

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD HELP – Quick notes by Graham Watts.

1. Most of the clues have a word or words at the start which are synonymous with the solution, or have a word or words at the end which are synonymous with the solution. The remainder of the clue supports the solution.
2. A few clues are to be read as one unit and rely on puns to mislead the solver. (See ploy 8.)
3. All clues are deviously designed to mislead the solver, but should be honest grammatically, notwithstanding a lot of licence according to setters' conventions.
4. Punctuation can be misleading – on purpose!
5. Abbreviations are employed a lot. (e.g. C= about,/ cent/ hundred/captain. L =left/learner, student, plate. R = run (in cricket)/right. S = second, bend, south, point, direction, quarter (USA).
6. Indicators *head, start, tail, end, middle of, heart of, centre, hub* often refer to the first letter, last letter or middle letters of a word. (The indicator may precede or follow the word in question.)
7. There are eight main sorts of clue ploys to be aware of:

CLUE PLOYS:

Note: Underlined words are synonymous with the solution. Italicised words are indicators of a ploy type.

1. **Hidden meaning.** The solution appears hidden letter for letter amongst the words of the clue, but may not be obvious because of spaces between words.

E.g. Clue: City *in* salami land. (5)

Solution: Milan

Indicators: *in, within, seen in* some, part/section of, bit/little

2. **Additions and subtractions.**

Clues consist of parts **added** together:

E.g. Clue: Credit is doubled in time of real trouble (6) Solution: Crisis. (Cr=credit abbreviated+is+is)

Also clues, part of which is to be **subtracted**:

E.g. Clue: Stylish little bird with *no tail* (4)

Solution: Chic (Chick minus tail letter k)

Indicators: *No tail, headless, without limits* (i.e. minus first and last letters)...

3. **Anagrams.** (Letter jumbles) The clue must contain a word or words suggesting the need for reordering, renewal etc. or a warning that the letters of words in front or behind are in a bad, chaotic or mixed state. According to cryptic convention even words of movement are sufficient to indicate the presence of an anagram (e.g. *dancing*). Also the words *perhaps, maybe, somehow* can indicate an anagram. Anagrammatic clues are very common. A helpful hint, which assists your eyes to rearrange the letters of an anagram into other words, is to write the letters in a circle, alternating letters clockwise and anticlockwise.

E.g. Clue: British Prime minister is that great charmer, *oddly enough*. (8,8)

Solution: Margaret Thatcher. (Anagram of that great charmer)

Indicators are almost limitless: *ordered, arranged.... new, novel.... bad, off, out... wild, turbulent... mixed, confused, sling... odd, weird, crazy... spinning, dancing, moving... translation, edited...*

4. **Containers and Contents.** Also a favourite ploy of setters is to indicate words written as contents within other words.

E.g. Clue: Discovered duck *in* available stock (5)

Solution: Found. (duck = 0 in cricket in available stock = fund :(F(O)UND)

Indicators: *in, within, heart/centre/middle/hub of....., holds, contains, has, keeps, embraces, about, around.*

5. **Homophones** (sound-alikes). The clue must contain some words indicating that there is a homophone present.

E.g. Clue: It comes down from heaven, as a rule, *we hear*. (4)

Solution: Rain (Sounds like reign = rule)

Indicators: *Sounds like, we hear, to the ear/ auditor ... say, said, expressed, reported, broadcast, on radio, voice....*

6. **Synonyms.** The first part of the clue means the same as the last part, but are misleading when read as a unit. These clues are often brief.

E.g. Clue: Just fine! (4)

Solution: Fair (Just means fair in a legal sense and fine means fair in a weather sense.)

7. **Reversals.** In indicator in the clue suggests that you should reverse letters.

E.g. Clue: Artist *returns* to get remuneration. (6)

Solution: Reward (Artist = drawer. Drawer reversed is reward.)

Indicators: For across clues: *returns, back, retrospectively, westerly ...*
For down clues: *up, rising, northerly ...*

8. **Misrepresentations.** These clues are to be read as an entire unit synonymous with the solution. They rely on puns to mislead the solver.

E.g. Clue: Beasts responsible for the present transport system. (8)

Solution: Reindeer (The pun on present makes the solver think immediately of the modern day transport system, rather than Santa's sleigh of presents.)

OFTEN CLUES WILL CONTAIN A COMBINATION OF SOME OF THESE EIGHT PLOYS.

E.g. Clue: Absorbed in final *holding wild* roses at The G. (9)

Solution: Engrossed (Final=end containing an anagram of roses added to the g. EN(G+ROSSE)D)

This clue is a combination of a CONTAINER AND CONTENT, an ANAGRAM and an ADDITION.

SPOONERISMS

Rev. W.A Spooner (1844-1930 was an Oxford don who reputedly had a speech problem involving the switch of letters in words. He reputedly said that some students had "hissed his mystery lecture" i.e missed his history lecture. A spoonerism is an exchange of the first sounds of words with each other, often used for comic effect.

Some setters like to include a spoonerism in a clue and will include Spooner's reference in it. e.g. Clue: *According to Spooner* bellman rings true for our city (9)

Solution: Melbourne. The switch of letter sounds in bellman becomes Mell- ban, which rings true to the ear for Melbourne.

A setter may make the clue more difficult and write: *Spooner's* campanologist rings true for our city (9). The solver has to see a synonym for campanologist as a bellman, to decipher the clue.

The setter may even be more misleading using a pun and write: *Spooner's* toll man at Bolte Bridge's city (9) Here the clue is designed to mislead the solver from thinking of toll meaning ring a bell to a road tax.
