



How to solve Cryptic Crosswords

© Martin Woods www.indigoextra.com

Martin has written over 500 cryptic crosswords for *The Big Issue in the North*. For an online version of this guide, please visit https://www.indigoextra.com/how_to_solve_cryptic_crosswords.html.

In most crossword clues the clue is composed of two parts, a clue to the answer (a bit like a quick clue only normally not so easy) and a cryptic component that also tells you the answer. There are several types of clue, as follows.

Anagrams

An anagram clue is comprised of 3 parts:

- A clue to the answer
- An anagram indicator
- The anagram itself

For example:

Drawn-out, rambling and rude (8)

Here the anagram is *drawn-out*, the anagram indicator is *rambling* and the clue is *rude*. The answer is *untoward*.

Examples of anagram indicators include abstract, absurd, active, addled, adjusted, afresh, after a fashion, alloy, all at sea, alien, altered., alternative, amazing, anyway, askew, awkward, awry, etc.

Sounds like

Like anagrams, these consist of 3 parts:

- A clue to the answer
- A 'sounds like' indicator
- Something that sounds like the answer

For example:

Make money talking crock (3)

Here the clue is *crock*, the sound like indicator is *talking* and the something that sounds like is *make money*. The answer is *urn* (a type of crock, which sounds like *earn*).

An alternative variant of these is where the sounds like indicates letters, for example:

Listen, I see easier each a.m. with this cone (3,5)

Here the clue is *cone*, the sounds like indicator is *listen* and the letters are made up as follows:

I	I
See	C
Easier	E-C-R
Each	E (Words are sometimes abbreviated in crossword clues)
a.m	A-M

The answer is *ice cream*.

Words that indicate sounds like include: say, we hear, listen, speak, utter, pronounce, declare, report, etc.

Pure Cryptic

A pure cryptic is an obscure way of reaching the answer, for example:

Nice pain (6,5)
Is *french bread*

Ingredients in jam (4)
Is *cars*

Double Meaning

Here there are 2 (or more) clues to the answer, perhaps with an = indicator in between. For example:

Socialist rose (3)
Is *red*

Furious, mark voted wrong (5)
Is *cross*, with each of the 4 words meaning 'cross'

Words that could indicate = include with, and, also, meets, equals, etc. (though they can also be used to mean other things).

Hidden words

A hidden word clue is again comprised of 3 parts:

- A clue to the answer
- A hidden word indicator
- A word or words containing the answer

For example:

City in Czechoslovakia (4)
Here, the clue is City, in indicates a hidden word and Czechoslovakia, if you look carefully contains the word *Oslo*, which is the answer.

Words that indicate a hidden word include: A little of, a portion of, apparent, appears, carried by, content, emerges from, out of, gripped by, herein, holding, in, nursing, portion of, showing, etc.

Crossword Equations

Equations are the most varied of crossword clues and can include various ways of forming a word, for example:

A = B + C

Getting close to Northern jewelry (7)

Here the A is the clue (*Getting close*), Northern simply indicates the letter *N* and jewelry is *earring*.

The answer is nearing, N + earring.

Fury over a painting with eggs (7)

Fury is temper, over indicates above (used in a down clue) the letter *a*, and the clue is *painting with eggs*.

The answer is temper + a = tempera

A = B + C + D

Chance for pawn to steal talent (11)

Chance is the clue, pawn is the letter *p*, steal is rob, talent is ability:

P + rob + ability = probability

B inside C = A

I'm stuck in glue, but it's a pleasant diversion (7)

Here the clue is '*a pleasant diversion*', and *I'm* is inside a word meaning glue (paste), so

The answer is pastime: past (im) e

A = B backwards

Beat up for sport (4)

Beat is flog, if you write this 'up', you have golf, which is the answer.

Crossword language

As well as the components of crossword language mentioned above, there are also things that are used to indicate individual letters, for example:

Almost any standard abbreviation can be used, sometimes not directly (so accident and emergency might be used to indicate ER (for emergency room))

Roman numerals, one = I, ten = X, etc.

King = k or r (rex)

Queen often means ER (Elizabeth Regina)

Note = any of the letters A,B,C,D,E,F or G

Ring, love, egg, zero, circle can all indicate the letter O.

Summary

80 or 90 per cent of cryptic crossword clues are written in one of the ways described above, however it obviously takes practice to identify what kind of clue a cryptic clue is and work out how to solve it! Crossword compilers can also use other methods of coding a clue, which might be unique to that particular clue!

I hope this gives you enough information to get started and you enjoy solving cryptic crosswords!