FREE PRINTABLE WORD LADDERS FOR ADULTS

12 ORIGINAL CLUED PUZZLES: 4 GENTLE, 4 STEADY, 4 TRICKY

A word ladder joins two words by changing one letter at a time. Every step must be a real word of the same length, and you may not add, remove or rearrange letters. Each missing word in these ladders has a clue beside it, so you are never guessing blind.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the start word at the top and the finish word at the bottom.
2. Change one letter to make the first missing word. Its clue is beside it.
3. Keep going, one letter at a time, until you reach the finish word.
4. Stuck? Work upwards from the finish word and meet in the middle.

A QUICK EXAMPLE

C O L D	*Start word*
C O R D	*L becomes R: a length of rope*
C A R D	*O becomes A: sent on a birthday*
W A R D	*C becomes W: a room of hospital beds*
W A R M	*Finish word*

Answers are on page 8. Use a pencil: a wrong turn rubs out.

Printing tip: choose Fit To Page to print on A4 or US Letter paper.

Free for personal, family, club and classroom use. Please do not sell it.

PUZZLES 1 AND 2

PUZZLE 1 · GENTLE

CHANGE GIFT INTO LOVE

3 missing words

G	I	F	T
L	O	V	E

Start

1. Raise up; a ride in a friend's car
2. Your time from birth onwards
3. Reside; dwell

Finish

PUZZLE 2 · GENTLE

CHANGE FORM INTO HAND

3 missing words

F	O	R	M
H	A	N	D

Start

1. Where cows and crops are raised
2. Damage or injury
3. Firm, like stone; difficult

Finish

PUZZLES 3 AND 4

PUZZLE 3 · GENTLE

CHANGE DRAG INTO GROW

3 missing words

D R A G	*Start*
	1 Sketch with a pencil
	2 Sketched, yesterday
	3 Got taller, last year
G R O W	*Finish*

PUZZLE 4 · GENTLE

CHANGE ITEM INTO SHOP

3 missing words

I T E M	*Start*
	1 A flower's stalk
	2 One stair; a single pace
	3 Halt; what a red light means
S H O P	*Finish*

PUZZLES 5 AND 6

PUZZLE 5 · STEADY

CHANGE ROOT INTO TEAM

4 missing words

R O O T	*Start*
	1 A wellington, for one
	2 It floats and carries people
	3 Win against; a drum's rhythm
	4 A ray of light; a wooden support
T E A M	*Finish*

PUZZLE 6 · STEADY

CHANGE FOLD INTO SOUP

4 missing words

F O L D	*Start*
	1 What you eat
	2 A silly person; a fruit-and-cream pudding
	3 A rule broken in football
	4 Spirit; a style of music
S O U P	*Finish*

PUZZLES 7 AND 8

PUZZLE 7 · STEADY

CHANGE CALM INTO RICE

4 missing words

C A L M	*Start*
	1 The inside of your hand; a tropical tree
	2 Light in colour; washed out
	3 Walking speed
	4 A contest of speed
R I C E	*Finish*

PUZZLE 8 · STEADY

CHANGE GAIN INTO MILK

4 missing words

G A I N	*Start*
	1 Chief; most important
	2 Letters and parcels
	3 A covered shopping centre
	4 It grinds corn into flour
M I L K	*Finish*

PUZZLES 9 AND 10

PUZZLE 9 · TRICKY

CHANGE SHOOT INTO STORM

3 missing words

S H O O T	*Start*
	1 ‘Long story ___’
	2 Where the tide comes in
	3 Put away for a rainy day
S T O R M	*Finish*

PUZZLE 10 · TRICKY

CHANGE LUNCH INTO TEACH

3 missing words

L U N C H	*Start*
	1 ‘The best of the ___’
	2 Where the substitutes sit
	3 Buckets and spades go here
T E A C H	*Finish*

PUZZLES 11 AND 12

PUZZLE 11 · TRICKY

CHANGE COINS INTO SAINT

4 missing words

C O I N S	*Start*
	1 Signs up as a member
	2 A shared effort is a ___ one
	3 ‘What’s the ___?’
	4 Watching it dry is famously dull
S A I N T	*Finish*

PUZZLE 12 · TRICKY

CHANGE BLAST INTO LEAVE

3 missing words

B L A S T	*Start*
	1 Beauty’s companion in the fairy tale
	2 ‘Last but not ___’
	3 ‘A new ___ of life’
L E A V E	*Finish*

NO PEEKING UNTIL YOU HAVE TRIED

THE ANSWERS

GENTLE

1. **GIFT** → LIFT → LIFE → LIVE → **LOVE**
2. **FORM** → FARM → HARM → HARD → **HAND**
3. **DRAG** → DRAW → DREW → GREW → **GROW**
4. **ITEM** → STEM → STEP → STOP → **SHOP**

STEADY

5. **ROOT** → BOOT → BOAT → BEAT → BEAM → **TEAM**
6. **FOLD** → FOOD → FOOL → FOUL → SOUL → **SOUP**
7. **CALM** → PALM → PALE → PACE → RACE → **RICE**
8. **GAIN** → MAIN → MAIL → MALL → MILL → **MILK**

TRICKY

9. **SHOOT** → SHORT → SHORE → STORE → **STORM**
10. **LUNCH** → BUNCH → BENCH → BEACH → **TEACH**
11. **COINS** → JOINS → JOINT → POINT → PAINT → **SAINT**
12. **BLAST** → BEAST → LEAST → LEASE → **LEAVE**

Each of these routes is the only shortest route between its two end words in our 5,861-word checking list, so if your ladder reached the finish in the same number of steps, it should match.

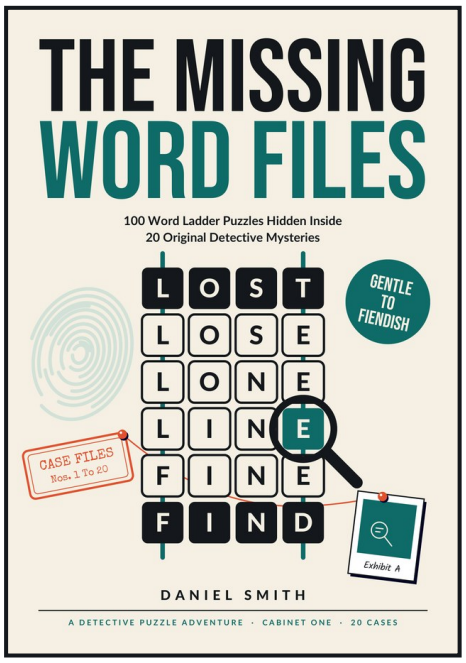
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The Missing Word Files is a word ladder puzzle book for adults with a story. It hides 100 word ladders inside 20 linked cosy detective mysteries set in the town of Briarbridge. Each solved ladder gives you one evidence letter, five letters spell the missing word that cracks the case, and all twenty answers reveal one final hidden message.

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THEMISSINGWORDFILES.COM

Things are only lost until somebody takes the trouble to find them.

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