

Alphabetical order seems like an organizational Stonehenge: something that has always been, and always will be. So much so that few of us ever stop to consider it after we first learn to sing the alphabet song as children. Yet it is alphabetical order—its role in organizing our world—that allows us to access centuries of poetry, literature, scientific discovery, and humanity's most profound ideas. Without this innovative system, all such knowledge would lie in great unsorted stacks of books—unfindable, unread, unknown.

And yet, remarkably, *A Place for Everything* is the first-ever history of alphabetization, from the Library of Alexandria to our iPhone contacts. Alphabetical order and its story have been shaped by some of history's most compelling characters, such as enthusiastic early adopter Samuel Pepys and dedicated alphabet champion Denis Diderot. George Washington was also a proponent, though many other Americans clung to older, less equal forms of classification: Yale listed its students by their family's social status until 1886. Today, the order of the alphabet rules—via libraries, phone books, reference books, even the order of entry for the teams at the Olympic Games—and yet it has remained curiously invisible.

With abundant inquisitiveness and wry humor, historian Judith Flanders traces the triumph of alphabetical order and offers a compendium of Western knowledge, from A to Z.

JUDITH FLANDERS is a social historian. Her works include the bestselling *The Invention of Murder*, *Inside the Victorian Home*, and *The Victorian City*. She is senior research fellow at the University of Buckingham, as well as a frequent contributor to the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

READ BY JULIA WINWOOD



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