

A brief guide to the construction of cryptic crossword clues

By Michael Callaghan

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1 Introduction

- Every Monday, Big Dave publishes a cryptic crossword created by rookie setters. These setters have not been previously published and their crosswords are presented “as is” without any editorial checking. Solvers see the good, the bad and the ugly. To be fair, the majority of the crosswords are well constructed but, as would be expected, there are some mistakes in the cluing and areas where there are a range of opinions about what is and is not acceptable.
- After a few weeks of reviewing the crosswords and providing feedback in the blog, the idea came to me of setting out more formally some of the basic rules about setting cryptic crossword clues. This was prompted by a question by one of the bloggers asking if the setter abided by the “Telegraph Rules”. After a few of these articles, it was suggested that these should be put together into one document. For better or for worse, this is the result.
- All setters, new and old, are rookies, constantly learning. I count myself in that camp. I have been setting crosswords for many years as Prolixic on Big Dave’s Blog, under my own name in the Church Times and, for the past five years, as Kairos in the Independent. This is scant qualification for commenting on other setter’s crosswords but, hopefully, these notes will prove useful to both setters and solvers. Any errors and omissions are of my own making and corrections and comments will be gratefully received.

2 Rules

2.1 Rules? What rules?

- One blogger commenting on a rookie crossword asked whether the setter abided by the “Telegraph Rules”. The simple answer is that as the rookie setters are not Telegraph setters, we would not expect them to abide by “Telegraph Rules”. As any rules that Chris Lancaster, the current crossword editor for the Daily and Sunday Telegraph, has for setters are known only to him and the setters, “Telegraph Rules” is a vague concept in any event. However, the question is deserving of a better reply than that.

2.2 House style rules

- There are two separate categories of rules that you can consider. The first is “house style” rules. These are rules that the editor of a crossword will ensure that setters follow for crosswords that they set for the paper.
- Different papers will have different “house styles”. For example, the Times has a policy of not having living people (other than the Queen) as the answer to a clue and has a narrow range of permitted abbreviations that can be used in clues. The editor of the Independent does not like “stuttering clues” of the form d-dog... and will not allow complex subtractive anagrams as clues in the general crossword, etc.
- Different papers will have different house styles. These may cover other issues such as the number of anagram type clues and how many hidden word answers there can be. Although I believe that the Telegraph used to have a detailed set of “house-style” rules, I don’t think that there is anything as formal in place as there used to be.

2.3 Rules for constructing the clue

- The second category of rules is much more complex and open to interpretation/debate/dispute/open warfare between setters, solvers and editors. This category is the rules relating to how a cryptic clue should be constructed.
- The starting point (that everyone agrees on – I hope) is that a cryptic clue must give the solver a fair chance of solving the clue. The clue can mislead but it must do so in a fair way. The oft repeated aphorism for the setter is “You need not say what you mean but you must mean exactly what you say”.
- Fairness extends to using only words and abbreviations that are recognised in major dictionaries. Chambers is the main one used by setters but the Oxford English Dictionary and Collins are also used. Correspondingly, if a word is an unusual one, then the wordplay will usually be simpler so that the solver has a better chance of discovering the answer from the wordplay and be able to check that they have reached the right answer.
- Fairness also requires that if you use synonyms, they are used in such a way that the two words could be exchanged in a sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence and if you are using one word as a definition by example, then this is indicated.

- After this, the waters start to get muddier. The purist approach is that the clue must be capable of being broken down into a grammatically correct series of instructions to the solver that will lead them to the solution. This purist approach is termed “Ximenean” after Ximenes, the pseudonym for Derrick Somerset Macnutt, who was one of the first people to lay down standards for creating good crosswords. Ximenean cluing requires things such as:
 - Appropriate indicators for all clue types;
 - No indirect anagrams;
 - No misleading connectors or punctuation; and
 - An unambiguous, unique answer to every clue.
- Other setters will take a more “Libertarian” approach. The biggest different between Ximenean and Libertarian approaches comes when considering whether or not an indicator is appropriate for a clue type. Perhaps some examples will illustrate this:
 - **Initial letter indicators:** If you want to indicate that the solver needs to take the first letter of a word, you could say “head of maths”. Ximeneans would be happy with this. A more libertarian approach would be to use “Maidenhead”. Grammatically, the Ximenean would say that this does not tell you to take the first letter of maiden but the Libertarian would say that it is clear and therefore fair. Ximeneans will tend not use “lead or leading” as an initial word indicator as grammatically this does not tell you to take the first letter;
 - **Anagram indicators:** Is “Organisation” a valid anagram indicator? The Ximenean would say that “Organisation” is a noun and therefore is incapable of indicating an anagram which requires some sense of action – though they might allow “Organisation of X”. The Libertarian would allow organisation as an anagram indicator.
 - **Lift and separate clues:** A Ximenean would choke on his or her cornflakes if presented with a clue that contained the word “indeed” as an indicator that they would need to put another word inside the word “deed”. A recent example of this that generated a lot of debate was a crossword in the Guardian where part of the clue was “hasten round” as an instruction to the solver to put “I O” around

another word “has ten (10) around”. Note that “lift and separate” is used in two different contexts. The first, as here, is where one word has to be divided into two sections. The other, which is not as contentious, is where the setter uses two words that the solver will automatically read as a single phrase which has to be mentally split to give the answer. For example, “Wacky baccy free in coffee shop (9)” requires you to split Wacky (anagram indicator) / baccy free (letters to be rearranged) to give cybercafé (coffee shop).

- These are a few examples. The two forms of cluing are not distinct and you should think of this more as a wide spectrum where different setters will be found at different points on the spectrum.
- Of course, different crossword editors will have different views and so the difference between Ximenean and Libertarian cluing (and points in between) will form part of the “house style” of individual papers. The Times, Telegraph back page crossword and Independent crossword will usually be more Ximenean; the Financial Times sits somewhere in the middle (depending on the setter) whilst the Guardian is firmly in the Libertarian camp – though Ximenean setters do set crosswords for the Guardian.
- Setters providing crosswords for the Not The Saturday Prize Puzzle, Monthly Prize Puzzles and Rookie Corner on Big Dave’s site are not expected to follow a set house style or adopt formal Ximenean or Libertarian rules. For example, I will tend to be more (though not strictly) Ximenean when setting crossword for Big Dave whilst Radler may be more Libertarian. Each setter will need to find their own style of cluing that they are comfortable with.
- When reviewing the Rookie Corner crosswords, I try to indicate where something is unfair and, if something falls within the spectrum of Ximenean / Libertarian cluing try to indicate that a particular clue may not find favour with some editors.
- With all thumbnail sketches, I have probably insulted everyone and grossly misrepresented different views – for which apologies!

3 The anatomy of a clue

3.1 Introduction

- After looking briefly at the “rules” of cryptic clues, we will look in a little more detail at the anatomy of a clue. Most clues (but not all) fall into three categories that we need to consider.

3.2 Cryptic definitions

- The whole clue provides a cryptic, sometimes slightly off the wall, definition of a word. for example:
 - What to do when you get the bit between your teeth (5) – FLOSS.

3.3 Double definitions

- A double definition clue contains two definitions of the same word. The two definitions should have different meanings for a double definition clue to work effectively.
 - Split stick (6) – CLEAVE.
- Double definition clues come in two main forms:
 - Definition 1 Definition 2; and
 - Definition 1 *link word* Definition 2.
- I will look at link words below.
- Double definition clues may give one straight definition and another cryptic definition.

