

## CRYPTIC CROSSWORD CONSTRUCTIONS

Most cryptic crosswords indicate the number of letters in the answer (or the number of letters in each of the words making up the answer) by a number in parenthesis after the clue. Thus, (5) after the clue indicates a 5-letter word; (4,2) after the clue indicates a two word answer with the first word containing 4 letters and the second word containing 2 letters; (3-3) after the clue indicates a hyphenated answer (such as hee-haw) consisting of three letters and three letters.

Following is a description of the more common types of cryptic clues.

### Single meanings

This type of clue is a more or less straight-forward clue but usually with a somewhat unorthodox interpretation of the answer. One does not have to be good at unusual constructions to get these; one only has to have a knack for 'thinking outside the box'.

Example clue: They ignore national customs (9)  
Answer: *smugglers* (nothing tricky about it except for an unusual interpretation of 'national customs')

Example clue: Water at the mouth (5)  
Answer: *delta* (one has to think of mouth in the context of the 'mouth of a river' not the human body)

### Double meanings

This type of clue has a double-barreled meaning but usually does not contain any sort of cryptic construction.

Example clue: Uses Polish enthusiasts (5)  
Answer: *buffs* meaning 'enthusiasts' and also meaning 'uses polish' (the capital P is just a trick to throw you off and make the clue readable)

Example clue: Leave your bed clothes (3,2)  
Answer: *get up* meaning 'clothes' and also meaning 'leave your bed'

### Charades

Many cryptic clues are so-called charades in which the answer is composed of two or more words each clued separately. These are very reminiscent of the game 'Charades' where the answer is broken down into bite-sized chunks.

Example clue: Night flier on staff (5)  
Answer: *baton* (meaning 'staff') is formed by literally taking *bat* (a 'night flier') and appending *on*

Example clue: To succeed it must be followed by her in first (8)  
Answer: *inherit* (meaning 'to succeed') is constructed by following *her* with *it* and

putting *in* first (just as the clue literally instructs you to do)

### Embedded constructions

Many clues require you to place a letter or word inside another word (embedding it) in order to get the answer.

Example clue: He composed the last letter in the catalogue (5)  
Answer: *Liszt* (the name of a famous composer, ie, 'he composed') is formed by embedding *z* (the last letter) in *list* (meaning 'catalogue')

Example clue: A matter-of-fact doctrine is dividing the kingdom (7)  
Answer: *realism* (meaning 'a matter-of-fact doctrine') is constructed by embedding *is* inside *realm* (meaning 'kingdom'); ie, by letting *is* divide the word *realm*.

### Anagrams

Words or phrases used to signify an anagram are always located immediately adjacent to (either immediately before or immediately after) the word(s) whose letters are to be rearranged. The following words/phrases are just a few examples of ones that are used to signify an anagram. The list is almost endless, as one can imagine.

perhaps	improved	maybe	about
new	unusual	may be	a change
impaired	apart	distributed	alternative
possibly	spoiled	different	badly
irregularly	turn	terribly	ruined
prepared	designed	odd	shaking
erroneously	plastic	dancing	out
wild	sorted		

A strong indicator of an anagram is if the word(s) adjacent to an anagram indicator have the right number of letters for the overall clue, as in the example below.

Example clue: One who helps Satanists out (9)  
Answer: *assistant* (meaning 'one who helps') is an anagram of *Satanists* (with *out* being the anagram indicator)

Example clue: A new song hit right away (2, 5)  
Answer: *on sight* (meaning 'right away') is an anagram of *song hit* (as indicated by the word 'new')

### Homonyms

Certain words or phrases are often used to signify a word that is a homonym. Usually in such clues,

a portion of the clue leads to *one* word while the second portion of the clue leads to a *different* word that sounds the same as the first word. As with anagram indicators, these words/phrases are always located immediately adjacent to (either immediately before or immediately after) the word that is a homonym. Indications of a homonym construction are words or phrases such as:

audience's    for the audience    audibly    listener's    sounds    reportedly

Example clue:    Was the ruler dropped from above audibly? (7)

Answer:    *reigned* (meaning 'ruler') is a homonym for *rained* (meaning 'dropped from above')

Example clue:    Trees they plant for the audience (6)

Answer:    *cedars* (meaning 'trees') is a homonym for *seeders* (meaning 'they plant')

## Hidden

In these situations, the answer is contained directly (that is, with all the letters in the right order) within a word or phrase in the clue. Indicators of hidden words are words such as:

in    some    crossing    selection    covers    holds

Note that often hidden words don't necessarily have to be contained entirely within some other word; they can straddle two or more words in a clue such as in the following example.

Example clue:    Land in puddle so thoughtlessly (7)

Answer:    *Lesotho* (meaning the country or land) is hidden inside the phrase *puddle so thoughtlessly*

Example clue:    Nasty selection of junk in drawers (6)

Answer:    *unkind* (meaning 'nasty') is hidden (ie, is a selection of) inside the phrase *junk in drawers*

## Reverse

In these situations, the answer is a word that is backwards - either by being hidden (as above) backwards in some other word or by being another word (backwards) for a given word. Indicators of reverse hidden words are words such as:

returning    back    coming back    retro    up (esp. for vertical words)

Example clue:    Label turns up to be spiked (5)

Answer:    *laced* (meaning 'spiked') is constructed by reversing *decal* (meaning 'a type of label').

