

Morse Code

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The invention of telegraphy and Morse Code enabled people all over the world to communicate with each other accurately and quickly for the first time.

Before the 1830s, the main way to send a message over long distances was by post. Depending on its destination, this could take days, weeks or even months to arrive.

Inspired by the need for effective ways to communicate over long distances, Samuel Morse invented the first commercially successful electrical telegraph system alongside Morse code, an alphabet code using dots and dashes. He gave the most frequently used letters the easiest symbols to enable messages to be sent faster. For example, one dot represents the letter E.



Using a connected system of telegraph machines, a message could be tapped in Morse Code on a Transmission Key and sent along a cable that either went over land or under the sea. This cable was connected to a Receiver that typed out the Morse Code. The message could then be decoded and sent as a telegram. Operators would soon learn to decipher the messages simply by listening to the sounds as they came through the machines, quickly translating the Morse Code into words.

In 1858 the first telegraph cable went under the sea linking America and Europe. In 1870, Britain and India were connected by undersea telegraph cable via Porthcurno, reducing the time it took to receive a message from 6 weeks to 9 minutes (an increase in speed of 670,000%). In the following years many more telegraph cables were to be laid into Porthcurno, connecting Britain with countries all over the world.

Messages were transmitted and received at Porthcurno until the station closed in 1970. Today 97% of all communication travels via cable using a coded system like Morse Code. Instead of dots and dashes, pulses of light are sent down fibre-optic cables and decoded into messages.