

SOLVING CRYPTIC CLUES

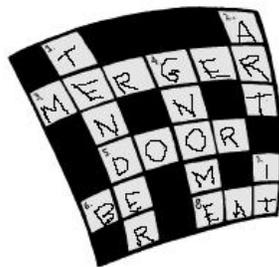


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Solving Cryptic Clues

“How do I even begin to solve a Cryptic clue?” you may wonder. Perhaps you have enjoyed solving regular crossword puzzles and want to try something new and different. Or maybe you’ve been intrigued with those intellectuals who seem to know something you don’t. It’s not that much of a mystery. You, too, can master these clever conundrums.

Cryptic clues are often made up of two parts. In order to solve a clue, it’s helpful to figure out where one part ends and the other begins. Beware — there are clues within clues! It can be confusing, but when you figure it out you will have one of those “Eureka!” moments. It’s well worth the bother.

Lesson 1 - Anagrams

Let’s look at this clue to start:

Possibly loves to figure out crossword clues. (5)

How do you start to decipher it?

Tip #1: Look at the number of letters in the answer and see if there is a word or phrase in the clue that has the same number of letters.

Tip #2: Look for a signal as to the type of clue that is being used.

Don’t worry — it won’t take you long to get the hang of it. The signal in this clue is the word, “possibly,” and it indicates an anagram.

Anagrams are one of the most common cryptic features. Here are some expressions that “clue you in” that it’s an anagram: *possibly, perhaps, unusually, new, changing, composition, wildly, varied, cooked, ruined, fresh, sort of, ordered, a form of*. All of these terms give a hint to indicate that the letters may be rearranged.

Let’s look at the clue again and dissect it into two parts with the slash /:

Possibly (loves) / **to figure out crossword clues**. (5)

Analysis:

The answer has 5 letters.

The word “possibly” gives the hint that it is an anagram.

The word “loves” is next to the hint word and has 5 letters, so it is likely the anagram word.

The definition is the second part.

Rearrange the letters in the word "loves" and you get the answer: SOLVE.

Definition: "To figure out crossword clues" = SOLVE. Well done!

Often, when you find the answer to a cryptic clue, there is no doubt that you have the correct answer. You just know it has to be right!

Let's try another:

Changing planes in Italy. (6)

The answer has 6 letters; "planes" has 6 letters.

"Changing" indicates that it could be an anagram.

"In Italy" could be the definition.

Here is the dissection:

Changing (planes) / in Italy. (6)

The answer is NAPLES, an anagram of "planes"!

One more:

Modification in game is a mystery. (6)

Dissection:

Modification (in game) / is a mystery. (6)

Answer: ENIGMA, an anagram of "in game." Enigma is a mystery.

Practice: Anagrams (answers on page 11):

1. Possibly ruin one getting together. (7)
2. A country of pure disorder. (4)
3. Royal house arranged in words. (7)
4. Student acted badly. (5)
5. Annotates new diets. (5)

Lesson 2 – Associations, Abbreviations and Numbers

Some terms automatically have associations with other words and occur quite regularly in cryptic crosswords and sometimes in regular crosswords, too. It is helpful to be familiar with these terms. Here is a partial list, but a good start:

Common Words and Abbreviations:

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Account or bill = AC | Afternoon = PM | America = US or USA |
| Army = HOST | Call = RING | Copper = CU |
| Doctor = DR, ME, MO | Dog = CUR | Edward = Ted |
| Eggs = OVA | Father, Pop = PA | Flyer = BIRD, CROW, etc. |
| Gold = OR | Hesitation = ER | Love, Circle, Ring = O |
| Member = LEG | Morning = AM | Mother, Mom = MA |
| Pound = L | Priest = ELI | Sailor = AB, TAR |
| Sash = OBI | Silver = AG | Ship, on board = SS |
| Softly, quietly = P | Study = DEN | Team, eleven = XI, II |
| That is = IE | Way – ST (street) | Work = OP |
| Worker = ANT | Writer = PEN | |

Roman Numerals:

| | | |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|
| One = I | Five = V | Six = VI |
| Ten = X | Fifty = L | Hundred = C |
| Five Hundred = D | Thousand = M | |

Note: "Large Number" could be C, D or M

Directions or Points: N, S, E, W, L (Left), R (Right)

Other languages:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| French "of" = DE, DA | German article = DER, DIE, DAS |
| French article = LE, LA, UN | "The" French = LE, LA, LES |

Foreign names: Scot = IAN; German = HANS

Practice: Associations, Abbreviations and Numbers (answers on page 11):

6. He wrote of French opposition. (5)
Hints: "He wrote" – he's an author; "of French" – "of" in French (de or da); opposition – another word for enemy?
7. Give an account of French writer. (8)
Hints: "Give an account" is the definition; "of" in French; another word for a writer (e.g. author, composer, etc.)
8. Color becoming a success between two points. (5)
Hints: "Color" is the definition; another word for "becoming a success," think of Broadway shows; two points – see points above.

