

Week 2

- **Rethink Your Alphas**
- Repurpose Your Games, Puzzles and Toys
- Research Jewelry Making Tools
- Reinvent Yourself: Making Your Own Charm Bracelet



Alphabet Soup

Does this problem look familiar?

Leftover alphas are perhaps one of the largest puzzles of the paper scrapbooking world--but they don't have to be! However, if you find yourself in the same situation pictured above... how will you ever be inspired to use them?

Below are tips and ideas to help you get them organized in a way that will have you using those leftover alphas in no time.

1. Learn from My Mistakes

How many of you told yourself that you didn't need the plastic film packages that came with your alphas and threw them away, only to watch all of your alphas slide off their backing?

Or perhaps you didn't put those stickers away and now, in the horrible summer heat, they've lifted off their backing and you find them stuck to the bottom of your son's socks?

I could be alone on this...but my guess is that some of us have neglected our alphas at some point. So my first piece of advice is to show your alphas some respect:

- Try keeping them stored in their original packaging.
- Keep them out of the heat and away from moisture.
- Come up with a system to save those alphas that have lost their packaging or their "stick".





2. Know What You Have

At some point you will have to determine when a set of alphas no longer meets your needs, and, in turn, becomes leftovers. For me this is usually once the vowels are gone.

Once you've identified your leftover alphas, I would suggest separating them from your more complete alpha packs to avoid the frustration of not finding the letters you're looking for within a set.

Some of you may decide that you'd like to keep your leftovers with their like designs. Others will find it more beneficial to sort them by letter. You could even try sorting them by color if you are so inclined. The choice is yours--in fact, why not try out all of these different methods to see which works best with your personal scrap-booking style!

3. Get Creative With Storage Solutions

I personally like to store my leftover alphas by letter in a cheap plastic lure box--or you could use a drawer or bead organizer as well. I leave "Thickers" and other adhesive-backed letters stuck to their backing whenever possible, by simply cutting the backing into pieces around each letter. This system accommodates most types and sizes of alphas and the organizers can be easily stacked and stored out of sight.

Not for you? Here are a few more ways to consider storing your leftover alphas that are both creative and effective:

- Use a file storage container and "file" your leftover alpha sheets.
- Keep like alphas, designs or colors on a book ring, carabiner, ball chain, or string.
- Use envelopes, jars or recycled product packaging to store your leftover alphas.

Once you've found a method that works for you, you're on your way to being able to use your leftover alphas more effectively in your pages.



Rethinking Your Alphas

Now it's time to open your mind and really consider all of the potential your leftover alphas truly hold. Besides the making of a great title, leftover alphas can also be used as frames, borders, mats and even embellishments. There will be no excuses for not using up those leftover alphas when you're done with this lesson!

Have Fun With Your Titles

Sometimes we get so concerned with finding the right letters for our title we forget about all of the possibilities that our leftover alphas have to offer. It's time to stop seeing those missing letters as a setback and start seeing them for what they really are: an opportunity to have some fun and utilize your stash.



Cover your alphas anew for a whole different look.



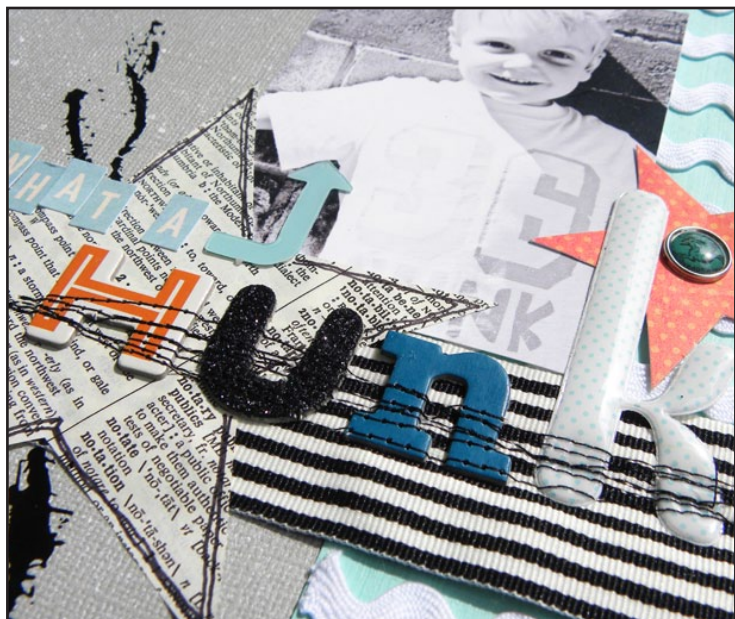
In, "One Snowy Day" I covered my chipboard alphas with a fun polka dot paper and outlined them to add a bit of whimsy. These letters were all part of a multi-colored set that did not complement my layout--but now they're perfect.

