discuss Franklin's system and reproduce its forms or describe them. In this domain the letters are citation characters: authors must show the historical system accurately even when they do not advocate it.

FIGURE 3. Table of the Reformed Alphabet of Benjamin Franklin.

Character	Sounded [respectively] as in [the Words in the Column below.]	Names of Letters as they are used in the Reformed Alphabet	[Manner of pronouncing the Sounds.]
o	Old.	o	The first Vowel, naturally, and deepest sound; requires only to open the mouth, and breathe through it.
• a	John, Folly; Awl, Ball.	a	The next requiring the mouth opened a little, or hollower.
a	Man, can.	• a	The next, a little more.
e	Men, lend, Name, Lane.	e	The next requires the Tongue to be a little more elevated.
i	Did, Sin, Deed, seen.	i	The next still more.
u	Tool, Fool, Rule.	u	The next requires the Lips to be gathered up, having a small opening.
• y	um, un; as in umbrage, unto, &c. and as in er.	y	The next a very short Vowel, the Sound of which we should expect, in our present Letters thus, sh, a short, and not very strong aspiration.
b	hunter, happy, high.	hub	A stronger or more forcible aspiration.
g	give, gather.	gi	The first CONSONANT; being formed by the Root of the Tongue; this is the perfect hard g.
k	keep, kick.	ki	A kindred sound, a little more acute, to be used instead of the hard c.
• f	(fh) Ship, with.	ib	A new letter, wanted in our Language; our fh, separately taken, not being proper elements of the sound.
• n	(ng) ing, repeating, among.	ing	A new letter, wanted for the same reason;...These are formed back in the mouth.
n	end.	en	Formed more forward in the mouth; the Tip of the Tongue to the Roof of the mouth.
r	Art.	r	The same; the tip of the tongue a little looser or separate from the roof of the mouth, and vibrating.
t	Teeth.	ti	The tip of the tongue more forwardly touching, and then leaving, the roof.
d	Deed.	di	The same; touching a little fuller.
l	ell, tell.	el	The same; touching just about the gums of the upper teeth.
f	Essence.	es	This sound is formed, by the breath passing between the small end of the tongue and the upper teeth.
z	(cz) Wages.	ez	The same; a little denser and duller.
• h	(th) think.	eh	The tongue under, and a little behind, the upper teeth; touching them, but so as to let the breath pass between.
• p	(dh) thy.	ep	The same; a little fuller.
f	Effect.	ef	Formed by the lower lip against the upper teeth.
v	ever.	ev	The same; fuller and duller.
b	Bees.	b	The lips full together, and spread as the air gushes out.
p	peep.	pi	The same; but a thinner sound.
m	ember.	em	The rising of the lips, while the s [here unacted] is sounding.

* [N. B. The six new letters are marked with an asterisk * to distinguish them, and show how few new sounds are proposed. E.]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp15-19]

Figure 5. Franklin's alphabet reproduced in an orthography-reform periodical.

Source: Spelling Progress Bulletin, Fall 1970, Figure 3. The page situates Franklin's table within a history of later spelling reforms.

5.3 Other documents and public reference use

Omniglot, Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, Smithsonian, and the 2005/2006 Twilley design project show broader educational and design interest. Their use is not by itself decisive for encoding, but the consistency of their workarounds is probative: image charts, individual glyph images, custom designs, and non-text downloads are repeatedly necessary because four alphabetic identities have no standard characters.

6. Digital interchange evidence

Unicode's relevant question is whether a stable abstract character must be represented as text across systems. Here, several independent publishers attempted digital editions and could not preserve the four identities as text.

6.1 Lossy substitution in the Online Library of Liberty

The 2013 OLL electronic edition derived from the Bigelow federal edition displays blue asterisks where Franklin's six new characters belong. In the affected table the entries for OH, UH, SH, NG, TH, and DH are visually

indistinguishable asterisks; the extracted text likewise carries '*'. The note that an asterisk marks a new letter does not restore which new letter was intended. This is semantic data loss, not merely an unattractive font fallback.