3.4 Wordplay and definition clues

- Wordplay and definition clues will form the majority of the clues in a crossword. They come in various forms:
 - Wordplay Definition
 - Wordplay *link word* Definition
 - Definition wordplay
 - Definition *link word* wordplay

- The definition gives the word that the solver has to find and the wordplay contains the elements that are put together to make the definition.
- It is usual for the definition word or phrase to appear at the beginning or the end of the clue but very occasionally, a setter will break this rule but it is rare to see this done. The most you are likely to find is a clue of the form:
 - In definition [*linkword*] wordplay;
 - Wordplay [*linkword*] definition – quite the reverse, where the “quite the reverse” is an instruction to reverse the wordplay elements to find the definition.

3.5 Wordplay

- I have blithely referred to wordplay. The technical term is the “subsidiary indication” as you are playing with letters as well as complete words. However, “wordplay” is used so often, that I will use the well known expression.
- The wordplay is where you will find your anagrams, charades (add two words / letters together), container and contents clues (put one word or letter inside another), reversals, homophones and several others. I will look in more detail at some of these devices below.

3.6 Definitions

- With the exception of a cryptic definition, where the whole clue provides an elliptical definition of the answer, a clue will have a definition or two definitions for a double definition type clue. There are a few pointers to watch when providing the definition of the clue.

3.6.1 Is the definition a valid synonym for the solution?

- As rule of thumb, you should be able to use the definition in a sentence in place of the solution without changing the meaning of the sentence. One thing I have learned from an early and helpful piece of advice from a crossword editor is not to rely too heavily on thesauri.
- Quite often a thesaurus will give you very loose synonyms for a word. Just because a word is listed in the thesaurus alongside the solution, does not mean it is a good synonym. Whilst Chambers dictionary is very good, I have found in practice that its

thesaurus is not always a reliable guide to suitable synonyms. Even with common words, before I define a word, I will always look it up in the dictionary first to ensure that I am not going astray when providing a definition for it.

- The other thing to watch with synonyms is to ensure that you are using direct synonyms. Word A may mean Word B and Word B may mean Word C but that does not necessarily mean that Word A is a synonym for Word C. A classic example of this is seen in clues that indicate that one word is placed around another. Sometimes the setter will use "without" as a containment indicator. Without can mean outside (as in the hymn, "There is a green hill far away, without a city wall". Outside can also mean around. The assumption is therefore that without can mean around. This is not the case. In the hymn, the green hill does not go around the city wall!

3.6.2 Does the definition match the part of speech of the solution?

- The definition should match the part of speech of the solution. For example, a definition that is a noun cannot be used to provide a solution for an adjective or vice versa. For example, you could not use "a bright person" (a noun) to clue "clever" (an adjective) even if in a sentence you could use "He is a bright person / clever" synonymously.
- Of course, where a word is capable of being read in more than one way, it is perfectly legitimate to mislead the solver. For example:
 - Australian funds prestigious award (5) gives OSCAR.
 - The surface reading suggests that "funds" is a verb when cryptically it is a noun (Oscar is an Australian slang word for money).

3.6.3 Are you using a definition by example?

- If you are using the definition in the clue as an example of the solution, then this should usually be indicated. For example, if you give "film-noir" as the definition for the solution "genre", it should be indicated that film-noir is an example of the solution.
- Definitions by example can be indicated simply by a question mark or by a word or expression such as "perhaps", "maybe", "for one", "for example" or "could be".
- If I am using a question mark as a definition by example indicator, I will try to ensure that it appears immediately after the word or phrase that gives the definition by example otherwise, I don't think that it makes it sufficiently clear that a definition by example is

being used. For example, "Film-noir – darker negative over exposed? (5)" would not work given the distance between film-noir and the question mark!

- Like all rules, the definition by example rule is sometimes broken even in national daily cryptic crosswords and, unlike grammatical construction rules, this may be justified. For example, you could possibly use "Axminster" to clue carpet as Axminster is so closely related to carpets that it would be reasonable to expect the solver to make the link between the two.

3.6.4 Rules are meant to be broken

- Rules are meant to be broken (or at least subject to honourable exceptions). So it is when providing a definition. Although the definition should usually match the part of speech of the solution, an exception is made in respect of "verbal phrases".
- It is possible to define a noun by a verbal phrase that describes the noun. The example often given is "wags its tail and is man's best friend" as a definition of a dog (not that this would provide a particularly suitable definition in a crossword). However, at times this can be used effectively. A prime example of this is the clue "Transporting coal, and running about area (5,5,5)" where the verbal phrase is a definition of the answer, a noun.

3.6.5 What is sauce for the goose...

- What is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander. Therefore, the same rules will apply to synonyms that form part of the wordplay as well as synonyms that form the definition.

3.7 Link words

- A link word is a word that links the two halves of a clue (two definitions or definition and wordplay) together. Often they can signpost which word or phrase in the clue is the definition and which part is the wordplay.
- Broadly, the link word should fulfil one of the following functions:
 - Wordplay leads to / results in Definition; or
 - Definition comes from / is found in Wordplay.

- If you cannot substitute (in some form) the above construction with your link word, it may be that you are using it in the wrong context.
- Often little attention is given to link words, but it is important that they are used correctly. One of the comments I often make when reviewing puzzles in the Rookie Corner is that a link word does not work. The reason for this is that some link words do not work in a two-way direction.
- For example “Wordplay for definition” works correctly but “Definition for Wordplay” does not. The link word here is pointing the solver to the definition. Similarly you can have “Definition from wordplay” but not “Wordplay from Definition”.
- One link word that causes problems is “of”. Traditionally, the view has been that “Definition of Wordplay” is fine but that “Wordplay of Definition” is not. However, you will often see the latter form of construction. Similarly “Definition [given] by Wordplay” works but “Wordplay [given] by Definition” does not.
- “In” is a curious link word. “Wordplay in Definition” is encountered so often that it is accepted as a canonical construction but strictly, “Wordplay in Definition” impliedly tells the solver that the wordplay “is found” in the definition, which is somewhat back to front. “Definition in Wordplay” would pass the required test. However, the “wordplay in definition” is so well entrenched that it is unlikely to change!
- Sometimes, the link word is “is” or “has” – wordplay is/has definition or wordplay. This is particularly useful as the “is” or “has” can then be disguised as an “s” in the clue. For example:
 - Small child’s slide (4) – S(small) + KID (child) has “slide” as the answer.

3.8 Surface readings

- One of the terms often referred to in reviews is the “surface reading” of the clue. This is simply a reference to how the clue reads as a sentence in its own right ignoring any wordplay and definition elements in the clue. The smoother the surface reading, and the less like a crossword clue it reads, the better.
- One of the key things is to ensure that the clue makes sense as a sentence in its own right. A Rookie Corner crossword had this as a clue:

- Country cousin born to replace head of vegetable (7)
- As a series of instructions to create the answer, this works but as sentence in its own right, the surface reading does not make much sense.
- Compare that with:
 - Sneak into workers' lectures (7)
 - The surface reading tells a story in its own right regardless of the cryptic clue it contains.
- From the point of view of the setter, the smoother the surface reading, the more difficult it becomes to spot where the break between the wordplay and the definition comes. One of the better setters at disguising those breaks is Anax (Elkamere in the Toughie).
- Whilst the surface reading of the clue is important, it is not king! A common mistake amongst new setters is to sacrifice the precision of the cryptic reading of the clue to make the surface reading smoother. If you are setting a clue and are tempted to "bend" the cryptic rules to make the surface smoother, you probably need to think again about what you are doing. Solvers will be more forgiving of the surface reading of the clue than liberties taken with the wordplay!

3.9 Clue length

- There are no formal rules about the length of a clue. Each setter will have their own style. Beam (a Daily Telegraph Toughie and back page crossword setter) will very rarely have a clue that is more than 8 words long. Shamus, another Daily Telegraph Toughie and back page crossword setter creates shorter clues for his back page crosswords and lengthier clues for his Toughie crosswords.