If you're looking to use up your leftover alphas by working with a variety of styles and colors, try creating a sense of unity amongst the letters in your title by giving a variety of alpha styles the same finish. These finishes will work with most alpha types:

1. Glitter
2. Fabric
3. Paper
4. Flocking
5. Paint
6. Mist

Piece together your very own ransom alpha title.

Having my leftover alphas organized made my search for a fun mixture of alpha styles in colors that coordinated with my layout, "What a Hunk," quite simple. I then stitched the group of letters to my page with my sewing machine to add to the feeling of a cohesive title.



Ransom alphas are very hot right now--in fact you can purchase a variety of ransom alpha sets, stickers and stamps. But why would you do that when you have so many leftover alphas at your disposal?

Here are some ways to go about selecting leftovers for your ransom alpha title.

1. Pull colors from your layout and choose a variety of alphas to match these colors.
2. Alternate two or three different colors or styles throughout the title.
3. Feature a single varied letter from your leftovers that you happen to be missing.
4. Choose distinctly different styles and then cover them with a medium that unites them.
5. Choose your alphas at random to make your title the focal point of your layout.

Make a title from the negatives of your letters.

These alpha chipboard blocks that I used for my title in "Dream" were made to be used as both positives and negatives. But you can also use the outer portions of your alpha sticker sheets and your chipboard alphas to get the same effect.

I scribbled inside my alpha negatives to add a bit of interest, while adding to the carefree feel of my layout. To help define your alpha negatives give one of these techniques a try:

1. Add a basic hand-drawn outline to the inside and outside of your alpha negative.
2. Layer your negatives over a misted area or a stroke of paint on your page's background.
3. Fill your negative with glitter.
4. Create a puffy acrylic effect by adding dimensional glue to the negative portion.
5. Fill the negative with a fun patterned paper.





Use Your Alphas to Make Dynamic Backgrounds & Mats

Using alphas to create interesting backgrounds and foundational mats can be a great way to support a juvenile theme or to introduce a graphic feel to your pages. Let's have a look at a few of the ways I like to use my leftover alphas in creating one-of-a-kind backdrops for my pages.

Create unique backgrounds by turning your alphas/negatives into masks/stencils to use with your paints and mists.

In this page of my "So You" Mini album I created a fun alpha-patterned background using the leftover negatives of a raw chipboard alpha set as a stencil. This was an inexpensive way to utilize my mists to set the tone for my juvenile-themed page, while giving my page an overall graphic feel.

Using your leftover alphas, negatives and backing film is a frugal, yet fun way to create a masked or stenciled effect on your pages.

Not sure where to start? Try giving one of the following techniques a try:

1. Use the negative space on your chipboard alphas sheets to create an alpha patterned background.
2. Create a void for your foundation by using an over-sized alpha or grouping of alphas as a mask.
3. Try masking your title with leftover alpha stickers and paint over top.
4. Use your chipboard or punch-out alpha sheets as stencils to create an outlined alpha.



Try using a tone-on-tone effect with your chipboard alphas to add a bit of texture to your background.

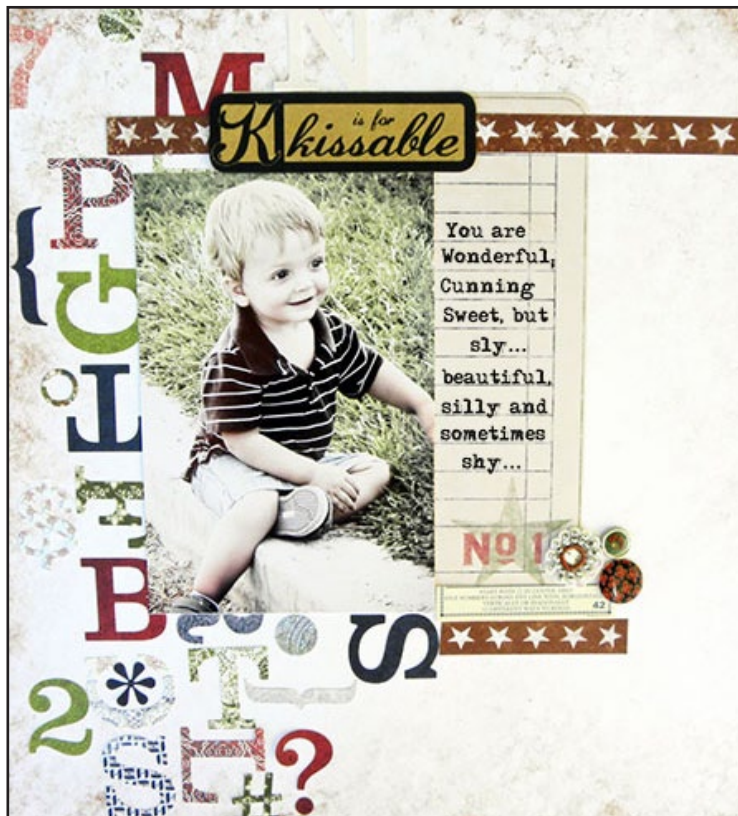
In my layout, "Love Letters," the tone-on-tone alpha mat that I created not only reinforces the graphic feel of the layout, but also helps to create dimension in the layout without overwhelming.

