

		C								
	C	R	O	S	S	W	O	R	D	S
		Y								T
		P								A
G	E	T	T	I	N	G				R
		I								T
		C								E
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## **A GUIDE TO READING AND SOLVING CRYPTIC CLUES**

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### **1 - Introduction**

Some crosswords are tests of your 'general knowledge'. Some are 'concise' type where you find new words that mean the same as the given clue.

What we will be looking at here, however, are 'cryptic' type crosswords, where you are given an assortment of words and ideas to play around with to get your solution.

**With these, typically only part of the clue will define the answer you are looking for, the rest gives building blocks and hints on how to tease out an answer.**

The word 'Cryptic' means hidden ...

For anyone who likes a word puzzle, a single cryptic crossword will give you a whole assortment of them. Newspapers have been featuring crosswords for over 100 years. All word puzzles are reputed to be good for deferring dementia and increasing vocabulary; cryptic versions are reckoned to improve lateral thinking and creativity too. But mostly it is just for the fun of the challenge.

There are a whole variety of different clue types ...

Our beginners sessions are an introduction to some of the typical of wordplays and tricks that a cryptic crossword setter might use; hints on what to look out for, and examples with solutions – as well as samples to try for yourself.

Absolutely no prior knowledge required – but a love of words does help. But even if you already know some of the techniques, always good to fill gaps in your knowledge, and build good foundations to progress faster.

**New Group starting 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025.**

## Here is a first example of a cryptic crossword clue

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### Fuel company with a shortfall finally (4)

Cryptic clues, on the surface, look like a single, although often quite complicated, sentence. This is followed by a number to indicate how many letters long the required answer is, and also whether its a single word or multi-word phrase.

E.g. (10), (4,3,4), (6-6) indicate a 10 letter word, a three word phrase, or hyphenated answers respectively. The clue above needs a 4 letter single word solution.

The first thing to understand is that only part of a cryptic clue is the 'definition' of what the answer will be. The rest are 'ingredients' to mess around with to uncover your solution; words to rearrange or translate or somehow assemble into a new combination. The definition will typically be at the start or the end of the clue.

If you simply read the clue as a complete sentence, then in 99% of cases it will make no sense whatsoever, and not help in the slightest at getting an answer. This takes some getting used to if you have done only general knowledge or concise crosswords previously!! But once you get used to the idea, it can be helpful because really you've got two clues in one, both leading to the same answer.

In this example, the definition *could* be the first part - fuel or fuel company maybe - or could be the last bit - finally or shortfall finally. This is what you need to pick out. The rest is building blocks to get to a word or phrase that fits this definition.

In this case, what you have is a solution built up of different elements, taking these out from the ingredients and then chaining them together. The word **'with'** is a bit of hint that this will be the case.

**CO** is a common abbreviation for Company

With **A** - literally with the letter A tagged onto this, and

Shortfall finally to give you **L** - indicating to use the final letter of the word shortfall.

**CO + A + L** gives you the word Coal, which is a type of fuel, so fuel is the definition.

You've found a word that both fits the definition AND relates to the rest of the clue, so ...

Clue Solved ✓ .

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## Different Clue Types

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This example above however is just one format of cryptic clue - referred to as a 'chain' clue or a 'charades' clue - (like in a game of charades if you can't act out the whole word you might split it into separate syllables and mime each of them in turn). But this is just one of many possibilities.

Other formats include:-

- Hidden words, where the answer is literally embedded in the clue
- Anagrams, where you rearrange the letters of one or more ingredient words
- Sandwich combinations, where ingredients lead to one word within another
- Double definitions, where two parts of the clue lead to the same solution
- Single clues - where you get just a definition, but often a very obscure one!
- Homophones where you need a word that sounds like part of the clue
- Manipulations like reversing a word, or dropping or swapping letters.

If you are new to cryptic crosswords, the answers almost certainly will NOT jump out at you straight away - it is a skill that does need some practice. Our beginners sessions will take a deeper dive into each of the different clue types in turn, to get more familiar and comfortable with each in turn - before moving on to looking at doing a crossword puzzle as a whole.

**Be aware though, that while you play around with the words, the cross-word setter tries to play around with your brain!**

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The way that cryptic clues are written will typically try to mislead you and send you off on the wrong tangent and disguise the right solution. It is you versus the crossword setter to work out which words are there as a definition of what the answer means, and then why the other words are being provided too.

It's a bit like learning a foreign language, that you need know how a sentence is put together before you know which are the verbs, nouns, adjectives etc. Expect to take a bit of time just to tune in to the clue writing formats, and don't expect to instantly be able to polish off a full crossword.

Note too that some puzzles are harder than others - look out for 'quick cryptic' crosswords, which typically have smaller grids and shorter answers, and a higher proportion of clues where the answer is within the words of the clues.

It's not a pastime you can easily just pick up yourself. But once you get started there are plenty of sources to get puzzles from, in newspapers and online. You need to start with puzzles of the right level to build up your skills, but can quickly move on to more and more challenging versions.

Do them alone, to tackle that day's crossword over a pot of tea in the morning, or get together with fellow solvers to brainstorm and combine efforts.