Lesson 3 – Hidden Words or Containers

Remember the first two tips:

- Look at the number of letters in the answer and check if there is a word or phrase that has the same number of letters.
- Look for a signal as to the type of clue being used.

The answer is hidden within the phrase or word. Hidden words are some of the easier ones to solve. Here are some expressions that “clue you in” that it’s a hidden word or container: *in, found in, used in, partly, some*.

Example: Dog used in security work. (3)

Dissection:

Dog / **used in** (security work). (3)

Analysis:

“Dog” is the definition. “Used in” is a signal that the answer may be contained in the next part of the clue. The answer is CUR (see list of common words in Lesson 2.)

Here are some more examples:

Spanish painter found in tidal inlet. (4)

Spanish painter / **found in** (tidal inlet).

Answer: DALI

A canopy partly drawn in good weather. (6)

A canopy / **partly** (drawn in good weather).

Answer: AWNING

It’s uncommon in extra revivals. (4)

It’s uncommon / **in** (extra revivals).

Answer: RARE

Practice: Hidden Words or Containers (answers on page 11):

9. It’s carved from the wedding cake. (5)
10. Take food from the attacker. (3)
11. Troll who is in no great hurry. (4)
12. Sash is partly too big. (3)
13. A small sprite in Delft. (3)

Lesson 4 – Alterations and Combinations

Signals will “clue you in” that the word is backwards or altered in some way.

Back – appears backwards in the clue
Endless, cut off – take off the end of the word
Headless – take off the first letter of the word
Heartless – omit the centre of the word

Example: Showing anger in answering back. (3)
Dissection: Showing anger / **in** (answering) **back**.
“Showing anger” is the definition. The answer is hidden in “answ**er**ing.”
“Back” is the signal that it’s written backwards. The answer is IRE.

Example: Please cut off the appeals. (5)
Dissection: Please **cut off** / the appeals.
The word, “please,” is cut off. The definition is “the appeals.”
The answer is PLEAS, another word for appeals.

Example: Out-of-date sort of chair taken into account. (7)
Dissection: Out-of-date / **sort of** (chair) **taken into** account.
The definition is “out-of-date.”
“Chair” is an anagram – “sort of” is the signal.
“Taken into” means to put inside of. “Account” is the abbreviation AC.
Answer: The word “chair” is an anagram, taken into AC.
ARCHAIC is the answer.

Example: Moved fast when account got in the red. (5)
Dissection: Moved fast / when (account) **got in the** (red).
The definition is “moved fast” = RACED
Account (AC) is in the RED. Answer: R **AC** ED

Practice: Alterations and Combinations (answers on page 11):

14. He goes round a short way in a rush. (5)
15. Girl born to misrepresent the facts in return. (6)
16. Proceed to a port in India. (3)
17. He foots the bill and it hurts. (4)
18. Order cabs about one – it’s fundamental. (5)

Lesson 5 – Double Definitions

By now, you are probably getting an idea that cryptic clues are quite different from most straightforward crossword puzzle clues. They require much more imagination and “thinking outside the box.” That’s why they are so clever! And that’s why you have to be somewhat clever to solve them!

Another type of clue is the double definition. Compared to the previous clues, these are actually rather mundane. You have one definition, followed by another definition, but meaning the same word or phrase. Sometimes, the biggest difficulty with these clues is to figure out where one clue ends and the other starts.

Example: Not making a hit by being absent. (7)
Dissection: Not making a hit / by being absent.
Not making a hit = MISSING (the target).
By being absent = MISSING.
Both answers are the same.

Example: Lacking merit so not so expensive. (9)
Dissection: Lacking merit / so not so expensive.
Lacking merit = WORTHLESS.
Not so expensive = WORTHLESS.

Example: Not open for business, yet clinched the deal. (6)
Dissection: Not open for business, / yet clinched the deal.
Not open for business = CLOSED.
Clinched the deal = CLOSED.

Example: One blow after another makes a great show. (5,3)
Dissection: One blow after another / makes a great show.
One blow after another = SMASH and HIT (both are blows).
Makes a great show = SMASH HIT (combination of the two words).

Practice: Double Definitions (answers on page 11):

19. Happen to reach a valley. (4,2,4)
20. Study apostle in Scandinavia. (7)
21. Savings book. (7)

Lesson 6 – Homophones

Homophones are words that sound alike but are spelled differently.

Like many cryptic clues, there is usually a signal that will indicate it's a homophone. Here are some expressions that "clue you in" that it's a homophone: *soundly, we hear, say*.