You can get this look a number of ways:

1. I was lucky enough to be able to match the color of a set of chipboard alpha leftovers that I owned to a piece of paper from my stash.
2. Start with the color from your paper and cover your alphas to match--this way you can use several different alpha styles to add a bit more interest to your alpha background.
3. You can use any piece of paper you like and any leftover alphas you own and simply paint over both with the color of your choice.



Create a fun photo mat with multi-colored alpha stickers.



A simple photo mat from your leftover alpha stickers can create a dynamic foundation for your page. In my layout "K is for Kissable" I used leftover alpha stickers from a multi-colored set. This helped me establish a color scheme for my layout and create a sense of harmony throughout the page by using repeating colors and patterns within my alpha mat.

Here are a few tips to help you create your own photo mat:

1. Use leftover alphas from a single set that contains multiple colors or patterns to help set the tone for your layout.
2. Piece together leftovers from several alpha sets that match your page's color scheme.
3. Trace out the placement for your photo and the shape of your mat directly onto your page with a light pencil stroke for a more precise guide.
4. Consider staggering your rows of alphas if you want less of a graphic look and more of a "freestyle" effect.

Recreate the appearance of digital brushes on your backgrounds with your leftover alpha rub-ons.

The first layout below is a digital page in which I have used a number of brushes to give my background a rich, dimensional foundation with a light and airy feel. You can get this very same look in your paper pages by using suggestive layers--like your rub-on alphas!



Further down on the page you'll see my paper page "The Son and Heir" in which I layered a few sheets of my leftover rub-on alphas over one another to create a distressed graphic backdrop for my photo. This adds a lot of dimension to the page without adding bulk--much like a digital brush.

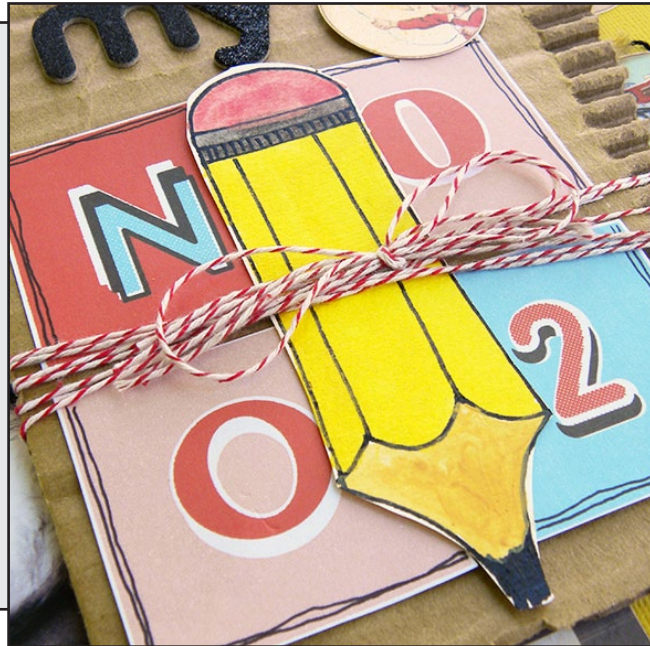
To replicate the look of this graphic brush effect on your next layout, use the following steps:

1. Gather a few leftover sheets of rub-ons--the more letters missing the better!
2. Cut out a few portions from each sheet that you think will create some interesting layers.
3. Start with your first portion of rub-ons and haphazardly apply. Don't worry about getting every inch of it--in fact it adds to the distressed look if you don't!
4. Layer a few more alpha styles over top of each other in the same manner for a fun graphic look!
5. For a more muted look, lightly run a piece of sandpaper over the graphic block you've created or use a dry paintbrush and-stroke over it with a paint that matches your backdrop.



Use Up Extra Alphas By Making Unique Accents For Your Pages

Leftover alphas can also make great embellishments and focal elements for your pages--you just have to use your imagination! From tags to frames to cute little butterflies, your leftover alphas have the capability of being so much more if you just give them a chance. Below are techniques to get you on your way to using your alphas to embellish your pages today!



Turn your alphas into creative tags.

I added this alpha tag to my "2010 Garden Journal" by simply hanging it from a piece of jute. Making your own alpha tag can be a creative and charming way to add a personal touch to your page or project.