Online Library of Liberty: The Works of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. V Letters and Misc. Writings 1768-1772

TABLE OF THE REFORMED ALPHABET SOUNDED, RESPECTIVELY, AS IN THE WORDS IN THE COLUMN BELOW Characters	
<i>o</i>	Old.
<i>* _</i>	John, folly; awl, ball.
<i>a</i>	Man, can.
<i>e</i>	Men, lend, name, lane.
<i>i</i>	Did, sin, deed, seen.
<i>u</i>	Tool, fool, rule.
<i>* _</i>	um, un; as in umbrage, unto, &c., and as in <i>er</i> :
<i>h</i>	Hunter, happy, high.
<i>g</i>	Give, gather.
<i>k</i>	Keep, kick.
<i>* _</i>	(sh) Ship, wish.
<i>* _</i>	(ng) ing, repeating, among.
<i>n</i>	End.
<i>r</i>	Art.
<i>t</i>	Teeth.
<i>d</i>	Deed.
<i>l</i>	Ell, tell.
<i>s</i>	Essence.
<i>z</i>	(ez) Wages.
<i>* _</i>	(th) Think.
<i>* _</i>	(dh) Thy.
<i>f</i>	Effect.
<i>v</i>	Ever.
<i>b</i>	Bees.
<i>p</i>	Peep.
<i>m</i>	Ember.

The six new letters are marked with an asterisk (), to distinguish them and show how few new sounds are proposed.

Figure 6. Asterisks replace Franklin's distinct letters in a modern digital edition.

Source: Online Library of Liberty, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. V, PLL v7.0 (generated September 2013), p. 32.

6.2 Image-only text in Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg's UTF-8 edition of the 1806 Complete Works explicitly states in its transcriber's note that the six new characters and the example text on pp. 360-366 are presented as images. The choice preserves appearance for sighted readers but blocks ordinary text selection, searching by character or word, screen-reader pronunciation, corpus reuse, and robust reflow.

*So huen sȳm Endſhel, byi divyin kcamand,
Uih ryiziſy tempeſts ſheeks e gilty Land;
(Syt ſi az caw leet or peel Britania paſt,) Kalm and ſiriin hi dryiws hi fiuriys blaſt;
And, pliiſ'd h' calmyitis cardyrs tu pyrfcarm,
Ryids in hi Huyrluind and dyirekts hi Stcarm.*

*So hi piur limpid ſtriim, huen fcaul uih ſteens
caw ryſhiſy Tcarents and diſendiſy Reens,
Uyrks itſelf kliir; and az it ryſns rifyins;
Til byi digriis, he flotiſy miryr ſyins,
Riflekts iit ſi ſlcaw hat caw its bcardyr groz,
And e nu hev'n in its feer Byzyſm ſhoz.*

Figure 7. Project Gutenberg preserves the reformed prose as an image.

Source: Project Gutenberg eBook 48137 (2015), image for printed p. 360.

6.3 Images and approximations on reference sites

Wikipedia's character table uses separate image files for the four missing letters while U+0265 and U+014B remain normal text. When the page is extracted or rendered without the images, the corresponding cells are blank. Wikimedia Commons stores individual OH (there named AH), SH, TH, and DH SVGs in a category for unencoded Latin letters; these files are used across language editions. Omniglot uses images for the alphabet and sample. Founders Online uses approximations and combinations that do not maintain a one-to-one mapping to the historical letters.

6.4 Current scholarship still depends on facsimile

Dawson and Joseph (2025) reproduce the 1768 correspondence as figure images in an otherwise searchable PDF. This is appropriate as documentary evidence, but it cannot support plain-text quotation or character-level corpus analysis. German (2026) adds more manuscript evidence and systematic transcription, increasing rather than reducing the need for stable digital identities.

homophones or “words of different meaning and similar sound”, and “all the books already written would be useless unless we living writers publish new editions”. She concludes that people should be allowed to spell as they are used to and comfortable with.

