

A book cipher is a cipher in which the key is the identity of a book or other piece of text. It is generally essential that both sending and receiving correspondents not only have the same book, but the same edition.

The Word Safe puzzle uses a variation on this concept in which text is being published and a set of keywords are being applied to that text.

As an example, consider the use of the keyword “fishmonger.” First assign numbers to each letter of the keyword as shown.

F	I	S	H	M	O	N	G	E	R
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Text is created to encapsulate a series of numbers. For our example lets assume the numbers 1, 4, 15, 22 and 30 are to be hidden within the published text. Here’s an example of how the published text could be created to hide those numbers.

I told my wife, “I’ve had enough of your extravagance.”

She told me, “Money is always all you think about.”

I responded, “I’ve never withheld any money from you. Only now I find out how recklessly you’ve been spending it.”

She screamed, “Susan told me of your selfishness. She warned me not to marry you.”

I told her, “Honestly, why would you bring something she said years ago into this. Frankly, she’s always hated me because of my background and you know it.”

The receiving correspondent would then substitute keyword letters found at prearranged locations within the published text with the assigned numbers. In our example the first letter of the first word of each quoted sentence serve as the prearranged locations.

To crack such a cipher one would need to know the keywords that were used and the prearranged locations for the letters being substituted. If the keywords were known but the prearranged locations were not known then each keyword could in turn be applied against text while the resulting numbers were searched for known patterns.

The prearranged locations can be conveyed along with the public text through the use of other keywords, letters, punctuation marks, symbols, capitalization, fonts, or any combination of these.