Example clue:    Backwards - therefore a monster (4)

Answer:    *ogre* (meaning 'a monster') is constructed by reversing *ergo* (meaning 'therefore').

## Deletions

In this type of clue, a letter (or sometimes a group of letters) is deleted from a word to yield the solution. If the letter to be deleted is taken from the front, the indicator might allude to this fact by suggesting the word is somehow not started. If the letter is to be deleted from the end, the indicator might suggest the word is unfinished. Or if from the middle, the indicator might suggest the word is missing its central letter.

Example clue: Fiery bird without a tail (7)  
Answer: *flaming* (meaning 'fiery') is constructed by removing *o* (the 'tail') from *flamingo* (a bird)

Example clue: Virtuous maybe but losing out to harmful influence (5)  
Answer: *virus* (meaning 'harmful influence') is constructed by removing *out* from *virtuous* (just as the clue literally suggests); this clue is extra tricky because *out* is removed in reverse order.

## Substitution

This is a fairly rare type of clue. These clues instruct one to replace a letter in a given word with another letter to create a new word which applies to the overall clue.

Example clue: Nobleman exchanging 500 for 5 in discount (7)  
Answer: *viscount* (meaning 'nobleman') is constructed by replacing the *d* in 'discount' for a *v* (signified in the clue by exchanging 500 which is *d* in Roman numerals with 5 which is *v* in Roman numerals). (The use of Roman numerals is discussed in the section below entitled **Special indicators**.)

## Selected letters

This is also a fairly rare type of clue. These clues give instructions to pick a certain combination of letters from within the clue to create the answer. The instruction could be to pick the odd-numbered letters or the even-numbered letters in a word or phrase or to take the initial letters in a set of words.

Example clue: Tosses for letters in postal station, initially (5)  
Answer: *flips* (meaning 'tosses' as in tosses a coin) is constructed by taking the first (or initial) letter from each word in the phrase *for letters in postal station*

Example clue: Eight botch theft after ignoring the odds (5)  
Answer: *octet* (meaning 'eight') is constructed by eliminating the odds (or odd letters) from the phrase 'botch theft' (namely, *o, c, t, e, t*)

A special case of this type of clue involves using only one specific letter from a word to form part of the answer to the clue.

Example clue: Need pale leader of Thailand (4)  
Answer: *want* (meaning 'need') is constructed by appending *t* (the 'leader' or first letter in Thailand) to *wan* (meaning 'pale')

Example clue: Otherwise, a heartless woman (4)

Answer: *else* (meaning 'otherwise') is constructed by removing *i* from 'Elise' - a woman (ie, removing the middle letter or 'heart' from Elise)

### Special indicators

There are a number of words which often - **but not always** - have a special significance (by convention).

Examples are:

many: *c* or *m*

no good: *ng*

father: *dad* or *pa*

mother: *mom* or *ma*

love: *o* (as in tennis)

sailor: *ab* or *tar* or *jack*

north: *n*

south: *s*

east: *e*

west: *w*

hard: *h*

hot: *h*

cold: *c*

right: *r*

left: *l*

ship: *ss*

of French: *de*

US states: the two-letter abbreviation

America/United States: *US*

article: *a* or *an* or *the*

loud: *f* (referring to musical notation)

quiet/soft: *p* (referring to musical notation)

way: *rd* (for road) or *st* (for street)

politician: *MP*

Roman numeral equivalent  
(ie, five = *v*, ten = *x*, fifty = *l*, hundred = *c*)

thousand: *m* (as in Roman numeral) or *g* as in grand (\$1000)

direction/ point/ quarter: *E, W, N* or *S* (as in giving directions or the point of the compass)

island: *is*

ring: *o*

doctor: *mb, dm, mo, md, or dr*

one: *i*

the French: *le* or *la*

the Spanish: *el*

about/concerning: *re* (confusing because *about* can also signal an anagram)

iron: *fe* (chemical terms for other metals are also common)

of German: *der* or *die* or *das*

church: *ch*

hospital: *h*

university: *u*

## Combination

Of course, combinations of the above types are possible and fairly common. They are also usually the most difficult types of clues for beginners to grasp. Generally speaking, single meaning and double meaning clues are not combined with any other types but all other types can appear in a combination clue. On a somewhat positive note, it is rare for more than two types of clues to be combined in one clue.

Example clue: Windstorms faced returning mosquitoes, for example (8)  
Answer: *tempests* (meaning windstorms) is constructed from *tem* (which is *met* backwards - ie, another word for 'faced' but backwards) plus *pests* (of which mosquitoes are an example). This is an example of a clue which combines the **charade** technique with the **reverse** technique.

Example clue: Books reviewer and retro Bogart costar get taxi (4,1,4)  
Answer: *call a cab* (meaning 'get taxi') is constructed from *ca* (which is a common abbreviation for 'chartered accountant' - ie, books reviewer) plus *llacab* (which is 'Bacall' backwards or retro - Lauren Bacall was Bogart's famous costar). This is another example of a clue which combines the **charade** technique with the **reverse** technique.

Cryptic crossword creators each have their own style or personality. As a result, they place different emphasis on using the various types of clues; also, some are better than others in masking the clues. For a beginner, it is best to pick one cryptic creator and stick with his/her work until the basics are mastered.