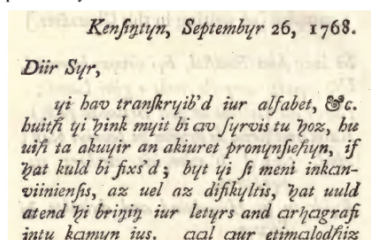


Figure 5. Excerpt of Stevenson's letter to Franklin from (as published in Franklin 1779: 472)

Franklin replied to her with a longer letter, dated just two days later (September 28, 1768), also written in his reformed alphabet, in which he addresses her concerns in turn. He first notes that all reformations, “whether in religion, government, laws, and even down as low as roads and wheel carriages”, are “attended with inconveniences and difficulties” (Franklin 1779: 473). Thus, while this concern is natural, he frames the “true question” as “whether the conveniences will not, on the whole, be greater than the inconveniences” (ibid.); he believes the difficulties associated with this reformation would be short-lived, but that the advantages would be “lasting”. As to why implementing the reformed schema would not cause long-term difficulty, he claims first that the new schema could be learned in a week by those who already know how to spell well. For others, he expresses confidence that teaching people how to write and spell in the new alphabet would be “by far” less difficult than teaching them in the current English system. The “bad spelling” found among many presently, he says, is bad only because it is “contrary to the present bad rules”, while “under the new rules it would be good” (p. 474). As it currently stands, “[t]he difficulty of learning to spell well in the old way is so great that few attain it”, and for foreigners in particular “it makes the learning to pronounce our language, as written in our books, almost impossible” (ibid.). He also expresses awareness of language change as a regular part of life, noting that the difficulties just described are “continually increasing, as the sound gradually varies more and more from the spelling” (ibid.).

Franklin next turns to the concerns about the loss of etymologies and access to meanings, noting that etymologies would not be entirely lost since “the old books would still preserve them and etymologists would there find them” (p. 475). More importantly, he points out that etymologies are “very uncertain” and that the connection to meaning is not as strong as perhaps she believed. Just as words change their spelling and pronunciation, they also change their meanings, and thus “we do not look to etymology for their present meanings” (ibid.). He backs up this point with a practical example, noting that if he were to “call a man a *Knave* and a *Villain* he would hardly be satisfied with my telling him that one of the words originally signified only a lad or servant, and the other an under plowman or the inhabitant of a village” (pp. 475–476). His final

Figure 8. A current linguistic article embeds Franklin's reformed letter as a facsimile.

Source: Hope C. Dawson and Brian D. Joseph, ‘Benjamin Franklin and the language sciences,’ *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 10(1), 2025, p. 7.

6.5 Assessment of necessity and advantage

The evidence does not prove that publication is impossible without encoding: images, Private Use Area fonts, transliteration, and typographic approximations can be used. It does prove clear, recurring advantages from encoding and shows that the present alternatives fail normal interchange requirements.

Digital function	Concrete advantage
Search and indexing	Find OH, SH, TH, or DH in transcriptions and distinguish them from each other.
Copy, paste, and quotation	Move exact text between editions, databases, and messages without bundled images or matching private fonts.
Accessibility and reflow	Allow screen readers, selectable text, responsive layouts, and user-selected fonts.

Digital function	Concrete advantage
Digital editions and TEI/XML	Encode the diplomatic text as characters instead of linking each occurrence to a facsimile zone.
OCR/HTR and corpora	Train recognition models, align manuscript/print witnesses, and count or query graphemes.
Preservation	Avoid asterisks, empty cells, broken image links, and private-use mappings that decay when files move.
Semantic clarity	Keep Franklin's letters distinct from Greek alpha, ordinary h, eng, eth, thorn, and arbitrary graphics.
Font independence	Permit historically faithful or modern scholarly fonts without changing underlying character identities.

7. Character identity, unification, and alternatives

7.1 Atomic letters, not presentation forms

Each proposed character has a stable alphabetic function in Franklin's system and appears at multiple positions inside words. The notches, cross-strokes, hooks, and terminal differences are integral to the letter designs, not optional font styling applied to an existing base. They should therefore be encoded as spacing letters, not combining marks or variation sequences.

