THE ALIBI GRID



60 Murder Mystery Puzzles to Solve, Easy to Expert, With Suspects, Clues and Step-by-Step Solutions

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The Alibi Grid

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Difficulty Key

Every case in this book has exactly one solution, and you can reach it by deduction alone. You never need to guess. The cases get harder as you go.

Level		Cases	Suspects	Categories	Clues
🔍	**Easy**	1–15	3	Suspect, Weapon, Place	5–6
🔍🔍	**Medium**	16–35	4	Suspect, Weapon, Place	8
🔍🔍🔍	**Hard**	36–50	4	Suspect, Weapon, Place, plus Time or Motive	9–10
🔍🔍🔍🔍	**Expert**	51–60	5	Suspect, Weapon, Place, plus Time or Motive	11–12

Easy cases teach the moves. **Medium** cases add a fourth suspect, so you will need to cross off more carefully. **Hard** cases add a fourth category, either the time each suspect slipped away or the motive each one had, and some clues compare times. **Expert** cases have five suspects and long chains of reasoning: one deduction unlocks the next, and the next.

New to mystery grids? Start with Case 0 on page 7. Inspector Hazel Finch solves it with you, one clue at a time.

How to Solve a Case

The setup. Each case has a handful of suspects. Every suspect had exactly one weapon and was in exactly one place, and no two suspects shared a weapon or a place. (In Hard and Expert cases, every suspect also has exactly one time or one motive, again with no sharing.) Exactly one suspect is the murderer.

The grid. The grid on each case's right-hand page lets you compare every category with every other one. The top rows match suspects against weapons and places. The lower block matches places against weapons. The last column, **Murderer**, has one box per suspect.

Marks.

- Put an **X** in a box when a clue rules a pairing out.
- Put a **dot (●)** in a box when you know a pairing is true.

The one-per-row rule. Each small block of the grid has exactly one dot in every row and every column. So:

- When you place a dot, put an X in every other box in that row and that column of the same block.
- When every box but one in a row (or column) of a block has an X, the last box must be a dot.

The Murderer column works the same way: exactly one suspect gets the dot.

Cross-category thinking. The blocks talk to each other. If Ada had the rope, and the rope was in the cellar, then Ada was in the cellar. And if Ada had the rope but the rope was not in the attic, then Ada was not in the attic. Every time you place a dot, check what it tells you in the other blocks.

Reading the clues. The clues use a few simple forms:

- **Plain facts.** "Ada had the rope." Put a dot. "Ada was not in the cellar." Put an X.
- **Either-or.** "Ada had either the rope or the vial." Ada had one of those two, so X every other weapon for her. Once one choice is ruled out, the other is a dot.
- **If-then.** "If the rope was in the cellar, then Ada was the murderer." When you learn the first part is true, the second part is true too. And if you learn the second part is false, the first part must be false as well. If the first part turns out false, the clue tells you nothing more.
- **Before and after** (Hard and Expert). "Ada slipped away earlier than the person with the rope." That rules out the earliest time for the person with the rope and the latest time for Ada, and it means Ada did not have the rope.
- **Exactly next** (Hard and Expert). "Ada slipped away exactly one hour after the person with the rope." Each case words this for its own time slots (exactly one hour, half an hour, ten minutes, five minutes, one set, one stop or one course after), and it always means the very next time slot on that case's list. Their times sit side by side, with Ada's the later one, so Ada did not have the rope, Ada did not take the earliest time and the person with the rope did not take the latest.
- **The murderer.** Some clues talk about "the murderer," for example "The murderer was in the gazebo." Treat the murderer like one more person: once you know who was in the gazebo, you know who the murderer is.

Your answer. When the grid is full, name the murderer, then read across their row: **With what** is the murderer's weapon and **Where** is the murderer's place (plus **When** or **Motive** in later cases).

Stuck? Every solution in the back gives the answer, a table of who had what, and Finch's reasoning in numbered steps. Each step says what it relies on in brackets: "(clue 3)" means clue 3 of that case, and "(clue 3; step 2)" means clue 3 together with what was proved in step 2 of the same solution, and "(above)" means what was shown earlier in the same step. A note such as "Clue 5 leaves two options" means clue 5 is an either-or clue and one choice has just been ruled out. Follow the steps to find exactly where a case turned.

Case 0: The Garden Party

Worked example. Solve it alongside Inspector Hazel Finch.

Inspector Hazel Finch had come to Bertram Ashcombe's garden party for the lemon cake, not for a body. Yet there lay the retired seed merchant, quite dead, while a string quartet played on, unaware. Three people had slipped away from the lawn that afternoon. Each carried something from the garden and each went somewhere private. The twist? Bertram had changed his will that very morning, leaving everything to a hedgehog sanctuary. Finch set down her cake fork. "Right," she said. "Facts first, feelings later."