3.10 Punctuation

- The convention is that you do not include a full stop at the end of a clue.
- Generally solvers should ignore punctuation in the clue but there are honourable exceptions where certain punctuation marks have specific meanings.
- A question mark (?) usually indicates that there is a definition by example, that there is something slightly unusual about the clue or that there is a cryptic definition.

- Exclamation marks (!) should be used sparingly. There can be a temptation to scatter them throughout the clues. Ximenes guidance is apposite here:

"As to exclamation marks, I am grateful to a solver who once wrote (none too politely) saying, in so many words, that I sprinkled my clues with them with no other purpose than that of crying out "Aren't I clever – isn't that a good one? ". I was irritated, as one is apt to be, at first; but on further thought I had to admit that he had got something. Now I try to use much more restraint in this matter and to use them only when I really am exclaiming or for a technical purpose, to call the solver's attention to the fact that I'm doing something particularly outrageous, perhaps by deliberately misunderstanding the meaning of a word."

- The apostrophe (') can be used in a number of ways:
 - When used with an 's or s', it can either indicate that you add an S to the relevant part of the wordplay. "Bachelor's" may mean take the abbreviation for Bachelor and add an S to give BS. However, it can also indicate a semi-hidden connection or link word as being shorthand for "has" or "is". Bachelor's underhand punch (4) may indicate B (Bachelor) has LOW (underhand) to give BLOW or The French bachelor's workplace may give LA (The in French) B is LAB (workplace).
 - When used at the beginning of a word, it can indicate that the corresponding letter is dropped in the solution. For example Confirm or 'esitate (4) gives AVER from [H]AVER or [H]esitate.
- The hyphen can usually be ignored but sometime it can be used to alter the sense of a clue. This example is from Crossword Unclued (<http://www.crosswordunclued.com/>) a mine of useful articles on the construction of crosswords and clues: Shanghai duck-eating LIZARD (6) for DRAGOON. Without the "-", the clue would say O eating DRAGON which would not make sense. Adding the hyphen makes sense of the clue. The dragon is one eating the duck.
- Ellipses at the end of one clue and the beginning of another clue can usually be ignored. Setters often use them to run two clues together as a coherent sentence where it is not possible fit the required wordplay together in two independent clues. In rare cases, where there is a strong link between the two answers, the answer to one clue might be indicated as a definition to the second by the use of ellipses.

- Occasionally, punctuation can be used as part of the wordplay “: for colon”, “,” for comma” or as the definition where “!” is the definition for the answer “EXCLAMATION MARK”.

3.11 Capitalisation

- When writing a clue, the setter may capitalise a word to mislead. For example, mark (as in a stain) may be included as “Mark” as a proper name in the clue.
- The reverse is not thought to be acceptable. Setters should not put a proper noun (that would normally have an initial capital) into lower case to mislead. The solution here is to try and write the clue with the relevant word at the beginning so that it naturally has a capital as the beginning of the sentence.

4 Wordplay

4.1 Introduction

- A wordplay and definition clue should give an indicator of how the clue is constructed. The key types of wordplay that you will find in cryptic crosswords are:
 - **Abbreviations** – a word is replaced by its abbreviation, for example small becomes S;
 - **Anagrams** – a series of letters are rearranged to give the answer;
 - **Charades or word sums** – two words are added together to give the solution, for example PART + RIDGE;
 - **Container and contents** – one word is put inside another, for example A{GIN}G where age is put inside the abbreviation for silver. The can be clued either as insert word A inside word B or put word A around word B;
 - **Deletions** – A letter is deleted from a word to give the answer or part of the answer. Deletions may tell you to remove the first letter, the middle letter or letters or the last letter from a word. Instructions may also be give to remove a specific letter, for example timeless to delete the letter T, or a specific word – ageless to remove AGE, etc;
 - **Hidden words** – The solution is hidden inside the words of the clue – for example CUBAN GLEEFULLY hides the word bangle;

- **Homophones** – One word sounds like another – for example maize sounds like maze;
 - **Palindromes** – word that reads the same which ever way it is read, for example ROTOR;
 - **Reversals** – One word is reversed to give another – for example STUN becomes NUTS;
 - **Select letters** – The reverse of a delete letter clue where you have to select the first, middle, last, outer or alternate letters of a word to give the answer or part of the answer – for example head of maths would give you the letter M;
 - **Switch letters** – Letters in the clue are switched either in their order – first letter to last, swap the middle letters around or one letter replaces another, etc;
 - **Spoonerisms** – The first letters or syllables of two words are exchanged – for example Down Train could become Town Drain.
- The art of the setter is skilfully to disguise the wordplay indicators and the skill of the solver is to spot the tricks that the setter uses. It is a battle that the setter should expect to lose gracefully!
 - This guide is not the place to provide lists of the standard wordplay indicators that may be used. Setters can find such lists in places such as Chambers Dictionary where the publishers include a “Word Lovers Miscellany” that includes common wordplay indicators. Some on-line resources such as Cryptipedia (<http://cryptics.wikia.com/wiki/Cryptipedia>) can provide limited lists.

4.2 Grammatical construction

- A clue has a surface reading that must make grammatical sense. However, the clue also has a set of cryptic instructions that tell the solver how to arrive at the solution. The cryptic instructions should also read as a grammatically correct set of instruction. Problems can arise where the grammar of the surface reading leads to clashes with the cryptic grammar.
- Take a clue such as “Sailors have single source of seafood”. The clue breaks down to AB (sailors) + ALONE (single). However the cryptic reading then becomes “AB have ALONE”

where the grammar does not work correctly as a set of cryptic instructions. The solution here would be to change the clue to one of "Sailor has single source of seafood" (AB has ALONE) or "Sailors having single source of seafood" (AB having ALONE).

- This issue can also affect link words where the clue can break down cryptically to wordplay have definition.
- A particular problem can arise with the use of I where, in the surface reading, it is used in as a personal pronoun and, in the cryptic reading, it is used as a letter. For example "I enter club to get fishing accessory" to give I enter BAT as the cryptic reading. The issue here is that at the cryptic level, I is used as a single letter not a person pronoun. If you had "R enter BAT to give BART" you can see that the grammar does not work. Some setters and editors are happy to make an exception for the use of I in this case. However, others take a stricter view. One solution in this case would be to have "I may enter club to get fishing accessory" where the cryptic grammar is preserved whatever the letter used.

4.3 Tense and voice

- Although it is not an absolute rule (as far as I am aware), it is good practice to try and use the present tense when constructing wordplay elements in a clue.
- For example, the clue "Lament described worker living initially with grace (9)" tells you to put the word ELEGY (lament) around (described) ANT (worker) + L (living initially) to give ELEGANTLY (grace). To me, the use of the past tense jars slightly as this implies it once was the case that word A went around word B but that it is no longer the case. In this clue, "Lament describes worker living initially with grace (9)" works equally well as a series of instructions to the solver and accurately conveys the present construction of the answer!
- When writing, it is good practice to use the active voice rather than the passive voice whenever possible. However, when writing a crossword clue, less emphasis is placed on this rule. "A describes B" to suggest that word A goes around word B is fine as is "B is described by A".
- It is permissible to put the wordplay indicator after the relevant words to be played with. A clue of the form "A B inserted" tells the solver to insert word B inside word A.

However, care has to be taken with this type of construction as the resulting clue can become “yoda like”.