Proposed character	Possible look-alikes/substitutes	Why not unified
FRANKLIN OH	Greek alpha U+03B1; Latin alpha U+0251/U+0252; a	Similar silhouettes do not establish identity. Franklin's letter has a system-specific alphabetic position and historical notches; Greek-script alpha is the wrong script, and IPA alpha letters have different standardized identities.
FRANKLIN SH	h; U+0283 ESH; digraph sh	The letter is h-derived but not ordinary h. U+0283 represents an IPA/Latin letter with a different shape and history. A digraph is not the single character used in the source.
FRANKLIN TH	U+00FE THORN; U+03B8 THETA; digraph th	Franklin's glyph is neither thorn nor theta, and the printed/reformed text deliberately replaces the digraph with one atomic letter.
FRANKLIN DH	U+00F0 ETH; U+00FE THORN; digraph dh/th	Eth and thorn are historically distinct letters with different shapes and orthographic traditions. They cannot preserve a diplomatic transcription of Franklin's form.

7.2 Why no decomposition is appropriate

There is no canonical sequence such as base h + notch, base h + hook, or alpha + notch. Unicode combining marks do not encode Franklin's structural cuts and terminals. Invented overlay sequences would be font-dependent, normalize unpredictably, impair search, and fail to distinguish letter identity from accidental glyph construction. All four characters should have no decomposition mapping.

7.3 Case behavior

Only lowercase-form letters are established in the supplied sources. Franklin's table and running examples do not define a stable paired uppercase repertoire. The characters should be General_Category=Li but have no uppercase, titlecase, or case-fold mapping, following the treatment of other lowercase-only phonetic and

historical letters. A later proposal could add capitals if genuine evidence emerges; capitals must not be synthesized here.

8. Character properties and text behavior

Property	Proposed value	Rationale
General_Category	LI	Lowercase-form letter; no paired capital attested
Script	Latin	Franklin's Latin-derived English orthography
Canonical_Combining_Class	0	Spacing base letters
Bidi_Class	L	Ordinary left-to-right Latin letters
Decomposition	none	No canonically equivalent sequence
Case mapping/folding	none	No stable uppercase forms
Line_Break	AL	Ordinary alphabetic behavior
Grapheme_Cluster_Break	Other	Base letters
Word_Break	ALetter	Participate in words
Sentence_Break	Lower	Lowercase-form behavior
East_Asian_Width	N	Neutral
Vertical_Orientation	R	Rotate in vertical text like ordinary Latin
Numeric / mirrored / joining	none / No / non-joining	No special behavior
Default_Ignorable	No	Visible letters

8.1 UnicodeData.txt lines

```
1DFB2;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN OH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1DFB3;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN SH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1DFB4;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN TH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1DFB5;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN DH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
```

8.2 NamesList annotations

```
@          Letters for Benjamin Franklin's reformed alphabet
1DFB2LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN OH
    * vowel in John, folly; awl, ball in Franklin's reformed alphabet
1DFB3LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN SH
    * single letter for /sh/ as in ship, wish
1DFB4LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN TH
    * single letter for voiceless /th/ as in think
1DFB5LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN DH
    * single letter for voiced /dh/ as in thy
```

8.3 Collation

No special root collation is required. A tailored collation for Franklin's Reformed Mode of Spelling may place the characters according to his table:

o < FRANKLIN OH < a ... k < FRANKLIN SH < eng ... z < FRANKLIN TH < FRANKLIN DH < f.

Editors may instead tailor by IPA value. The encoding should not impose a single historical or phonological ordering outside such tailored contexts.

8.4 Identifiers and confusables

The letters are alphabetic and would ordinarily receive derived identifier properties from their general category and script, subject to the version's property derivation rules. Security profiles for unrestricted identifiers may nevertheless exclude them because OH can resemble alpha-like letters and the other three can resemble h-like forms. Fonts should preserve the notches, cross-stroke, hook direction, and TH/DH top-left distinction. Similarity is a confusability issue, not a basis for unification.

9. Conclusion

The Franklin letters were proposed in N3555 in 2008 and again in L2/22-215 in 2022. Their absence from Unicode is procedural: the 2008 collection was exploratory and only its Teuthonista strand matured; the 2022 proposal received a request for better evidence and design analysis and was not advanced. No record located shows a formal finding that the characters are ineligible.

The characters are stable abstract letters with distinct functions, attested in alphabet tables and multiple pages of running text from 1768/1779 onward. They recur in collected editions, the history and criticism of English orthography, contemporary linguistic scholarship, and public reference works. Multiple digital publishers independently demonstrate the cost of non-encoding through asterisks, approximations, blank cells, image-only prose, and per-glyph SVGs.

