

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL CROSSWORD CONTEST 101

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The Wall Street Journal Crossword Contest puzzles are just like normal crosswords, but with one big difference: *somewhere in each puzzle there's a secret word or phrase hiding, and you've got to figure out where and what it is.*

This secret word or phrase is that week's Contest Answer, and you can email it to us each week at crosswordcontest@wsj.com for a chance to win a WSJ "CROSSWORD CHAMPION" coffee mug. Please put your answer in the subject line of your email. (Full contest rules are posted at wsj.com/puzzles.) Imagine yourself as a cruciverbal Hercule Poirot on these, unraveling the secret plans of a dastardly master criminal. And be ready for an adrenaline rush (no joke!) when you finally catch your prey.

There are three steps to solving a Contest Crossword:

1) Read the instructions. Each Contest Crossword comes with a unique set of instructions that tells you what you're looking for. Typically it's something like a famous actress, a major river, or a familiar two-word phrase, but it could be just about anything.

2) Solve as you would a regular crossword, but keep an eye out for anything unusual—a clue that doesn't quite make sense, an overabundance of Z's in the grid, or anything else that seems odd. This may (or may not!) have something to do with getting the Contest Answer.

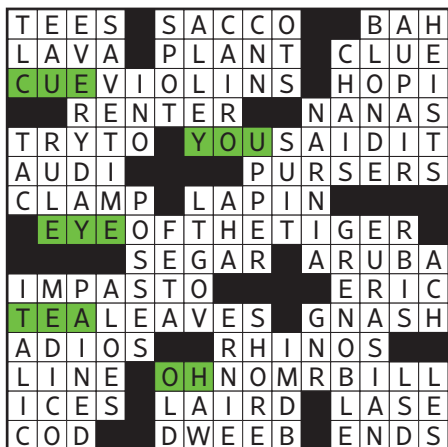
3) Find the Contest Answer. This is the tricky part! Describing how to get there defies easy explanation, since the answer-hiding mechanism changes with each puzzle (and part of the game is figuring out what you're supposed to be figuring out). But solvers tend to catch Contest Crossword Fever after three or four puzzles, and we'll look at a couple of typical mechanisms now.

Let's say you open the paper to try your first one, and the instructions read: "This puzzle's Contest Answer is a world capital." You solve the puzzle and decide to look at your theme entries first, since that's usually the key to cracking a Contest Crossword. The five theme clues and entries here turn out to be:

- Sarcastic expression of sympathy* CUE VIOLINS
- "Amen!" YOU SAID IT
- 1982 #1 hit EYE OF THE TIGER
- Reading material for a fortuneteller TEA LEAVES
- 1970s "Saturday Night Live" catchphrase OH NO, MR. BILL

Does any world capital jump out at you from these five? Hint: Say the answers aloud.

The Contest Answer is *Quito*, Ecuador's capital, which is spelled out by pronouncing the first word of each of the five theme entries, CUE, YOU, EYE, TEA and OH.



Let's look at another one. For this example, the instructions read: "This puzzle's Contest Answer is a dessert." Sounds delicious. You solve the puzzle and the four theme entries are the following nonsense phrases:

- Judicial summons that makes you yawn?* BANAL SUBPOENA
- Refused to let anyone listen to Kurt Cobain's music?* BANNED NIRVANA
- Women's part of the house in an Iraqi home?* BAGHDAD ZENANA
- Itinerary listing after "Argentina ayer, Paraguay hoy"?* BOLIVIA MANANA

Take a look at those four phrases and see what they have in common. Do you see the dessert?

You may have noticed that all four phrases start with B and end with A. Upon closer inspection, it goes further than that: They all form the word BANANA from their first and last sections: **BANAL SUBPOENA, BANNED NIRVANA, BAGHDAD ZENANA, BOLIVIA MANANA**, as illustrated in the solution grid here:



In other words, the word banana has been split apart in these four entries, leading to our Contest Answer dessert: *Banana split*.

One final pointer: It's a good idea to pay attention to the puzzle's title, as it may provide a clue to the method in which the Contest Answer has been hidden.

This may seem arcane at first, but you'll get the hang of it soon enough. And feel free to e-mail me at crosswordcontest@gmail.com with any questions you've got.