

The Basics

- Puzzles usually solve to a word or short phrase.
- Different forms of encoding are used - don't panic, you will be given a code sheet.
- There are rarely outright instructions for how to solve a puzzle, but sometimes you can find hints in the introductory text. For example references to "in the dark" or "sight" are often hints something is encoded with braille.
- Puzzles will often have multiple steps to get to the answer word.
- Basic newspaper puzzles such as sudoku, crosswords, and word searches are often incorporated as one of the steps in solving the puzzle. Keep in mind that unlike a typical newspaper puzzle, you will be somehow extracting one word or phrase out of the puzzle.
- If the answer you end up with is a garbled "alphabet soup", then look for a clue on how to order them. Answers will rarely be an anagram. If you can't figure it out, anagram solvers like <http://www.wordsmith.org/anagram/> are totally OK to use.

How to Solve

- An **Acrostic** is a clue where the first letter, syllable, or word of each line, paragraph, or other recurring feature spells out a word or message.
- **Indexing** is one of our most common puzzle mechanisms. Try indexing when you have a list of words or phrases and a corresponding list of numbers. Count into the word or phrase by the given number and record the letter in that position. For example: 2 Cake, 6 Pudding, 5 Shortening
Gives you: Cake, Pudding, and Shortening, or **ant**.
- **Alpha-numeric** codes are also very common. If you end up with a list of numbers try replacing the numbers with the corresponding letters like this: 1 = A, 2 = B, 3 = C... 26 = Z. Occasionally, these types of codes will "wrap around", so don't despair if you see a number greater than 26. Just subtract 26 and try again. In this scenario 27 (27-26 = 1) = A, 28 (28-26 = 2) = B etc. If you try this and it doesn't work, try other numeric codes such as ASCII.

Codes

- **Braille:** Braille is frequently clued in the introductory text by the words "Look," "See," or "Blind." Try braille when a puzzle contains 2x3 grids or matrices. Occasionally, braille is coded in 6-digit sequences.
- **Morse code:** Morse code is often clued by the words "dot," "dash," or "telegram" in the introductory text. Look for data that breaks down easily into three different categories (dots, dashes, and spaces).
- **Semaphore:** Puzzles that contain semaphore are sometimes clued by the words "flag," or "Signal." Puzzles that use semaphore often use clocks or time. Also look for directions (bearings) or anything that rotates about or comes from a central axis.
- **Binary:** Binary is often clued by the words "On," "Off," or computer-related words. Binary is often expressed in groups of five digits (although it can be as little as two or as many as eight). Look for groups of data that contain two different categories of objects.

Other Things to Consider

Even more codes

If none of the above codes or methods work, consider other encryption mechanisms such as ternary (like binary, but base three instead of two), hexadecimal, nautical flags, pigpen, mayan numerals, etc. Many codes are available in the ARG Tools app for iPhones: <http://nja.me/argtools>.

Other puzzle types

Puzzles will sometimes contain no encryption at all and instead rely on word play, basic logic, or other mechanisms.

Hints and Solving Aids

- It's not a trivia contest - Googling things is acceptable and encouraged.
- Hints are always free - if you get stuck, come talk to us.