Here are a few things to try when making your own alpha tags:

1. If you'd like to use an alpha sticker or rub-on back it with cardstock--or for a bit more dimension, try chipboard.
2. Cover the back side of your adhesive-backed alphas with a coordinating pattern paper.
3. You could try accenting it with a few other small accents, like bling, eyelets or even buttons.
4. If you punch a hole in your alpha consider reinforcing it with an eyelet for durability.
5. Use a fiber like twine, jute or ribbon that is strong enough to hold your alpha.

Now you've got your own alpha tag for accenting your pages.

Leftover numbers, alphas and punctuation make great borders and frames.

My page "Final Countdown" needed some strong focal points to make up for the fact that it was without a photo. I used my leftover numbers from five different alphas sets to create these two numeral borders. This was a fun way to add color and style to my layout while incorporating some visual interest.

You could also try:

1. Piecing together a succession of W's and V's from the same alpha to make a fun zig-zag border or frame.
2. Creating a dotted or dashed border with leftover dashes and periods.
3. Cutting curved alphas to create a playful scalloped border around your photo.
4. Using strips of leftover alpha rub-ons around your photo for a frame.
5. Using a series of X's to create a faux-stitched border.



Turn your alphas into focal elements.



In my layout "Bliss" I turned a letter that held significance to my page into a focal element on the layout. This not only conveys meaning in a subtle way, but it also helps to highlight secondary subjects in our pages. While this particular page is about the "bliss" that accompanies the birth of a new baby, the focal letter helps to identify my niece "Eryss."

Here are number of ways to utilize focal alphas on your pages:

1. Fill a large focal alpha or number with photos.
2. Number or letter your photo sequences.
3. Make the date of your event the center of attention.
4. Use page numbers in your albums.
5. Draw attention to initials, acronyms or slang that contribute to your story.

Create unique embellishments with your leftover alphas.

For this past Mother's Day, my husband and I helped my son make a bouquet of flowers from my leftover scrap supplies. One of our creations was a flower made of leftover letters. If you get creative with your leftovers, the possibilities are endless--of course it can't hurt to have an imaginative 3-year-old at your side!



Flowers aren't the only embellishments you could make with your leftover alphas--here are a few other ideas:

1. Capital B's make great butterfly wings
2. Try stacking different sized O's to make fun paper posies.
3. Z's can be the perfect addition to your bedtime and nap time pages.
4. Use your leftover punctuation to make your very own emoticons for your page.
5. Create an alpha banner with leftover tile alphas.

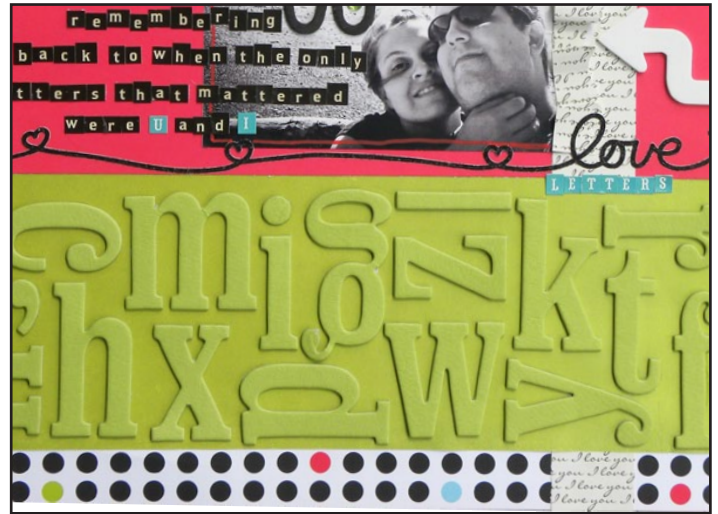
Don't forget your Punctuation!

In my layout "Sweet Dreams," I used two brackets from a glittered alpha pack to frame my photo. While brackets don't completely enclose an object, they do an excellent job of separating the object from its background--which is what we often use frames for in scrapbooking. Brackets can also be used to create fun borders or interesting accents.



Here are a few other ways to use your punctuation on your layouts:

1. Using your "@" symbols in place of A's can be fun!
2. Use dashes and exclamation points to create a dotted line to show movement.
3. Asterisks make great flowers or pinwheels.
4. Create a fun scatter with an assortment of dots from your exclamation points, colons and periods.
5. Use your question marks as accents on bio/Q&A style layouts to reinforce your theme.



You didn't realize all of the fun you could have with your leftover alphas did you? As I said before, a little bit of imagination goes a long way with regard to your supplies--and your leftover alphas are no exception!

Your Assignment:

In the Forum:

Please join our discussion about how you currently deal with your leftover alphas--I have no doubt that there is plenty more we can learn from each other!

In the Gallery:

Post your layouts using your leftover alphas in the gallery for all of us to see and be inspired by!