



SCHOOL OF CIPHER

# Hidden in Plain Sight

Making a message invisible instead of unreadable

BOOKLET 3 OF 5

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[schoolofcipher.com](http://schoolofcipher.com)

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# The acrostic letter

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Write a perfectly ordinary letter where the first letter of every line spells something else.

## Read down the left-hand edge

Monday was wet again, so we stayed inside.  
Everyone is well, and the dog has stopped barking.  
Emma says thank you for the book you sent.  
Tomorrow we are going to see grandma.  
Mum has been baking, which never happens.  
Eric is being Eric, as always.

The hidden message is:

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## Now write your own

Choose a short message first, then write one line for each letter. The hard part is making the lines sound ordinary.

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**The skill is the dullness.** A letter that sounds strained is worse than no hiding at all.



# Null ciphers

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A null is a letter or word that means nothing. In a null cipher almost everything is a null, and a rule tells you which few letters count.

## Take the first letter of every third word

We are sailing at dawn. Everything is quiet. Nothing to report. Down at the harbour all the evening watch is late, so please prepare.

The message is:

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## Now the same page, a different rule

Take the first letter of **every** word instead and write what you get.

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Same words. Different rule. One is a message and one is nonsense, and nothing on the page tells you which rule is right.

## Write your own with a rule of your choosing

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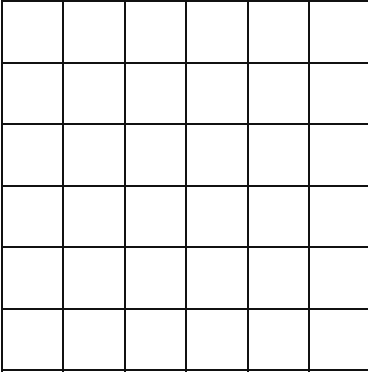
**Send the rule separately,** or not at all if you agreed it in advance. Without the rule there is nothing to attack.

# Cut a grille

A card with windows cut in it. Lay it over a page and only the words that matter show through.

## The template

Cut out the seven marked squares. Cut a second copy for whoever you are writing to, and mark the same corner on both with a dot.



Mark these squares before cutting: row 1 column 3, row 2 column 3, row 3 column 5, row 4 column 3, row 5 column 3, row 6 column 3, row 6 column 5.

## How to use it

1. Lay the grille on paper and write one word of the secret in each window.
2. Lift it off, then fill all the space around those words with a dull letter.
3. Send the letter only. Never the grille.

**An adult holds the knife.** Cut against a ruler on a cutting mat, and glue the template to card first or the windows will tear.

 **Invisible ink**

Lemon juice is mostly water and sugar. Dried on paper it disappears. Warmed, the sugar browns before the paper does.

**What you need**

Half a lemon or some milk, a cotton bud, plain paper, and a warm lamp or an iron on a low setting.

**What to do**

1. Squeeze a few spoonfuls into a cup. No water: it will be too weak to see.
2. Write with the cotton bud, going over each letter once.
3. Let it dry completely, about ten minutes flat on a table.
4. Write a dull letter on top in ordinary pen, between the invisible lines.
5. An adult warms the paper. The writing browns and appears.

**Write the dull letter here first**

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**Never a flame, never unattended, and an adult holds the heat.** If the paper starts to smell or darken at the edges, stop straight away.



# The shape of the text

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Not the words. The gaps between them, and the shapes of the letters.

## Wide gap or narrow gap

Write a sentence where a wide gap means one and a narrow gap means nought. Eight gaps make one letter, using the numbers on the binary sheet in booklet two.

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## Two handwritings

Or write the whole thing twice over: neat letters for one, scruffy letters for nought. This is Bacon's cipher, four hundred years old, and it is why he called his two units A and B rather than naming any shapes.

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**This one survives being copied.** A message hidden in the last dot of colour in a photograph dies the moment somebody saves the picture again. Spaces and letter shapes are part of the text itself, so they travel wherever the words go.

### **Sheet 1, acrostic**

The first letters read M E E T M E, the beginning of MEET ME AT NOON.

### **Sheet 2, null cipher**

Every third word gives SENDHELP.

Every word gives WASADEIQNTRDATHATEWILSPP, which is nothing at all.

### **Sheet 3, the grille**

The seven windows are placed so that the words showing through read as a sentence while the rest of the letter reads as ordinary prose. Any seven positions work as long as both copies match.

### **A question worth asking a child**

Which is safer: a message nobody can read, or a message nobody knows is there? The honest answer is both together, which is what real agents did.



## About this booklet

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School of Cipher is a free set of lessons, animations and worksheets about codes, ciphers, signals and hiding messages, for code-breakers roughly aged seven to eleven.

**How this was made.** The writing, worksheets, diagrams and animations in this booklet were produced by **Claude**, an AI assistant made by Anthropic, working from a person's prompting, direction and curation. A human chose what the project should be, what belonged in it, what to cut, what was wrong, and what to keep. The AI did the drafting and the building.

Facts have been checked where checking was possible, and where a source could not be confirmed the claim was left out rather than guessed at. If you find a mistake, it is worth telling us: on a site about code-breaking, being corrected is the point.

### Sources and further reading

**Codes, Ciphers and Secret Writing** by Martin Gardner is where this project started, and several of the earliest ciphers here follow his explanations.

Historical details have been drawn from public reference sources, museum material and the published records of the organisations named in the text.

### Using this booklet

- Print at **100 per cent**, not fit to page, or any template will come out the wrong size.
- Photocopy freely for a class, a club or a family. No permission needed.
- Every sheet works on its own. There is no need to go in order.

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