Often, this type of clue also includes a double definition.

Example: Soundly criticize some light entertainment. (5)
Dissection: **Soundly** criticize / some light entertainment.
Criticize = REVIEW (this will sound like the answer).
Some light entertainment (definition) = REVUE.
The answer is REVUE. It sounds like REVIEW, to criticize.

Example: Calm and quiet, we hear, for a snippet. (5)
Dissection: Calm and quiet, **we hear**, / for a snippet.
Calm and quiet = PEACE. (This will sound like the answer.)
A snippet = PIECE. (This is the definition.)
The answer is PIECE which sounds the same as PEACE.

Example: Bearing gifts, we hear. (8)
Dissection: Bearing / gifts, **we hear**.
Bearing = PRESENCE. This is the definition.
Gifts = PRESENTS. This will sound like the answer.
It sounds like gifts; therefore, the answer is PRESENCE.

Practice: Homophones (answers on page 12)

22. Temporarily secures a levy, we hear. (5)
23. Last we hear of some European language. (7)
24. Assistance for one who's been duped, we hear. (7)

Lesson 7 – This and That

- (1) Some signals indicate that the answer is written the same each way:

Back and forth it goes. ROTOR
Two-directional navigational aid. RADAR
Vigour, it's the same, this way or that. PEP

- (2) Thinking "outside the box":

Example: A well-equipped health centre. (3)
Dissection: A well-equipped / health centre.
In this clue, "well" means a spring, e.g. a spa.
A health centre is a spa, also. Answer = SPA.

Example: Military band. (6)
You may be thinking of something musical. Think again!
Answer: STRIPE (a band used on military uniforms)

Example: An astronomical figure. (5)
You may be thinking of a large number. Think again!
Answer: ORION (a figure in astronomy)

Example: They work to make cuts. (7)
You may be thinking of economists. Think differently.
Answer: TAILORS (their job is to cut fabric)

- (3) Initials: Not used that often, but these clues will come up from time to time.

Example: Any stupid simpleton is, initially. (3)
The initials for "any stupid simpleton" = ASS.

Practice: This & That (answers on page 12)

25. Decree initial carp to be mixed with backward tide. (5)
26. I'm quiet but he's not. (3)
27. Mother, Jockhead and whale on a Mediterranean island. (7)
28. He has a stable job. (6)

Lesson 8 – Some Final Pointers and Tips

So, to solve Cryptic Clues, follow these steps:

- The number of letters in the answer will often give you the first clue to the answer, especially if it's an anagram.
- If you see some odd combination of words or letters or proper names, it's often an anagram or a hidden word.
- Watch for associations, abbreviations, numbers, and foreign words.

Here are some more examples to help you out:

Example: I will be briefly unwell. (3)

Dissection: I will be **briefly** / unwell.

"I will" briefly is ILL (I'll). Definition of "unwell" is ILL.

Example: Doctor needs transfer to a city of China. (7)

Dissection: Doctor needs **transfer** / to a city of China.

Doctor = DR. Transfer "needs" means an anagram of "needs".

City of China (you may be thinking about the country of China, but, in this clue, it means porcelain) = DRESDEN.

Example: Totals include fifty in the ghetto. (5)

Dissection: Totals **include** fifty / in the ghetto.

Totals = SUMS, including L (fifty) = SLUMS

The ghetto = SLUMS.

Example: Exhausted a writer in the street. (5)

Dissection: Exhausted / a writer **in the** street.

A writer = PEN. In the street = ST. (PEN inside ST = SPENT)

Exhausted = SPENT.

Example: Very eager to do a turn as a singer. (4)

Dissection: Very eager **to do a turn** / as a singer.

Very eager = AVID. To do a turn (AVID backwards) = DIVA.

A singer = DIVA.

Example: Report the gun is loaded. (8)

Dissection: Report / the gun is loaded.

Report = BULLETIN.

Thinking outside the box, "gun is loaded" = BULLET IN.

More Practice on Everything: (answers on page 12)

One other thing to remember: After you get one clue and write it into the puzzle, the intersecting letters should make it easier to solve the next clue. None of these practice exercises have that advantage.

