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	C	R	O	S	S	W	O	R	D	S
		Y								T
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A GUIDE TO READING AND SOLVING CRYPTIC CLUES

3 – The Classic Crossword Clue – the ‘Charade’

This is the commonest of cryptic clue formats AND has the most variety in its ways of working. You get to the solution by finding several different sub-sections that can be combined together. Often referred to as ‘charade’ clues - as in the party game where if you can’t act out the whole word, you can get your team to the required answer by working syllable by syllable, for them to then string together.

Earlier we saw an example of this, getting the word COAL from three successive parts of the ingredient phrase ‘*company with a shortfall finally*’. ‘Co’ as an abbreviation for *company*, with ‘a’, then finally *shortfall finally* to add the letter ‘l’ being the final letter in shortfall. A charade of three different elements to make up just a four-letter solution!

Combining the component parts could be either putting them together one after the other (a chain) or inserting one part inside another (an insertion or sandwich). Typically there are only very subtle (if any!) indicator words to make it clear it’s a charade clue, or how you should build the sub-parts together. Often you recognise them only by them NOT obviously being any other type of clue!

It's also a bit harder to spot what is the definition - however one thing unchanged is that **the definition will be either at the start or end of the clue.**

Sub- parts can be a) **individual characters or character combinations** (like the a and l above); b) **recognised abbreviations**; c) **alternative words - aka synonyms** - meaning the same as a clue word or phrase but usually shorter (for example ‘free’ instead of ‘no charge made’); or d) **examples of a clue word** (for example cat for ‘animal’). More about each of these below. But first some more examples of charade clues.

- Ill in bed and being invoiced (6) B-ILL-ED
no manipulation or substitution, just insert ill into bed to get a new word
- Choose alien character to encourage workers to strike (6) PICK-ET
choose -> pick (synonym) + alien character -> ET (example)
- Calm gym expert (5) PE-ACE
gym -> pe followed by expert -> ace (synonyms)
- Manage to smuggle uranium in car (5) CO-U-PE
manage -> cope, u as chemical symbol for uranium inserted into this

(Definitions are ‘being invoiced’, ‘encourage workers to strike’, ‘calm’, and ‘car’.)

It really does take some time to get familiar with the wide variety of tricks that setters use within charade clues. So initially, just being able to see how a solution was arrived at, you are already getting more familiar with what to expect.

A fairly basic combination is either a synonym or an example word plus a few added letters from an abbreviation or extract.

Synonyms and **Examples** are THE major test of your vocabulary when it comes to cryptic crosswords. How many alternative words can you come up with to mean happiness – glee, joy, cheer, bliss, content...? (since it is usually short words you're looking for). How many 3 letter animals or names of UK rivers?

Abbreviations are a whole learning curve of their own – to be returned to in a later session, and to keep learning for years!! Examples here will try to stick to fairly common abbreviations, e.g. sizes (S,M,L), abbreviated job titles, etc.

Odd characters can be clued really fiendishly. Some are a throwback to sequence clues, like 'shortfall finally'. But do expect all sorts of other variants too: Outskirts of Torquay (TY), heart of glass (A), content of book (OO), empty pail (PL), West Ham (H) – a real opportunity for setters to be creative! Watch out too for number 1 for letter 'l', and zero and o or 'ring', being treated interchangeably.

Here's some examples of this format of charade clue.

Ex 3:1 – Charades: synonym or example, plus extra letter(s)¹

Definition underlined for first few.

- Small enough to try (6)
- VAT on a musical instrument (4)
- Difficult to hide ring in collection (5)
- Droop when encountering a lengthy account (4)
- Thaw encountered around heart of Himalayas (4)
- Detective Sergeant drinking beer in the Valleys (5)

This type of clue probably will, at first, seem to be more challenging. Especially when the only indicator words here tend to be where there is something to imply 'in' when it's an insertion rather than a chain. Even this, too, however might be disguised as 'eaten by' or 'hiding' or 'around' or similar hints for one thing inside another.

¹ **Exercise 3:1**

- | | |
|--|---------|
| ● <u>S</u> mall enough [ample] <u>to try</u> (6) | S-AMPLE |
| ● VAT [tub] on <u>a</u> <u>musical instrument</u> (4) | TUB-A |
| ● Difficult [hard] <i>to hide</i> ring [o] in <u>collection</u> (5) | H-O-ARD |
| ● Droop [sag] when encountering <u>a</u> <u>lengthy account</u> (4) | SAG-A |
| ● <u>Thaw</u> encountered [met] <i>around (heart of)</i> Himalayas (4) | ME-L-T |
| ● <u>D</u> etective <u>S</u> ergeant <i>drinking</i> beer [ale]in <u>the Valleys</u> (5) | D-ALE-S |

With synonyms and examples you can have a LOT of different options to consider - some of them can need a bit of quite lateral thinking (e.g. NAG for horse, or TUB for VAT). With practice, however, you DO quickly get more able to think up synonyms and become better aware that some words have multiple meanings. Which is exactly why learning to do crosswords is such good mental exercise.

