

CODEBREAKER GRIDS

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Recently two British newspapers have launched the next generation of crosswords -- codebreaker grids. Resembling a standard crossword in format, the only difference being each blank square has its own number from 1 to 26, there are virtually no clues but let me quote the Daily Mail's Codeword instructions to give you a flavour of the challenge:

Each number in our Codeword grid represents a different letter of the alphabet. For example: today 10 represents C, so fill in C every time the figure 10 appears. You have two letters in the control grid to start you off (a simple column of numbers all blank bar 10 with a preprinted C and 14 with a preprinted L is given alongside): enter them in the appropriate square in the main grid, then use your knowledge of words to work out which letters should go in the missing squares.

The Mail's Codeword now appears as a regular feature along with its cryptic and standard crosswords so, presumably, it has met with reader appreciation. Naturally all the answers are 'normal' words even though the compilers sensibly include one or two with an unusual construction as an aid to solution.

Below, I conclude with two miniature codebreaker grids to show their potential without the need to produce artwork. The first is an original palindrome, the second an amorphous grid. The letter substitutions in the two puzzles are different. The 'wordsmith words' are all given in the OED. For the palindrome's 12A45 see under the prefix 12-; the grid's 63335 is a conventional headword which features in my word games books as a useful guessing ploy in the 'adult' version of the childish Jotto (see Words, p 87 in the Mammoth Book of Word Games). I believe 63335 to be unique--but no doubt I stand to be corrected!

(a) 12A45 A676A 54A21

(b)

1	2	3	4	5	6		5			
2	4	3		3	3	5	4	3		
3	3	7		7	3			4		
6				1	3			7		
3	5	5			5		6	3	3	5