4.4 Direction

- Depending on whether a clue is an across clue or a down clue, certain wordplay indicators will have different meanings or uses. Setters should ensure that the wordplay indicator is appropriate to the positioning of the clue in the grid.
- Particular care has to be taken with charade indicators and reversal indicators.
 - “On” as a charade indicator. “A on B” in an across clue is usually (though not universally) used to indicate word B followed by word A. In a down clue, solvers “A on B” should mean “A on top of B” and solvers will feel rightly aggrieved if the setter uses “A on B” in down clue to mean word B followed by word A.
 - “Over” as a charade indicator. In a down clue, “A over B” means that word A goes on top of word B. In an across clue “A over B” has an entirely different meaning. It means that word A is laid over or surrounds word B.
 - “Supports” – “A supports B” in a down clue means that word A goes underneath (supports) word B. You could not use this construction in an across clue.
 - In reversal clues any indicator that the word goes upwards or northwards should be used only in a down clue. Similarly any indication that a word reads from right to left should be used only in an across clue.
- With apologies to Warbler whose clue I have lifted, the difference in direction could be exploited thus:
 - 5d Note number on back of car (5) – FIVE (number) on (top of) R
 - 10a Note number on back of car – MINIM – MINI + M
- On the subject of direction, one type of construction that can be a source of confusion is the use of “A pursues B”. To pursue means to follow and therefore as an instruction to the solver it means that word A follows (goes after) word B. The confusion arises because the mental image of A pursuing B is of A running behind B to catch them. Forget the mental image – pursue means to follow or go after.

4.5 Complexity

- What distinguishes tough wordplay in a clue from the easier clue? It seems to me that a number of factors distinguish a tough cryptic from a more straightforward one:
 - the complexity of the wordplay. In a straightforward puzzle, you will see one or maybe two wordplay elements, such as put word X inside word Y to find the answer. In a tougher crossword, there maybe three or four wordplay elements, such as put and anagram of A inside a reversal of B and add this to word C;
 - cleverly disguising the wordplay indicators;
 - disguising breaks in the answer so that an answer such as COP OUT could be clued to give the elements CO + POUT which joined together give the answer;
 - disguising breaks between the definition word and the wordplay. A favourite trick is to take a well known phrase that the solver reads as one but which must be mentally split to give the answer. For example, "It may help to part company with doctor (4)" requires you to split the clue as "It may help to part" as the definition and "company with doctor" as the wordplay giving CO + MB.
 - using obscure definitions of words in the wordplay or as the answer. This final one will often get you brickbats from the solver! If you are using an obscure word as the answer, it is usual to use less complex wordplay to compensate.

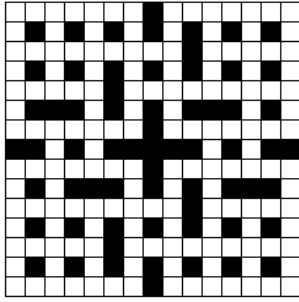
5 Designing the grid

5.1 Introduction

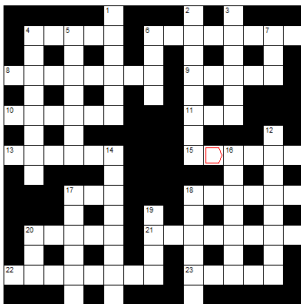
- The design of the crossword grid can have an effect on the ease or otherwise of solving the crossword. Some grids are fairer to the solver than others. The design and layout of the grid is therefore important to consider when setting a crossword.

5.2 The basic grid

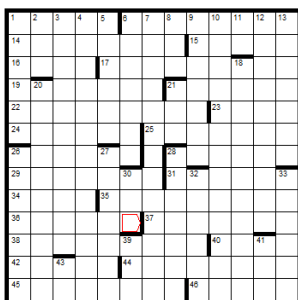
- Standard UK cryptic crosswords are designed using a 15 x 15 blocked grid. Blocked simply means that some of the squares are black. As a rule of thumb the ratio of blocked squares to white squares should be about 1 to 3. The white squares in the grid are sometimes referred to as lights. An example is below.



- When designing the grid, you should try to avoid large blobs of black squares as these can look out of place.



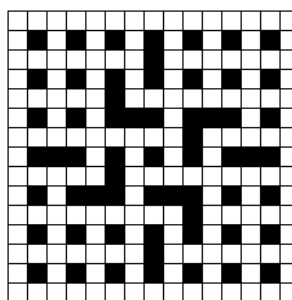
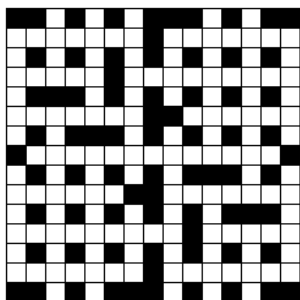
- The other main size of grid used is 13 x 13 but this is usually reserved for quick crosswords. However, the Times has a beginners cryptic crossword with a 13 x 13 grid. Jumbo crosswords may use larger grids. The only constant is that the dimensions are always an odd number.
- Advanced cryptic crosswords use what is known as a barred grid. This is one where all of the squares are white with word boundaries indicated by thicker black lines at the edge of a square. The Enigmatic Variations crossword in the Sunday Telegraph, the Azed, Inquisitor and Listener crosswords all use barred grids.



5.3 Symmetry

- It is usual for grids to be symmetrical. The two main symmetries are 180 degree symmetry where the grid looks the same if you rotate it through 180 degrees and 90

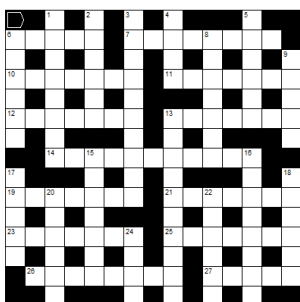
degree symmetry where the grid looks the same if you rotate it through 90 degrees. Examples are below.



- Very occasionally there will be minor breaches of symmetry with maybe one or two squares out of symmetry but this is very much the exception than the rule. A wholly unsymmetrical grid will look messy and will not feel pleasant to solve.

5.4 Cross-checking

- In any answer, at least 50% of the letters in each answer should ideally be cross-checked – that is they intersect with another clue. Occasionally, with five letter answers, you will get unchecked, checked, unchecked, checked, unchecked. You should try to avoid these but one or two such clues in a grid are sometimes unavoidable where you are designing a themed crossword. The example below shows two entries of five letters at 9d and 17d where cross-checking is less than 50%.



5.5 Double and triple unches

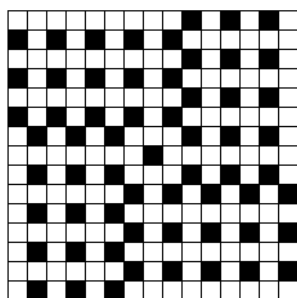
- A white square that does not intersect with another answer is referred to as an UNCH (unchecked).
- Quite often you will get double unches in grids – these are two successive squares that are unchecked. Even the Times crossword permits double unches but not where the two unchecked letters are at the beginning of a word. Double unches can make it more difficult to solve the crossword so too many double unches can be off-putting. However,

provided that at least 50% of the letters are cross-checked, double unches are a fact of the solver's life. If setting, try not to have too many though.

- Triple unches are a different story. Virtually no newspaper uses them. One of the stock of Daily Telegraph grids has triple unch but I cannot recall it having been used in recent memory.

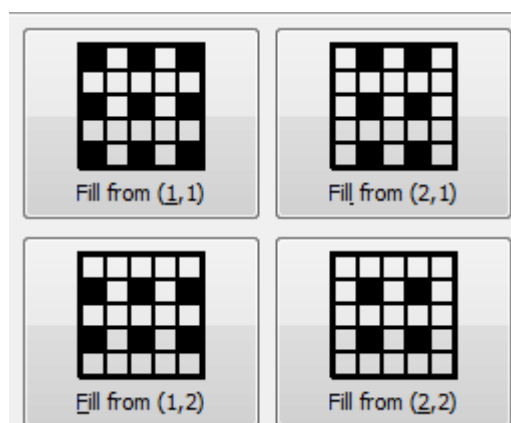
5.6 Interconnectivity

- All parts of the grid should interconnect. There should be no islands were one section of the grid is divorced from the remainder of the crossword. This interconnectivity makes the solving process easier. Some grids can produce four separate crosswords linked only in the middle. These can be more difficult to solve. The more interconnectivity between different parts of the grid, the better.