29. Ten cents is pointlessly dull. (3)
30. Flush when attacked. (5)
31. I go into bat – it could be a worm. (4)
32. Around five, pull through the bend. (5)
33. Back compensation for the artist. (6)
34. A number involved in backwards tree-splitting exercise. (5)
35. Discourage Ted's return with hesitation. (5)
36. Put up with -- unusual to relate. (8)
37. Language of a quarter in Paris. (5)
38. The French way to show regret. (3)
39. Aidan takes her to heart. (3)
40. Country that is right to put Scotsman out. (4)

Answers and Explanations:

1. **Possibly** (ruin one) / getting together. (7) REUNION (anagram)
2. A country / of (pure) **disorder**. (4) PERU (anagram)
3. Royal house / **arranged** (in words). (7) WINDSOR (anagram)
4. Student / (acted) **badly**. (5) CADET (anagram)
5. Annotates / **new** (diets). (5) EDITS (anagram)
6. He wrote / of French opposition. (5) DAFOE
DA = "of" in French. FOE = opposition. DAFOE was a writer (he wrote).
7. Give an account / of French writer. (8) DESCRIBE
DE = "of" in French. SCRIBE = writer.
8. Color / becoming a success between two points. (5) WHITE
HIT is a success. W and E = two points (West and East).
WHITE is a colour.
9. It's carved / from **the wedding** cake. (5) HEWED
Hidden word means carved.
10. Take food / from **the attacker**. (3) EAT
Hidden word means to take food.
11. Troll / who is in **no great** hurry. (4) OGRE
Hidden word, OGRE, is another word for troll.
12. Sash / is partly **too big**. (3) OBI
Hidden word, OBI, a sash.
13. A small sprite / in **Delft**. (3) ELF
Container or hidden word, ELF, a small sprite.
14. He goes round a short way / in a rush. (5) HASTE
HE is around a short way = A ST (street shortened).
H AST E means "in a rush."
15. Girl / born to misrepresent the facts in return. (6) EILEEN
Girl could mean a girl's name. NEE (born) and LIE (means to misrepresent the facts) backwards (in return). EILEEN is a girl's name.
16. Proceed to a / port in India. (3) GOA
GOA is a port in India, GO (proceed) to A.
17. He foots the bill / and it hurts. (4) ACHE
(Probably a down clue in the puzzle.)
HE is below (foots) the bill AC (account). An ACHE hurts.
18. **Order** cabs about one / – it's fundamental. (5) BASIC
CABS is ordered (arranged) around one (I) to make BASIC.
19. Happen / to reach a valley. (4,2,4) COME TO PASS
Double definition. Both mean the same thing.
20. Study apostle / in Scandinavia. (7) DENMARK
A study is also a den. Mark is an apostle. DENMARK is in Scandinavia.
21. Savings / book. (7) RESERVE
Double definition. Both mean the same thing.

22. Temporarily secures / a levy, **we hear**. (5) TACKS
Double definition that sounds the same (homophone). TACKS/TAX
23. Last **we hear** / of some European language. (7) FINNISH
Double definition that sounds the same (homophone). FINISH/FINNISH
24. Assistance / for one who's been duped, **we hear**. (7) SUCCOUR
Double definition that sounds the same (homophone).
SUCCOUR/SUCKER
25. Decree / initial carp to be mixed with backward tide. (5) EDICT
C = initial of carp. TIDE is backward and mixed with the C.
A decree is an EDICT.
26. I'm quiet / but he's not. (3) IMP
IM plus P for quiet. An IMP is not quiet.
27. Mother, Jockhead and whale / on a Mediterranean island. (7) MAJORCA
MA = Mother. J = Jockhead (head of Jock). ORCA = whale.
28. He has a stable job. (6) OSTLER
Thinking outside of the box. Stable has two meanings. An OSTLER works
in a horse stable.
29. Ten cents is **pointlessly** / dull. (3) DIM
DIME = ten cents. Pointlessly (take away the point, E = East) = DIM.
DIM is dull.
30. Flush / when attacked. (5) GORED
Double definition. Flush = GO RED. Attacked = GORED.
31. I **go into** bat /- it could be a worm. (4) BAIT
The letter I goes into BAT = BAIT, which could be a worm.
32. **Around** five, pull through / the bend. (5) CURVE
Pull through = CURE. Around five = around V. A bend is a CURVE.
33. **Back** compensation / for the artist. (6) DRAWER
Compensation = REWARD, written backwards. Artist = DRAWER.
34. A number involved in backwards tree-**splitting** / exercise. (5) EXERT
TREE is written backwards, split with a number in it (number = X for
ten). To exercise is to EXERT.
35. Discourage / Ted's return with hesitation. (5) DETER
TED returning (back) is DET. Hesitation = ER. To discourage = DETER.
36. Put up with / -- **unusual** (to relate). (8) TOLERATE
TOLERATE is an anagram of "to relate" and means to put up with.
37. Language / of a quarter in Paris. (5) LATIN
Double definition.
38. The French way / to show regret. (3) RUE
Double definition. Way/street in French is RUE. Regret is RUE.
39. **Aida** takes her to heart. (3) IDA
Hidden word, IDA, in the heart (middle) of Aidan.
40. Country / that is right to put Scotsman out. (4) IRAN
Scotsman = IAN, put out (mixed up letters). R means right.