

Alphabetical Order

Functional Skills English Entry 3 - Handout

What is alphabetical order?

Alphabetical order means putting words in the same order as the letters of the alphabet: A to Z. It helps you find words quickly in dictionaries and indexes, and organise names, files, lists and registers.

How to put words in alphabetical order

- 1. Look at the first letter of each word.
- 2. If the first letters are the same, compare the second letter.
- 3. If the first two letters are the same, compare the third letter - and keep moving to the next letter if needed.
- 4. If one word finishes and all its letters match the start of another word, the shorter word comes first.

Tip: Compare one letter at a time from left to right.

Worked examples

Rule	Words	Correct order
First letters are different	banana, apple, chair, door	apple → banana → chair → door
Same first two letters	can, cap, car, cat	can → cap → car → cat
Look at later letters	green, greet, great	great → green → greet
Shorter matching word first	plan, plant, plate, play	plan → plant → plate → play

Quick exam check

Words	Correct alphabetical order
shop, show, ship, shut	ship → shop → show → shut
train, trap, trade, travel	trade → train → trap → travel
clean, clear, clever, clerk	clean → clear → clerk → clever

Exam tip: If words start with the same letters, do not guess. Move to the next different letter and compare it carefully.