Lots of other combo's too. Two synonyms combined, examples rather than synonyms, more than 2 components to make up the word, more subtle indicators for how to combine the different elements, etc. Plus you might get e.g. an anagram which gives you that element, but not the whole solution.

Exercise 3:2 Some more examples to try²

- A European type to rush around part of UK (6)
- Characters mixed up: a horse and sheep (7)
- Compulsion to set alight extremely pretty country (9)
- Colourful picture of attempt to follow recordings? (8)
- Burns, say, not charged, and without penalty (4,4)
- Junior tearaway, ultimately having no urge to be sorted (7)

You definitely have to work that bit harder, and work through a lot more possibilities to solve these clues. But remember that there are always TWO different routes to get the solution – a) the definition and b) the ingredients. You can approach from either end.

Plus for trying to find a word that fits your (possible) definition, you might well get starter letters from where this clue overlaps with others, so then you're looking for a word to fit. This really helps!

However once you can see that your word BOTH fits the definition AND can be derived from the ingredients, you can then be 100% satisfied that it is correct. This format of clue can therefore be really satisfying when the answer fully clicks!

² Exercise 3:2

- | | |
|---|------------|
| • <u>A European type</u> to rush [dash] <i>around</i> part of UK [N.Ireland] (6) | DA-NI-SH |
| • <u>Characters mixed up:</u> a horse [nag] and sheep [ram] (7) | A-NAG-RAM |
| • <u>Compulsion to set alight</u> <i>extremely</i> p retty country [Romania] (9) | PY-ROMANIA |
| • <u>Colourful picture</u> of attempt [try] <i>to follow</i> recordings [tapes]? (8) | TAPES-TRY |
| • Burns, say, [scot] not charged [free], and <u>without penalty</u> (4,4) | SCOT FREE |
| • <u>Junior</u> tearaway, <i>ultimately</i> having /no urge/ <i>to be sorted</i> (7) | Y OUNGER |

One extra clue type for today - REVERSALS

Although charades is a big topic, I'm going to add one further clue type here. One that can be used on its own, however is also very commonly used as part of a charade. This is the reversal – to turn the ingredient word, or a synonym of it, back to front.

On its own it is unusual to see, but here is one full reversal clue example

- Enthusiastic prima donna making a come-back (4)

More examples as used in charade clues

- Small drink brought up; time for larger one? (4)
- Noisy couple turning left beforehand (3)
- America backed dodgy gaffer for voting rights (8)⁴

The first 3 of these are explained (parsed) below as illustrations, the last you can try yourself (solution at foot of page).

- Enthusiastic prima donna [DIVA] *making a come-back* [AVID] (4) AVID
- Small drink [NIP] *brought up* [PIN] + time [T] for larger one? PINT
- Noisy couple [DUO] turning [OUD] left [L] beforehand (3) LOUD

However further exercises on reversals can wait for a future session!

General Advice

If rule 1 is that the definition is at start or end of clue, rule 2 is that **every meaningful word in the clue is there for a reason**. The setter is allowed to add minor link words like 'and' or 'of' to make a clue read like a sentence, but nothing beyond that. They can also mess around with commas and capitalisation etc. for readability and misdirection. There's a few examples of this in the clues set this week?

However any significant words must be there as part of the '**definition**', **OR** added to be '**indicators**' of the clue type, **OR** are the '**ingredients**' – i.e. words to be used, after any replacing, shortening, reordering, or whatever other manipulations are asked for, to generate the solution.

The setter's leeway to add minor words to make the clue read better is to support there being what is known as a '**surface reading**' of the clue; where it *sort of* makes a sentence, words linked so that they make at least limited sense. The solver however should try to avoid this surface reading of the whole thing – as it tends to throw you off on tangents. Instead read word by word, thinking what each word is doing. Though be warned that your brain will resist you doing this!

⁴ America [US] *backed* [SU] *dodgy* (gaffer) for voting rights (8) SUFFRAGE
(dodgy as an anagram indicator with gaffer as the word to scramble)

Further Practice

Here's another Guardian Quick Cryptic that will give more practice at these types of clues: -

<https://www.theguardian.com/crosswords/quick-cryptic/7>

And an explanation of the word plays required to give correct solutions

<https://www.fifteensquared.net/2024/05/18/guardian-quick-cryptic-7-by-carpethian/>

Charades are some of the most challenging clues, especially when you need to find a synonym for a clue word or phrase. Having a good vocabulary obviously helps, but even then its hard to think of every other possible way to say the same thing!

So CHEAT! If you've already worked out it's a charade clue, and what words you need synonyms for, you've done more than half the work already. And if you get a list of synonyms then you still have to pick out the one that fits the rest of the clue. So if you don't do 100% of the solving, that's fine.... Use google or a synonym app.

e.g. you want another word for e.g. enough, just go to Google or whatever other search engine you use, and type 'synonym enough' that should give you ample, sufficient, plenty, abundant, adequate... alternatives to use.

Lots of apps available for phones. My preferred one is 'Word Hippo'.