5.7 Odd checking or even checking

- Crossword grids can be designed so that it is the odd numbered letters in a word that are cross-checked or the even numbered letters.



- If the form of grid in the top left is used, it is easier for the setter to fill the grid or include hidden themes around the perimeter but the resulting grid is harder to solve. This is for two reasons. The first is that it is easier to find a word where you have the initial letter. The second is that where the cross-checked letters are at positions 2, 4, 6,

etc, many more words will have unhelpful vowels as the cross-checking letters. The form of checking at the bottom right of the picture is much easier to solve.

6 Abbreviations

6.1 Introduction

- One of the tools in the setter's armoury is to build up clues from bits and pieces of other words. Those bits and pieces can be made up in a number of different ways.
- One of the ways in which bits and pieces can be used is by using recognised abbreviations.

6.2 Using abbreviations

- If you use abbreviations, they should be generally recognised abbreviations in a major dictionary. The primary reference is Chamber's dictionary.
- For example, using an example from a Rookie Corner crossword, Holiday for H would not be acceptable but Husband for H would be.
- The abbreviation should stand in its own right. RAF means Royal Air Force, but this does not mean that the setter can use Royal to indicate the letter R or A for air. However, F for force is acceptable as F = Force is an accepted abbreviation in its own right.
- One of the problems with building up clues with abbreviations is that it is very easy to repeat wordplay elements in the crossword by, for example, using small to indicate S twice in the same crossword. Care is needed to avoid repetition.
- I believe that the Times particularly has a restricted list of abbreviations that it permits in crosswords. I can see the advantages of this as it introduces greater discipline for setters to ensure that they do not include too many abbreviations and it benefits the solver as there are some very obscure abbreviations – if solving a crossword would you know that Deputy to the Dail is abbreviated TD?
- If you are using abbreviations as part of the letters to be included in an anagram, it is best practice only to use abbreviations that are directly represented by the letters of the expanded version – G[ood] S[ense] O[f] H[umour] is fine but Entropy for S would not.

7 Alternate letters

- Some clues require you take the alternate letters of a word. These are usually indicated by words such as regularly, on a regular basis, oddly overlooked, second helpings from, etc.
- Conventionally, this construction is used for either the odd or the even letters but there is no reason why “regular” could not mean every third letter. Some editors will not allow this form of construction though.
- I have also seen indicators to tell you to take the letters representing prime number letters (prime examples of...) or to use progressively increasing intervals of the letters so that you take the 2nd, 4th, 8th letters, etc.
- One point to watch is that it is better to use a construction such as X regularly rather than regular X as grammatically this makes better sense of the clue.

8 &Lit clues

- An &Lit clue is a clue where the whole of the wordplay provides both the solution and the definition. They are a rare clue type to get right but as a solver, very pleasing to achieve.
- Examples would be:
 - Pamper wee runts (3,5) for WET NURSE where the whole clue is a definition of the answer and the wordplay is an anagram (pamper) of WEE RUNTS.
 - An excellent storyteller of Phrygia, originally (5) for AESOP where the whole clue describes the storyteller and the wordplay is the initial letters (originally) of the first five words in the clue.

9 Anagrams

9.1 Introduction

- With a basic anagram clue, the wordplay gives you a series of letters to be rearranged and an instruction to jumble them up to find the definition. In some discussions of anagram clues, the letters to be rearranged are referred to as the fodder and the instruction to rearrange them as the anagrind (anagram indicator).
- A straightforward anagram clue might be:

- Nestle theme composed in a song by Tom Lehrer (3, 9).
- Rearranging (composed) the letters NESTLE THEME gives you The Elements.
- Anagrams are relatively easy to clue given the number of on-line anagram sites that will enable you to find suitable anagrams (and crossword programs such as Crossword Compiler also include this facility). The danger, however, with many beginners (and some not so beginners) is to overload a crossword with anagram clues. As Gazza sometimes says, he gets worried when he has to take his shoes and socks off to count the number of anagrams in a crossword!
- There is no hard and fast rule to the number of anagram type clues in a crossword but as a rule of thumb, in a crossword with 28 to 32 clues, I would try (not always successfully) to include no more than 6 anagrams (including clues where only part of the solution is an anagram). In some of the crosswords that Beam sets in the Telegraph Toughie series, you will find no anagram clues. I think that the Times is the only crossword with a house policy of limiting the number of anagram clues in a crossword.

9.2 Anagram indicators

- Anagram indicators should convey a sense of having to rearrange the letters. These can be obvious such as composed or less obvious such as "supply" (meaning in a supple manner rather than give or provide).
- One rule that some editors impose is that the anagram indicator should not be a noun as this cannot convey movement. Therefore "*Letters to be rearranged* organisation" on its own would not be considered a fair anagram, even though it conveys a sense of movement, as organisation is a noun. However "organisation of *letters to be rearranged*" would be considered acceptable. There can be a wide range of views on whether a word is a suitable anagram indicator!
- The anagram indicator usually comes before or after the letters to be rearranged but it is also acceptable to have a clue of the form "A mixed with B gives C" where the anagram indicator (mixed) comes between two sets of letters to be rearranged.

9.3 Letters to be rearranged

- The letters to be rearranged can be two or more words and can include abbreviations such as British for BR). However, the general rule of thumb is that all of the letters to be rearranged must be clearly visible in the clue.
- Where you have to perform an additional step to get to the letters, you start straying into the realms of the indirect anagram – a cardinal sin for setters! I will look at these below.
- It is permissible to use conjunctions with the letters to be rearranged in the form “A and B mixed gives C”.

9.4 Indirect anagrams

- The indirect anagram is one of the cardinal sins of setting a crossword. An indirect anagram is an anagram where the letters to be rearranged are not clearly given in the clue. These can come in many forms.
- For example:
 - Couples dancing in French capital (5) would be an indirect anagram. Although the answer here is obvious, the solution, an anagram (dancing) of PAIRS, requires the solver to think of a synonym for couples, the letters of which then have to be rearranged to give the required answer.
 - Countrymen rearranged pebbles on the beach (7) is harder to guess. An anagram (rearranged) of SHINGLE (pebbles on the beach) gives ENGLISH as the answer.
- The same care with indirect anagrams has to be taken with abbreviations. For example, British for BR is acceptable but the same letters clued as “old transport company” would be indirect (even British can be open to interpretation as British can be abbreviated B or BR so that the solver has to decide which letters are used to make up the answer).
- Some setters will take the view that the abbreviation should begin with the same letter as the full word so that “second” for S would be usable but not “entropy” for S. Other setters may only use single letter abbreviations. As a general rule, as soon as you start defining part of the letters to be rearranged cryptically (other than by a direct abbreviation) you are straying into the indirect anagram territory.

