

## How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords · by Fraser Simpson

Cryptic crosswords are the wordplay-packed relatives of regular crosswords. If you're new to the game, you need to learn the difference between regular clues and their cryptic cousins.

The important distinction is that every clue has two parts: a definition of the answer and another way of arriving at the answer through wordplay. These two parts are put next to one another: You must figure out where one part ends and the other begins. There are eight main types of wordplay hints, each with its own special signals that indicate what to do to produce the answer a different way.

### 1. **Anagram:** Terribly morose lovers (6)

In an anagram clue, the letters that make up the answer are given in scrambled form. Beside them is an anagram signal, a figurative word or phrase that indicates that you must anagram letters. (As well, as in any cryptic clue, there is a normal definition of the answer.) In the clue above, the answer ROMEOS ("lovers") is a terribly formed (i.e., anagrammed) version of MOROSE. The digit 6 in parentheses tells you the answer is a six-letter word.

### 2. **Charade:** Salamander on scientist (6)

In a charade, the answer is broken into pieces and clued piece by piece. NEWTON ("scientist") is a charade of NEWT ("salamander") + ON.

### 3. **Hidden Word:** Areas only hiding motive (6)

Sometimes, the clue-writer gives the answer spelled out in its correct order right in the clue. No rearranging is necessary. What word meaning "motive" is hidden by AREAS ONLY? Look closely, and you'll see the REASON.

### 4. **Two Meanings:** Fast armada (5)

Some words have two meanings from different origins. For these words, the clue-writer may just give the two definitions side by side. FLEET means both "fast" (as an adjective) and "armada" (as a noun).

### 5. **Container:** Guevara is held by crazy groups (7)

In a container, the solution is formed by putting one part of the answer inside (or outside) another. BATCHES ("groups") is formed when you put CHE ("Guevara") inside BATS ("crazy"), like this: BAT(CHE)S.

### 6. **Homophone:** Charming room, we hear (5)

A homophone clue tells you that the answer has the same sound as another word or phrase. SWEET ("charming") sounds like SUITE ("room") when "we hear" the word. Every homophone clue has a signal like "to the audience," "we hear," or "reportedly" that indicates that people hear or say the two words the same way. This homophone signal is always beside the definition of the *homophone*, not beside the definition of the actual answer word.

### 7. **Reversal:** Roundup horse returned (5)

A clue may hint that the answer word spells something when reversed. RECAP ("roundup") is PACER ("horse") written backward ("returned"). A reversal clue always contains a signal (like "back," "returned," or "from the east") that suggests the reversal in a playful way. In down clues, which refer to vertical entries, look for indicators like "up," "northward," and "rising."

### 8. **Deletion:** Almost dressing bird (5)

A clue may suggest that a word could lose its "head" (first letter), "heart" (central letter), or "tail" (last letter) to form a new word. Or the clue may tell you not to start the word, or not to finish it. ROBIN ("bird") is almost ROBING ("dressing"). The word "almost" suggests that you need almost all of the word. That is, you drop the last letter.

These are the eight types of wordplay devices. You may want to take a moment now to try the practice puzzle on the next page, which has one each of the eight clue types.

Some clues involve a combination of two or more types of wordplay, such as an anagram inside a reversal, or a deletion as part of a charade.

Look at this clue:

Bore reported about a tree that's twisted (9)

TOLERATED ("bore") is a container of TOLD ("reported") about ERATE ("a tree that's twisted," an anagram of A TREE), like this: TOL(ERATE)D.

