

Code Breaking

Try It Out

Figure out the code to identify a five-letter word hidden on this page. Align the letters with the arrows on the top and bottom of the puzzle toy to open it.

2-10, 3-7, 4-5, 5-5, 6-4

What's the Big Deal?

Cryptography is the practice and study of techniques for secure communication to prevent unwanted people from reading private messages. This practice goes back 1000s of years, starting with very simple ciphers, such as replacing each letter in a message with another. And it has become ever more valuable, as a means to protect our information in the digital age. Cipher mechanisms are becoming more and more complex in the hopes that no computer will be able to "crack the code."



(German Enigma ciphering device. Source: Alessandro Nassiri)

Women in Science

Elizebeth Smith Friedman was an American cryptanalyst who deciphered enemy codes in both World Wars, including messages sent using the infamous German Enigma machines. Her work destroyed an entire spy network in South America. She also helped to solve international smuggling cases during Prohibition.



Over the course of her career, she worked for the United States Treasury, Coast Guard, Navy and Army, and the International Monetary Fund. She has been called "America's first female cryptanalyst."

(Image: George C. Marshall Foundation)

Wonder While You Walk...

How many times have you used cryptography today? (think: passwords, web browsing...)



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