9.5 Subtractive anagrams

- Some anagram clues will give you the letters to be rearranged and then tell you to remove one or more of them before making the anagram.
 - Cleric operates badly without any drugs (6).
 - The answer is PASTOR an anagram (badly) of OPRATS, both letter Es (drugs) having been removed.
- Subtractive anagrams can be a source of disputes. There are a few basic points to watch:
 - Some editors like the letters to be removed to be given directly in the clue and not defined cryptically. Therefore if you wanted to remove the letters RIM from the letters to be rearranged, you should include rim in the clue and not say, for example, "edge removed from X";
 - Where two or more letters have to be removed and they do not appear in the same order as in the clue, then a secondary anagram indicator should be included to indicate this.
 - For example, "Distinctive quality of absurd non-violent environmentalism (9)" requires you to remove the letters of violent from environmentalism and make an anagram from the remaining letters to give MANNERISM. However, as the letters of violent appear in a different order in environmentalism, some editors will require a secondary anagram indicator to indicate this.
 - Compare this with: "Illicitly, can he go out of rate of exchange arrangement like the Cayman Islands? (3,4). The letters in HE CAN DO OUT are rearranged (illicitly) and removed from RATE OF EXCHANGE and an anagram (arrangement) of the remaining letters gives TAX FREE;
 - Some people like to see a secondary anagram indicator if the letters to be removed are in the same order in the letters to be rearranged but those letters are not contiguous; and

- Some editors will not allow complex subtraction anagrams in a daily crossword.

9.6 Compound anagrams

- Consider a clue of the form "Such cars, when repaired, could make our racers mad (8)". The answer is ARMOURED.
- This type of clue requires you to find the word which, when combined with CARS in an anagram (when repaired) makes the phrase "OUR RACERS MAD". To solve this type of "compound" anagram type of clue you remove the letters of CARS from OUR RACERS MAD and find an anagram of the remaining letters.
- These types of clue are not very popular with solvers as they are difficult to spot and even more difficult to solve.
- The most common indicator of this type of clue is a word like "this", "these" or "such" followed by another word and an anagram indicator and then a phrase that follows, sometime with its own anagram indicator.

9.7 Build your own anagram clues

- A more recent form of clue requires the solver to building their own anagram clue.
- For example, the clue "Perhaps a trap might be made from this ruin (3,5)" gives the answer RIP APART (ruin).
- The answer reads as an anagram clue to find the "A TRAP" in the clue. The anagram indicator, that the solver has to supply, is added to an arrangement of A TRAP.

9.8 Long anagrams

- Clues can contain very long anagram (say 50 letters spread across many entries in the grid).
- Using long anagrams like this is a perfectly acceptable ploy for the setter but solvers are split over whether or not they like them. The difficulty is that you either spot the anagram very early on and have lots of checking letters for the remainder of the crossword making it much easier to solve or you cannot spot the anagram and you spend ages trying to get enough cross-checking letters to make sense of it which reduces some of the enjoyment of solving. Others may relish the challenge of teasing out the long anagram from the checking letters.

- One of the chief issues with the long anagram is the amount of the grid that they take up. On a standard grid of 255 squares roughly 2/3 will be black squares. This leaves, say, 170 squares to be completed. If you have a 50 letter anagram that is roughly 29% of the grid devoted to one clue. If the solver cannot get sufficient cross-checking letters (which may be the case where the anagram entries themselves cross check) it can make the crossword more difficult to solve than it needs to be.
- A more recent issue with long anagrams is their use with a crossword that will be solved on-line. In the absence of a piece of paper on which letters can be written down and crossed off and with it being very difficult to follow the flow of the linked entries on screen, the on-line solver is at a severe disadvantage with a long anagram type clue.

10 Charades

10.1 Introduction

- A charade or word sum clue is a clue where the solver has to add two words together to find the solution.
- For example, "Look after wife's steak (6)" gives RIB (wife) + EYE (look) with the after being a positional indicator to tell you that the first word in the clue goes after the second.

10.2 Word breaks

- Word breaks in charade clues can follow the natural split in the word to be clued such as IMPORT + ANT.
- A more subtle form of charade clue disguises breaks in the word. For example:
 - FIRST AID could be split as FIR + STAID; or
 - START OUT could be split as STAR + TOUT.

10.3 Combination clues

- Charade clues are often combined with other wordplay elements so that you have an abbreviation followed by another word or one word reversed followed by another – there are many variants on this theme.
- For example: "Small child's slide (4)" – S (small) + KID (child).

10.4 Positional indicators

- The order of the words given in the wordplay does not have to follow the order in which they appear in the solution. However, where this is the case, a positional indicator should be given to tell the solver the correct order in which they appear.
- As discussed previously (see paragraph 4.3), positional indicators have their own rules. Some examples are:
 - Positional indicators should match the direction of the clue (across or down) so that “A on B” in an across clue usually means B followed by A. In a down clue A on B means A on top of B;
 - A pursuing B means B followed by A; and
 - Indicators that suggest support or sitting on are appropriate only for down clues.

11 Container and contents clues

11.1 Introduction

- Container and content clues are clues that require the solver to put one word inside another.
- Unlike charade clues, where there may be no wordplay indicator to show that the words are to be joined together, a container and contents clue must have an indicator to show that Word A goes inside Word B (insertion) or that Word A goes around Word B (container).
- For example, “Flags up money pocketed in bribe (7)” requires the solver to put TIN (money) inside (pocketed in) BUNG (bribe) to give flags that may be put up.

11.2 Russian dolls

- Like Russian Dolls, container and content clues can become complex so you may see clues that require Word A to be put inside Word B with the resulting letters put inside or around Word C to give the solution.
- For example “Clear lecturer put in photo in way out (8)” requires the solver to put the abbreviation for lecturer (L) inside PIC (photo) and add these letters inside EXIT (way out) to give a word meaning clear – explicit.

11.3 Combination clues

- Like charade clues, container and contents clues are often combined with other wordplay elements so that you have an abbreviation inside another word or one word reversed around another. Once again, there are many variants on this theme.

12 Cryptic definitions

- Cryptic definitions are one of the few clue types that do not contain wordplay and definition. The whole clue provides an oblique definition of the answer. Solvers have to think laterally to find the solution.
- The master of the cryptic definition is Roger Squires who sets the Monday Telegraph backpage crossword and often appears as Rufus in the Guardian on Mondays as well.
- A good cryptic definition is difficult to achieve. Setters tend only to use one or two in a crossword.
- Examples would be:
 - Mummy would soon fall apart were it not for him (8) for EMBALMER
 - It brings a guy down to earth (4-3) for TENT-PEG
 - East-end inventions (7) for PORKIES

13 Deletion clues

13.1 Introduction

- A common and useful cluing device is the deletion clue.
- A deletion clue requires the solver to delete one or more letters from the wordplay to give part of the solution.
- The reason for the versatility of this cluing device is the ways in which deletions can be used.

13.2 Delete the first letter of a word

- Removing the first letter of a word can leave useful letters for the remainder of the wordplay.

- Deletion indicators for the first letter are usually of the form headless, lead free, decapitated, topless (in a down clue), scratching the first, or anything that indicates that the beginning of the word is omitted.
- Another method of deleting a letter when it begins with an H is to use some indication that it is dropped by using a cockney indication such as bow, east end or cockney. For example, "Have a strong desire to thumb a lift down the Old Kent Road? (4)" for ITCH, how a Cockney might pronounce hitch.

13.3 Deleting the last letter of a word

- Deleting the last letter of a word can be indicated in one of two ways.
- Sometimes the instruction is clear such as tailless, scratching the bottom or other indicators that suggest the final letter is omitted.
- A more subtle indicator is to indicate that the wordplay is curtailed in some way such as words suggesting that a word is taken briefly or is abridged.

13.4 Deleting the first and last letters of a word

- Deleting the first and last letters can be indicated by words such as endlessly (lacking both ends) or shelled to leave the central letters.

13.5 Deleting the inner letters of a word

- Indicators can suggest that you remove one or more of the central letters of a word.
- Indicators such as heartlessly, gutted, etc might suggest removing one or more of the central letters. One of the benefits is that the setter can indicate the removal of one or more letters with the same letters. Heartless rogue might indicate either roué (the G being removed) or RE, the OGU being removed.
- The only thing to remember is that you must be fair. Heartless rouge could not be used to indicate RGE as the OU to be removed is not at the heart of the word.