These facts establish clear advantages and a durable need for digital exchange. Encoding at U+1DFB2..U+1DFB5 in Latin Extended-G would enable accurate searchable editions, accessibility, corpus analysis, OCR/HTR, stable citation, and preservation while respecting the Script Ad Hoc's SMP guidance. The proposal should advance after community review.

10. References

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- [26] Unicode/WG 2 document L2/11-137 (N4031), 9 May 2011, Latin Extended-D chart and names list: 'Archaic letters for Volapük.'
- [27] Unicode/WG 2 document L2/11-202 (N4081), 2 June 2011, revised Latin Extended-D chart and names list retaining LATIN CAPITAL/SMALL LETTER VOLAPUK AE, OE, and UE.

Appendix A. Proposal Summary Form

This appendix follows the ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2/WG 2 proposal-summary questions. Administrative submitter details and the provider/rights statement for the supplied font must be completed before filing.

A. Administrative

1. Title	Proposal to encode four Latin letters of Benjamin Franklin's reformed alphabet
2. Requester's name	Karl Pentzlin
3. Requester type	Individual contribution
4. Submission date	2026-08-30
5. Requester's reference	-
6. Complete proposal?	Yes as to repertoire, evidence, properties, rationale, and font; submitter contact and font provider/rights details remain administrative completion items.

B. Technical - General

1. New script or existing block?	Addition to existing block: Latin Extended-G
2. Number of characters	4
3. Proposed category	B.1 - Specialized (small collection); historical orthography with current specialist use
4. Names and legible shapes?	Yes; proposed names and upright glyphs from the supplied BenjaminFranklinProposal Regular font are supplied in Section 3.
5. Font provider	Karl Pentzlin
6a. References?	Yes; see Section 10.
6b. Published examples attached?	Yes; Figures 2-8 include primary, editorial, orthography-history, digital-edition, and current scholarly samples.
7. Processing issues addressed?	Yes; Sections 7-9 cover identity, normalization, case, collation, input, security, searching, indexing, and digital editions.

C. Technical - Justification

1. Submitted before?	Yes. N3555 / L2/08-428 (2008) and L2/22-215 (2022). The present draft updates the status, evidence, names, allocation, and review response.
2. Contact with user community?	The proposer himself (writing about attempts at English orthography reforms) is a member of the user community.
3. User-community information included?	Yes. The community consists of scholarly editors, historians of English and linguistics, phonologists, sociolinguists, archivists, digital-humanities/OCR projects, reference publishers, and readers of accessible editions.
4. Context of use	Rare, specialized, historical, and scholarly; also public-history/reference display.
5. Current use?	Yes in the sense relevant to historical characters: current publications and sites reproduce, transcribe, or discuss the letters, usually through images or substitutes. It is not a living community orthography.

6. Must be entirely in BMP?	No. The Script Ad Hoc specifically recommended SMP allocation if eligible.
7. Contiguous range?	Yes, U+1DFB2..U+1DFB5.
8. Presentation forms?	No. They are atomic alphabetic characters.
9. Encodable as sequences?	No canonical or reliably renderable existing sequences represent the identities.
10. Similar to existing characters?	Yes in appearance to alpha-like and h-like letters, and in sound to esh/eth/thorn-related values. Section 7 explains why identity, script, form, and documentary use preclude unification.
11. Combining characters/composites?	No.
12. Special properties?	No control or other special functions. Ordinary Latin letter behavior is proposed.
13. Ideographic compatibility characters?	No.

UnicodeData.txt

```
1 1DFB2;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN OH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
2 1DFB3;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN SH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
3 1DFB4;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN TH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
4 1DFB5;LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN DH;Ll;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
```

+4

NamesList.txt

```
@ Letters for Benjamin Franklin's reformed alphabet
1DFB2 LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN OH
* vowel in John, folly; awl, ball in Franklin's reformed alphabet
1DFB3 LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN SH
* single letter for /sh/ as in ship, wish
1DFB4 LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN TH
* single letter for voiceless /th/ as in think
1DFB5 LATIN SMALL LETTER FRANKLIN DH
* single letter for voiced /dh/ as in thy
9 lines
```