### Symbols and Abbreviations

Clue-writers may use common symbols or abbreviations, including these:

A, D = across, down (crossword notation)

A, K, Q, J = ace, king, queen, jack (playing cards)

AVE, RD, ST = avenue, road, street

B = bachelor (as in BA or BSc)

B, D, M = born, died, married (in Who's Who)

B, K, N, P, Q, R = bishop, king, knight, pawn, queen, rook (chess notation)

B, G, R, W = black, green, red, white (common color abbreviations)

C, H = cold, hot (on faucets)

C, H, N, O = carbon, hydrogen nitrogen, oxygen, etc. (chemical symbols)

CH, SCH, U = church, school, university

E, H, R = error, hit, run(s) (sports stats)

E, F = empty, full (on automobile gas gauges)

E, I, M, R, T, W = energy, current, mass, resistance, time, work (in science)

F, G, P, S, U = fail(ing), good, pass(ing), satisfactory, unsatisfactory (reports)

F, T = false, true

FLA, ILL, SD = Florida, Illinois, South Dakota (etc.)

G, R, X = general, restricted, pornographic (movie ratings)

G = grand (as in 10G to mean \$10,000)

H, L = high, low (on weather maps)

I, R = island, river (maps)

I, V, X, L, C, D, M = 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500, 1000 (Roman numerals)

K = kindergarten (as in K-5 school)

L, M, S = large, medium, small (clothing sizes)

L, R = left, right

M, F = male, female (or masculine, feminine, with N = neuter)

MA, PA = mother, father

MO = month

N, S, E, W = north(ern), south(ern), east(ern), west(ern)

N, Y = no, yes

N, X = unknown (in algebra)

O = circle, globe (from shape), love (from the tennis score), zero, nothing

P = page

P = parking (street signs)

P = piano, soft (music notation, also F = forte, loud)

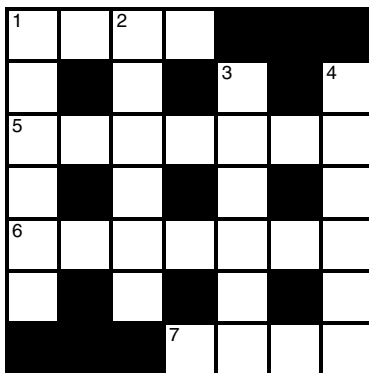
SR = senior

X = by (as in 2x4 planks), wrong

The clue-writer may also instruct you pull off pieces of words. For example, the capital of France is F (its capital letter), the third of May is Y (its third letter), central Poland is LA (the two letters at the center) and piece of wood is W ("piece of" always refers to the first letter).

### Practice Puzzle

Answers and explanations appear below.

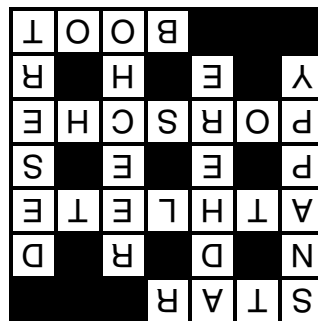


#### ACROSS

- 1 Lead rodents back (4) *reversal*
- 5 Jock changed the tale (7) *anagram*
- 6 Sports car a Shakespearean heroine heard (7) *homophone*
- 7 Kick Lincoln's assassin endlessly (4) *deletion*

#### DOWN

- 1 Smart spy takes short rest (6) *container*
- 2 Stick commercial in this spot (6) *charade*
- 3 Screech owl offers sound again (2-4) *hidden word*
- 4 Leave wasteland (6) *two meanings*



#### ACROSS

- 1 STAR ("lead") is RATS ("rodents") backward.
- 5 ATHLETE ("jock") is a changed (anagrammed) version of THE TALE.
- 6 PORSCHE ("sports car") sounds like PORTIA ("a Shakespearean heroine") when you hear it.
- 7 BOOT ("kick") is BOOTH ("Lincoln's assassin") with the last letter removed (i.e., endlessly).

#### DOWN

- 1 SNAPPY ("smart") is what results when SPY takes NAP ("short rest") inside.
- 2 ADHERE ("stick") is AD ("commercial") + HERE ("in this spot").
- 3 RE-ECHO ("sound again") is offered inside SCREECH OWL.
- 4 DESERT means both "leave" and "wasteland."