13.6 Deleting one of two central letters

- Where the word has a double consonant or vowel in the middle, half-hearted or similar indicators can suggest taking only one of the double letters. Half-hearted pop-group might give ABA from ABBA.

13.7 Deleting specific letters

- Specific letters can be deleted from a word. Lacking love, for example might indicate removing an O from word or timeless might indicate removing a T. This type of deletion can be used well with abbreviations.
- More than one letter can be removed. For example "He leaves the composer to go on a journey (6)" would give T (The minus the HE) + RAVEL.

14 Double definitions

14.1 Introduction

- There is little to be said about double definition clues. Two definitions are given of the same word, sometimes (but not usually) with a link word between the two.

14.2 Disguising the double definition

- Double definitions tend to be very easy to spot because the clue is very short (sometimes only two words). There are various ways of disguising the definition.
- The best way is to provide one straight definition and one that is defined cryptically. For example "Exploit a device to move property? (4)" could be a double definition of deed, the first being a straight definition and the second a cryptic reference to a legal document that may transfer title to a property.
- Another way is to use a triple or quadruple definition. This example from a Daily Telegraph crossword "Decrease inflexible element in club (4)" gives four possible meanings of IRON.

14.3 Parts of speech

- With double definitions, it is perfectly acceptable for the different definitions to represent different parts of speech. In the IRON clue above, we have a verb (de-crease), an adjective (inflexible) and two nouns (element and club).

14.4 Different meanings

- One mistake to avoid is to provide two very similar definitions for the same word. For example "Pocket toy (5)" provides two very similar definitions for the word SMALL (toy as in a toy poodle). The clue is not wrong but solvers feel slightly aggrieved when the two meanings are the same.

15 Hidden word clues

15.1 Introduction

- A hidden word clue hides the answer in plain sight of the solver but in a manner that can be difficult to spot. A master of the hidden word clue is Virgilius when he sets the Sunday Telegraph crossword.
- Hidden word clues can reverse the hidden word (so that it has to be read backwards or upwards) but this must be indicated in the clue.

15.2 Hidden word indicators

- Hidden word indicators can be very small. "In" or "Of" can be hidden word indicators. Other, less obvious indicators may tell the solver to remove the outer letters to leave the inner letters of a word or phrase. Words such as narrowed, or outsiders leaving may indicate a hidden word clue.

15.3 How many words can hide the solution?

- It is permissible for the word to be hidden inside only one other word. An example from a Sparks Toughie "Tapestry mounted in disarray (5)" in a down clue hides and reverses ARRAS inside DI**SARRAY**.
- Where the solution is split across two or more words, the setter should try to avoid adding padding words that contribute to the surface reading but which do not contribute to the hidden word itself. For example "4d Beaver among the reeds trod enthusiastically (6)" hides "RODENT" (a beaver) among "**TROD ENTHUSIASTICALLY**". However, the words "the reeds" are there purely for decorative effect and do not contribute to the definition or to the wordplay.
- If a word is to be split, a useful way of making sure that the split is not obvious is to ensure that the word endings do sound phonetically like the answer that they are defining – for example "A month in Capri Leone (5)" hides APRIL but at no point when reading the clue is "APRIL" sounded out.

15.4 Long hidden words

- The real skill of the setter comes in successfully hiding long hidden words. Tim Morey quotes the following as a really long hidden word clue: "As seen in jab, reach of pro miserably failing to meet expectations (6,2,7)" for BREACH OF PROMISE.

16 Homophones

16.1 Introduction

- Homophones rely on the fact that one word sounds like another. Maize sounds like Maze”, Rill sounds like “Rhyll”, etc.
- The danger with homophones is that there will always be someone, somewhere (usually Gazza) who will pop up and say, I don’t pronounce the words in the same way! With the broad range of regional accents this is inevitable but be prepared for some adverse comments.

16.2 Homophone indicators

- Homophone indicators should give some indication that the word is being overheard such as over the intercom, in the house, on the radio, reportedly, etc.
- The differences in pronunciation can be alleviated with “so some say” or equivalent words if you know that there are differences.
- You can exploit slurring of words or odd pronunciations – “James Bond formerly pronounced drunk killed (4)” as SHOT as Sean Connery might pronounce SOT or “Pop star, speaking drunkenly, invented language (6)” as ELVISH (a drunken reference to ELVIS).
- Where the two words are of equal length, as a courtesy to the solver, please don’t put the homophone indicator between the two definitions as the solver has no way of knowing which is the definition and which is the wordplay element.

17 Palindromes

- Palindromes are words that read the same either way. You do not often find them but the following examples indicate the type of clue.
- “Woman who meets herself coming back (5)” for MADAM
- “It turns either way (5)” for ROTOR.

18 Reversals

18.1 Introduction

- Reversal clues require the solver to reverse one word to form the whole or part of the solution.
- The longest reversal word that is often seen, to the point of becoming hackneyed is that "STRESSED" is a reversal of "DESSERTS". Other commonly seen ones are "NUTS" and "STUN" and "SNUG" and "GUNS".
- Reversals can be combined with hidden word clues so that the hidden word is reversed in the clue.

18.2 Reversal indicators

- Reversal indicators should indicate that the word or part of a word is reversed. Words such as returned, got up, going west, etc can indicate a reversal.
- Sometimes you can apply reversals to abbreviations where this will improve a clue. Sailor returned could be used to indicate BA, record flipped to indicate PL, etc.
- One point to watch is that reversal indicators should match the direction of an across or down clue. For across clues, you should not use reversal indicators that suggest upwards reversals and for down clues you should not use indicators that indicate reading from right left, such as going west, etc.

19 Select a letter clues

19.1 Introduction

- Select a letter clues are the reverse of deletion clues. They require the solver to take the first, middle or last letters of a word. Occasionally, they will be clues that require you to take a particular letter in a word such as Forth of July for Y or Beethoven's fifth for H.

19.2 Initial letters / final letters / centre letters, etc

- If you want to start a war between different solvers and setters, this is a fertile battle ground. The way in which you can indicate the opening or closing letters of a word is subject to a wide range of opinions.
- Those who believe that the cryptic instructions in the clue should give a grammatical set of instructions to solving the clue will take a far stricter view of how such letters should

be indicated than those who believe that so long as the intention of the clue is clear, the strict grammatical reading of the clue should not restrict how the letter is clued.

- The strict view is that, for example, to clue the first letter of the word, you should use a construction such as start of X or X starts. Clues such as "first person", "start panting", "begin painting" or "leading parliamentarians" would not be allowed to clue the letter P as grammatically these do not indicate the initial letter of the word even if they give the sense of the first letter. Similarly middle man would not be allowed to clue A as the central letter of man. Other setters and solvers would be happy to accept the less grammatical constructions.
- Other letter indicators include words such as initially or finally can be used fairly and the only problem with them is that they are hackneyed by overuse!
- Constructions such as French leader are acceptable as this means leader of the French. However, silly leader would be more questionable as this does not mean leader of the silly!
- A curious construction that all seem to accept is an indicator such as "a bit of cake" to indicate the letter C. Expressions such as this do not actually tell you which bit of the word you use but the accepted convention is that it refers to the first letter unless you use an expression such as last bit of cake!
- Another form of construction that can cause disputes the use of words ending in head to indicate the first letter of the word – examples include "Gateshead", "Redhead", "Egghead". Even if they do not grammatically indicate the first letter of a word, they are clear and will frequently appear in crosswords.
- The number of letters to be selected should be clear from the clue. "Leader of school house" would not a sufficient instruction to take the S and H as the initial letters.
- If you are using an indicator for the centre of a word, you must make sure that you are using the central letters. Centre of gravity is the letter V. You could not use this to indicate AV, though AVI would be acceptable.