Suspects

- **Delphine Moss**: Bertram's niece, a watercolor painter who owes everyone money
- **Osgood Pell**: the neighbor, whose roses always lose to Bertram's
- **Winifred Larch**: the housekeeper of thirty years, who knows where the will is kept

Weapons: Trowel, Croquet Mallet, Watering Can
Places: Rose Arbor, Gazebo, Potting Shed

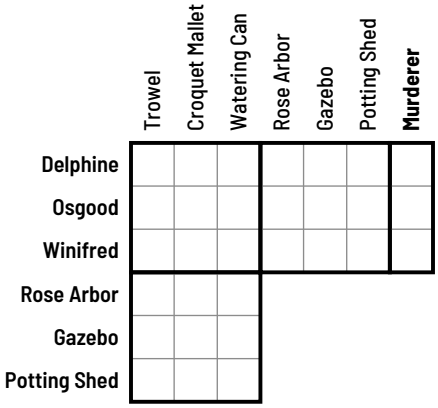
Clues

1. The trowel was in the gazebo.
2. Osgood was in the potting shed.
3. The murderer was in the gazebo.
4. Winifred did not have the croquet mallet.
5. The watering can was not in the rose arbor.

Try it yourself first if you like. Then follow along.

SOLVING IT, CLUE BY CLUE

Here is the empty grid. Suspects run down the side; weapons, places and the Murderer column run across. The lower block compares places with weapons.



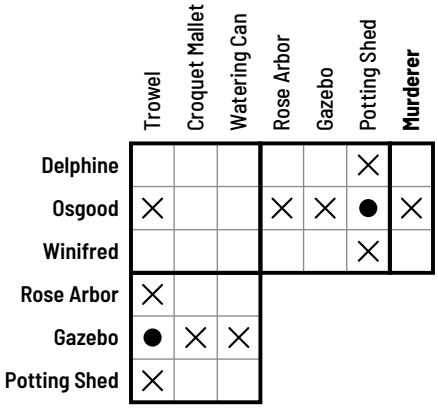
Clue 1: "The trowel was in the gazebo." A plain fact from the lower block. Put a dot where Gazebo meets Trowel. Now use the one-per-row rule: X the other weapons in the Gazebo row, and X the other places in the Trowel column.

Clue 2: "Osgood was in the potting shed." Dot Osgood and Potting Shed. X Osgood's other two places, and X Potting Shed for Delphine and Winifred.

Clue 3: "The murderer was in the gazebo." Osgood was in the potting shed, so Osgood is not the murderer: X his box in the Murderer column. We can't name the murderer yet, so write *murderer = gazebo* in the margin.

A cross-category bonus. The trowel was in the gazebo, and Osgood was not in the gazebo. So Osgood did not have the trowel. X it.

After clues 1, 2 and 3, the grid looks like this:

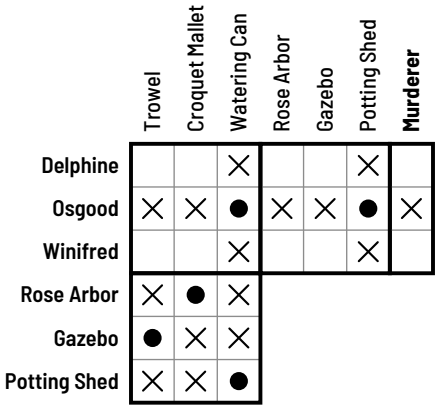


Clue 4 is easier once we know more, so skip ahead. Solvers often take clues out of order.

Clue 5: "The watering can was not in the rose arbor." X Rose Arbor and Watering Can. Now look at the Watering Can column of the lower block: not the gazebo (clue 1), not the rose arbor (clue 5). Only the potting shed is left, so dot Potting Shed and Watering Can. That leaves the rose arbor for the croquet mallet: dot.

Cross-category thinking. Osgood was in the potting shed, and the watering can was in the potting shed, so Osgood had the watering can. Dot it, and X the watering can for Delphine and Winifred.

After clue 5:



Clue 4: "Winifred did not have the croquet mallet." X it. Winifred can't have the watering can either (Osgood has it), so Winifred had the trowel. That leaves the croquet mallet for Delphine.

Carry it across. The trowel was in the gazebo, so Winifred was in the gazebo. The croquet mallet was in the rose arbor, so Delphine was in the rose arbor.

