



Solving a cryptic crossword

By Arachne

1. Remember: the setter is trying to mislead you! And the word's function in its surface meaning may have nothing to do with its cryptic meaning.
2. With one type of exception, every clue has two ways in, mostly a DEFINITION and WORDPLAY. The definition will be at one end or the other, not in the middle.
3. Look at the LETTER COUNT which is often helpful.
4. Look for ANAGRAMS, usually the easiest way in to the puzzle. Anagram indicators are words which suggest disturbing, moving or rejigging the letters, or anything meaning drunk (see the list attached later).
5. Other types of clue include:
 - a. HIDDEN WORD
"Some job at hand? We'll soon see" (4, 3, 5) – by crossword setter Brian Greer. The see is a bishopic, and the solution is underlined.
 - b. DOUBLE DEFINITION
Two different ways of saying the same thing, for example:
"Takes knickers off / (and asks questions afterwards)" (8). Answer: debriefs
"Tours streets, / and wishes one hadn't" (4). Answer: rues
 - c. ENVELOPE
Putting one word inside another, for example:
"Artist's phone hacked by horrible woman (7). Answer is Chagall (putting 'hag' inside 'call', and the definition is the artist Marc Chagall).
 - d. SUBTRACTION
Remove a part of the word, for example 'detailed' means remove the last letter, for example:
He helps / virgin to remove clothes (4). Answer: (m)AIDE(n)

- e. REVERSAL
e.g. I back Brian (3) is the reversal of 1 = one, and the solution is Eno.
 - f. HOMOPHONE
Soundalikes, for example:
Foreign worker (reporter) in less than friendly way (6). Answer is Coolly (sounds like Coolie).
 - g. CHARADE
Like a game of charades, for example:
Came across hard / drug (4). Answer is MET H
 - h. CRYPTIC DEFINITION
For example:
Font selection? (9). Answer is Godparent
“Bar of soap?” (6, 6). Answer is Rover’s Return (by crossword setter Roger Squires.)
 - i. SPOONERISMS
For example:
Restrain Spooner’s drunken rage (8). Answer is handcuff (spoonerism of canned huff).
 - j. & LIT
Here the whole clue is also a definition, for example:
Pounding ingredients (11). Answer is tenderising (and anagram of ingredients).
6. ABBREVIATIONS. Queen = ER. Cricket, chess and roman numerals are often used.
 7. FOREIGN WORDS (within reason). For example ‘the French’ = Le, La, Les, and ‘Nancy’s way’ = Rue.
 8. LETTER INDICATORS can indicate the first, middle, last or alternate letters. For example:
 - a. Start to cry = C
 - b. Catt’s tail = T
 - c. Regularly looks = OK
 9. COCKNEY means drop the ‘h’

Some anagram indicators

These are just a few – there are hundreds!

Abroad

Addled

Badly

Barking

Brahms and Liszt

Broadcast

Contrived

Criminal

Devious

Foolishly

Gambolling

Horrible

Improper

Loosely

Manipulate

Naughty

Pants

Problematic

Ridiculous

Rioting

Surprising

Synthetic

Some common 1-letter abbreviations

Cricket, card and chess notations are used, as are roman numerals, measurements, musical keys and scientific abbreviations (including chemical element and electrical).

A	answer, area, blood group
B	British, black, billion(s), born, book, bowled, breadth, bachelor, blood group
C	about, circle, Conservative, century, chapter, cent(s), cocaine
D	date, daughter(s), Democrat, old penny, diameter, died
E	east(ern), ecstasy (drug), energy, English, European
F	fine, female, folio, following, forte, frequency, France, force
G	good, grand, acceleration
H	height, hard, henry, hot, hour(s), husband, heroin, horse
I	island, isle, 1
J	jack, judge
K	a thousand, kelvin
L	lake (loch, lough), learner (driver), Liberal, pound, length, line, large, left
M	motorway, maiden(s), male, mark(s), married, metre(s), mile(s), minute(s), medium
N	north(ern), name, neuter, new, noon, noun, note
O	nothing, blood group, old
P	parking, penny/pence, page, piano
Q	question
R	Republican, regina, river, rupee(s), right, railway
S	Saint, bend, south(ern), second(s), shilling(s), son(s), small
T	junction, temperature, time
U	university, bend, upper-class
V	velocity, verb, very, see (vide), volume, verse, versus
W	west(ern), wife, with, weight, width, wide
X	cross, vote, times or (multiplied) by, kiss, mark denoting error
Y	year, yen
Z	0

These hints and tips for solving a cryptic crossword were written by Arachne for [David Baddiel Tries to Understand Cryptic Crosswords](#)