20 Switching letters

20.1 Introduction

- Some clues will require you to switch letters around. This can be done in a number of ways.

20.2 Replace one letter with another

- Some clues require one letter in the wordplay to be replaced by another. Often this is combined with abbreviation indicators. For example “daughter leaves for Norway” might indicate that you replace the letter “D” with the letter “N”. The wordplay should give some indication that one letter is deleted and replaced by another.
- Sometimes, the swap might be more subtly clued. Changing hands might indicate replacing an L with an R or the reverse. Swapping partners might indicate exchanging N S or E for W. For example “Fish always changing hands (3)” for EEL from EER (always) having the R changed to L.
- Another way of indicating a change of letter might be simply saying that the word had a new letter at the beginning, middle or end without giving the letter that is substituted for the deleted letter. Clues such as “having a change of heart” or “with a new beginning” could suggest that the original letter in the clue is replaced with another one.

20.3 Swapping the order of letters

- A clue can instruct the solver to swap the beginning, middle or end letters around. Indicators such as turning tail might indicate changing the order of the final two letters or a spinning head changing the order of first two letters.

20.4 Moving the position of a letter

- A clue can instruct the solver to move the position of a letter. This could be to move the first letter the end or moving any letter left, right, up or down.
- “Cycling” as an indicator is often used to indicate moving the first letter to the end. Dropping the head or raising the tail in a down clue might indicate that the first or last letter is moved to an indeterminate position in the answer.
- These types of clue can be combined with abbreviations. “Lecturer moving east” might indicate in an across clue that the L moves to the left in the solution.

21 Spoonerisms

- Spoonerisms rely on the fact that two words with their initial sounds swapped can result in another phrase. They come from the verbal mannerisms of the Revd. Spooner, an Oxford don who would often get his words in a muddle. Classic examples are "Town Drain" for "Down Train" or "Queer Dean" for "Dear Queen".
- Solvers often do not like Spoonerisms. Sometimes this is because they are often appalling. Another reason is that there is a very limited number of ways that the wordplay can be introduced without specifically referring to Spooner. Alternatives might be "Tongue tied cleric" or "Exchanging introductions".
- Examples would be:
 - Rock and sex maestro with complaint from Spooner (8) for MUDSTONE from STUD (sex maestro) MOAN (complaint).
 - Spooner's headgear provides opening for queen (3,4) for CAT FLAP from FLAT CAP.

22 Producing a balanced set of clues

- A good cryptic crossword should contain a good mixture of wordplay devices. A crossword with too many anagrams may feel lopsided. Too many bits and pieces clues may make the crossword feel scrappy.
- A good way of making sure that you are not using too many instances of the same wordplay devices is to keep a chart that you can tick off the clue devices that you have used. The following is the grid that I use to do this.

Abbreviation																			
All in one																			
Alternate letters																			
Anagram																			
Charade																			
Container and contents																			
Cryptic definition																			
Deletion																			
Double definition																			
First letter / last Letter / Middle letter																			

Hidden word																		
Homophone																		
Other																		
Palindrome																		
Reversal																		
Spoonerism																		
Substitution																		

23 Submitting crosswords

23.1 Introduction

- If you are submitting a crossword for publication, there are some basic things that you can do to help the editor.
- Provide a clean copy of the uncompleted grid and the clues as they would appear to the solver. This can be in Word or PDF format. Most editors will try and solve the crossword from scratch as a solver would. This gives the editor the best feel of the difficulty of the crossword and any changes that may be required. A single page document that can be printed off and used for this first run through can be very helpful.
- Do provide a separate sheet with an explanation of how each clue works. This is useful to cross-check any queries that the editor has. The explanations do not have to be detailed. A fairly standard algebraic notation is often used by setters to explain the wordplay of the clues. This is set out below.
- If you are serious about setting, a good investment is software to assist in designing the grid and entering the clues and explanations. The main one used by setters is Crossword Compiler. Many editors used the saved file "ccw" file to publish the crossword. Providing the file saves the editor the job of cutting and pasting the crossword into an electronic format for publication.

23.2 Clue notation

- Although there are many variants, the standard cluing notation is set out in the table below.

Notation	Usual meaning

ABC<	ABC reversed.
[abc]	Letters abc removed, as in [c]OUNT to represent 'count' with c removed;
{ABC}	Letters placed inside others, as in C{AND}ID to mean 'and' inside 'cid'.
(ABC)*	Anagram of ABC. It is usual to include the anagram indicator after the *.
A+B	A concatenated with B. Sometimes both notations are used together where ambiguities may arise.
aBcDeF	Alternate letters of ABCDEF (shorthand for [a]B[c]D[e]F)
AB[C>D]	A letter substitution with C becoming D
ABC>DEF ABC~DEF	Homophone
>ABBCBBA<	Palindrome
CD	A cryptic definition
DD	A double definition
D/CD or CD/D	A double definition with part cryptic definition
Hidden	A hidden word
Hidden reversed	A hidden word reversed
&Lit	A & Lit clue

- An example of a series of explanations might be:
 - **Across:** 8 YOKO + HAMA[S], 9 IS + AI + A + H, 10 (HUNGARIAN) * CORRUPT + G, 11 TeHrAnI, 12 (TAB + MOW)<, 14 (RICE CHUB) * COOKED, 15 D{EVIL}RY, 17 CARP + ARK, 20 A + LIGHT + ED, 22 [B]ATTLE + E, 24 Hidden word - reversed, 25 HOUSE (Family) + TRAIN (Caravan), 27 [L>R]ECTOR, 28 T[OR]Y +

RAN + NIC. **Down:** 1 DO+RA+DO, 2 (A TO I)<, 3 (RUTH AGED) * DISGRACEFULLY, 4 TAP + I + O + CA, 5 [G>H]IGGLE, 6 (MET RAPTURE) * SURPRISINGLY, 7 DD, 13 B + RING + FORTH, 16 (EEL NETS I) * SUPPLY, 18 A + MATE{UR}S, 19 AD{JUST}S, 21 (THIRT[IE]S) * REDESIGN, 23 E {LIX + I) + R (27A = RECTOR), 26 RE + ON<.

- Some crossword blogging sites use this form of notation to explain clues to the solvers. This undoubtedly saves time for the blogger but it is not user friendly for the reader of the blog unless they know the conventions. On Big Dave's blog, the full explanation of the clue is always given in, hopefully, plain English.

24 Closing words

- I hope that these notes prove to be useful. They are not exhaustive but should give new setters and solvers some of the basic tools for use when setting or solving crosswords.
- There is no substitute for practice in setting and solving. However, there are many good books that setters can refer to for further guidance. Chief among these are Don Manley's book "Chamber's Crossword Manual" and Tim Moorey's book "How to Crack Cryptic Crosswords" are both excellent resources. If you can find copies of the now out-of-print "Ximenes on the Art of the Crossword" or Barnard's "Anatomy of the Crossword", both will repay careful study.
- Thanks are due to all of the Rookie setters who have bravely put forward their crosswords for public scrutiny and endured my analysis of their work. I was tongue in cheek referred to as the "Grand Inquisitor" but perhaps "Simple Assessor" is closer to the truth.
- The biggest thanks go to Big Dave for taking the bold step of publishing the Rookie series and bring new talent to the fore. Just as many setters from the "Not The Saturday Prize Puzzle" have gone on to be published in the national papers, hopefully some of the setters of the future will come from today's cohort of Rookies.