

How to write messages like an Elizabethan Spy



Queen Elizabeth I had a network of spies and secret agents. They were experts at reading and writing secret messages. The messages used other letters or symbols to stand in for the letters in the real message. They could only be read and understood by the person receiving them if they knew the way the message was written. This is called the **Key**.

The secret agents, led by Queen Elizabeth's spy master Lord Walsingham, were particularly skilled at managing to solve the keys of messages they intercepted from the Queen's enemies. They could then read the contents and learn about the secret plots against the Queen. In this way they managing to protect her from harm and keep her on the throne.

Here some ways of writing secret messages for you to try out. You can use them to send hidden messages to your friends – but remember, they will only make sense to your friends if you have told them what the key will be!

- 1) An easy way is to swap each letter in your message for the letter that comes after it in the alphabet. So A becomes B, B becomes C and C becomes D. The message **Send help** would be written as **Tfoe ifmq**. To turn it back just replace each letter with the one in front of it in the alphabet. Now try and write your own message using this method.
- 2) Another way is to use blocks of letters. A simple version is this one. Write out the alphabet in two lines of 13 letters (this is the key your friend needs to know):

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

You are now going to substitute each letter you need to write your message with the one either directly above or below your lines of letters, so if you want to write A you would use N, if you want to write N you would use A, and if you want to write D you would use Q. That means "**AND**" would look like "**NAQ**"!

Here is a longer example:

"Meet me in the garden after lunch" would look like this:

ZRRG ZR VA GUR TNEQRA NSGRE YHAPU

Now try your own. Don't forget, your friend will need to know the key to how you have done this to be able to read your message. Did it work?