THE WALL STREET JOURNAL GUIDE TO CRYPTIC CROSSWORDS

WHAT MAKES A CROSSWORD CRYPTIC?

For those new to the game, we reveal the secret in a nutshell: *The clues each have two parts*. One part is a normal definition of the answer; the other is an additional hint using wordplay.

Having *two* hints in each clue might seem a big giveaway to solvers. Why aren't these clues twice as easy? The hitch: Either hint may come first. The definition may appear before or after the wordplay hint, often without any punctuation to mark the point of division. The challenge and fun of a cryptic puzzle is to see through the puzzle writer's deceptions, to tease out the definition by rethinking the clue's wording.

And now without further fanfare, we reveal the basic tricks of the cryptic trade.

1. DOUBLE DEFINITIONS

The simplest kind of wordplay hint in a clue is a second definition. For example, HOOD can mean "gangster" or "a cover for the head." So a clue for HOOD might read:

► Cover for the head gangster (4)

(The number in parentheses indicates how many letters are in the answer.) Here is another clue of this type for you to solve:

► Trim a tree (6)

(For answers, see the end of this introduction.)

2. ANAGRAMS

A clue may show you what the letters of the answer would look like when scrambled, also giving a signal word such as "mixed," "aimless" or "fractured." An anagram clue for STEW (which scrambles into WEST), could be:

► Wild West dish (4)

Here is another clue of this type:

► Noises in restless slumber (7)

3. HIDDEN ANSWERS

Sometimes the answer will be hidden inside a longer word or phrase (as PLEAD is tucked inside "apPLE A Day"). Look for signals such as "caught in," "buried in," "part of" and "housed by." For example, CAT could be clued as:

► Lover of birds imprisoned in Alcatraz (3)

Here's another example:

► Karen always displays an engagement ring? (5)

(Though punctuation is usually mere dressing in a clue, question marks are traditionally reserved for indicating stretchy definitions or outright puns.)

4. HOMOPHONES

The wordplay hint may tell you that the answer has the same sound as another word or words, giving a signal such as "we hear," "so it's said" or "orally." A homophone clue for BEAR (which sounds like "bare") could be:

▶ Animal is naked, we hear (4)

See if you can solve this one:

▶ Piece of gossip stated out loud for a lodger (6)

5. CHARADES

A clue may break the answer into two or more convenient parts and define them sequentially, as in the game of charades. FARMING (agriculture) breaks into "far" (remote) and "Ming" (Chinese dynasty), and could be clued as:

► Agriculture in remote Chinese dynasty (7)

Here is another charade:

► A combo on leave (7)

6. CONTAINERS

If the answer breaks into convenient parts not side by side but one within the other, the clue may say that one part "contains," "holds," "grips" or even "swallows" the other. CALLOW (inexperienced, green) has "all" inside "cow," yielding the clue:

▶ Bovine has eaten everything green (6)

A container for you to solve:

► Mr. Crosby keeps it sharp (6)

7. REVERSALS

The wordplay hint may tell you that the solution when seen backward makes another word or words. SMART (keen) is the word "trams" (railway cars) backward. Its clue could be:

► Keen—railway cars in reverse (5)

Here's another:

► Strike friend's back (4)

8. DELETIONS

Sometimes a clue will invite you to lop off the front, back or central piece of a longer word. For example, ENTRY could come from SENTRY missing its leading letter, with the clue:

▶ Guard behind the front doorway (5)

Here's one involving a last letter:

► Horse with no tail damage (3)

9. COMPLEX CLUES

Sometimes (especially with longer words) these different kinds of hints may be used in combination. But however complicated the operations may seem, full instructions will always be available for obtaining the answer. Here is one example to test your wits:

► Furniture wire wrapping broken dart (4,5)

Well, that's enough to get you started. Now sharpen up a pencil, dive right into the clues, and don't be afraid to enlist a friend for reinforcement. We find that solving as a twosome makes for twice the fun.

Cheers, Emily Cox & Henry Rathvon

Answers to the sample clues:

L. SPRUCE (2 defs.) 2. RUMBLES (slumber anag.) 3. ARENA (hidden) 4. ROOMER (rumor hom.) 5. A + BAND + ON 6. B(IT)ING 7. SLAP (pal's rev.) 8. MARe 9. C(ARDT)ABLE (dart anag.)