The finished grid:

	Trowel	Croquet Mallet	Watering Can	Rose Arbor	Gazebo	Potting Shed	**Murderer**
Delphine	×	●	×	●	×	×	×
Osgood	×	×	●	×	×	●	×
Winifred	●	×	×	×	●	×	●
Rose Arbor	×	●	×				
Gazebo	●	×	×				
Potting Shed	×	×	●				

Naming the murderer. Back to our margin note: the murderer was in the gazebo (clue 3). Winifred was in the gazebo. So Winifred is the murderer. Dot her box in the Murderer column and X Delphine's.

Reading the answer. Look across Winifred's row: she had the trowel, and she was in the gazebo.

Finch closed her notebook. "Every clue mattered," she said. "Take any one of them away and you could not be sure. That is how every case in this book works. Your turn, Detective."

Case 0 answer

Who: Winifred Larch
With what: Trowel
Where: Gazebo

Finch's verdict: Thirty years of polishing the silver, and one morning's change to a will. Winifred knew exactly where that will was kept, and exactly what it no longer said.

CASE 1 EASY

The Lighthouse Supper

A storm cut Gullrock Light off from the mainland just as supper was served. By the time the soup was cold, keeper Silas Tremaine was dead and Inspector Hazel Finch, stranded by the same storm, was the only detective for twenty miles. Three people had left the table during the gale. The small twist: the lamp still turned perfectly all night, which meant somebody who knew the machinery had kept it running. Finch buttoned her coat against the draft. "Nobody leaves this rock until I know who did it."

Suspects

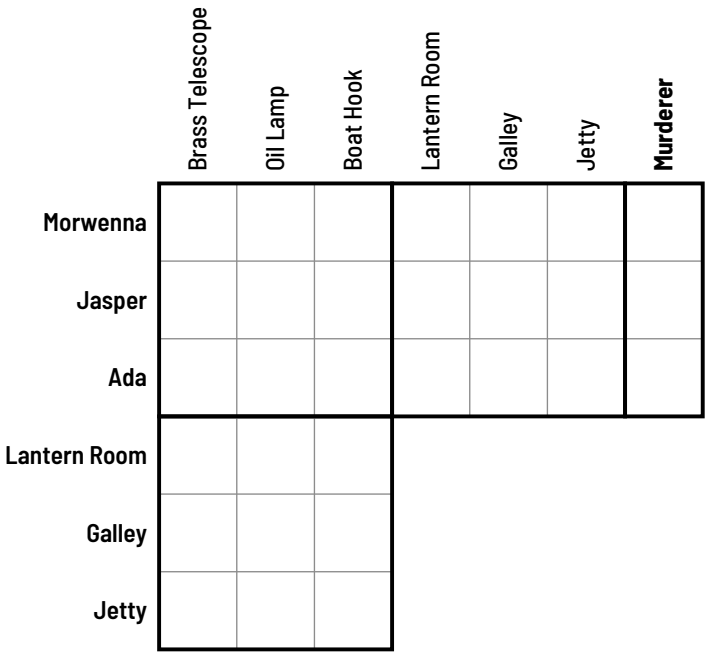
- **Morwenna Quill**: skipper of the supply boat, stuck here by the storm
- **Jasper Fenwick**: a visiting painter who sketches the sea for hours
- **Ada Pellow**: the assistant keeper, next in line for Silas's job

Weapons: Brass Telescope, Oil Lamp, Boat Hook

Places: Lantern Room, Galley, Jetty

Clues

1. The murderer was in the lantern room.
2. Morwenna was on the jetty.
3. Jasper did not have the oil lamp.
4. Jasper was not in the galley.
5. The brass telescope was on the jetty.



ANSWER

Who: _____

With what: _____

Where: _____

NOTES

Solutions

SOLUTION 1

The Lighthouse Supper

WHO	WITH WHAT	WHERE
Jasper Fenwick	**Boat Hook**	**Lantern Room**

SUSPECT	WEAPON	PLACE
Morwenna	Brass Telescope	Jetty
Jasper MURDERER	**Boat Hook**	**Lantern Room**
Ada	Oil Lamp	Galley

How Finch cracked it

1. Clues 1 and 2 tell us that the murderer was in the lantern room and Morwenna was on the jetty.
2. Jasper was not in the galley or on the jetty (clue 4; step 1), so Jasper was in the lantern room.
3. Morwenna and Jasper were not in the galley (steps 1 and 2), so Ada was there.
4. The murderer was in the lantern room (step 1), and Jasper was in the lantern room (step 2), so Jasper is the murderer.
5. Clue 5 tells us the brass telescope was on the jetty.
6. The person in the lantern room did not have the brass telescope or the oil lamp (clue 3; steps 2 and 5), so that person had the boat hook.
7. Ada did not have the brass telescope or the boat hook (steps 3, 5 and 6), so Ada had the oil lamp.

Finch's verdict: The lamp kept turning because Ada did her job, as she always does. Jasper simply painted himself into the wrong room.