

# CLUE-SOLVING FOR BEGINNERS

The important difference between standard American crosswords and "cryptic," or "British-style," crosswords is that the clues in the latter have two distinct parts. One part is a normal definition of the answer, and the other is an additional hint about the answer's literal makeup. That each clue has *two* references to its answer may seem a great advantage to the solver—and in the end this is true, since the definition and the additional hint, when grasped, will confirm each other. The hitch is that the clue's message is couched in a misleading way. The definition may appear before or after the additional hint, frequently without any

**1. DOUBLE DEFINITIONS:** The simplest kind of additional 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)." (Answers to this and other sample clues appear on page 2.)

**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 could be "Wild West food (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 sample: "Karen always displays an engagement ring? (5)." (Though punctuation is usually mere dressing in a clue, ? and ! are traditionally reserved for signaling puns or unusual wordplay.)

punctuation to mark the point of division. The challenge and the fun of a cryptic puzzle is to see through the clue-maker's deceptions, to tease out the definition by rethinking—and often repunctuating—the clue's phrases. All appearances in a clue should be suspect; but remember that every clue has to yield a fair interpretation that directs you to the answer.

The following paragraphs will explain every basic type of device solvers can expect to encounter in an Atlantic Puzzler. The game may be bewildering at first, but determined solvers will quickly learn to recognize in each clue the hints for its solution.

**4. HOMOPHONES:** The additional 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: "Vocal gossip 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 additional hint may tell you that the solution when seen backward (or upside-down, in the case of a Down answer) 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. HEADS, TAILS, HEARTS, BITS AND PIECES:** In describing a charade or container, a clue may have to refer to single letters or small bunches of letters, and may do this with ingenious, though literal, indications. “Head of state” could indicate the letter *S* (first letter of the word); “donkey’s tail” could be *Y*; “heart of stone” could be *O* (the central letter); “half-moon” could be *mo* or *on* (front or back half). Standard abbreviations are also employed: for example, “right” could be *R* and “left” could be *L*; “time” or “temperature” could be *T*; “nothing” (or “love,” as in tennis) could be *O*; “loud” could be

*F*, and “quiet” or “soft” could be *P* (as in music).

**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: “Fellow eating a rind torn from an orange (8).”

Every Atlantic Puzzler has its own theme, accompanied by special instructions. Although differently shaped diagrams and other devices may appear from month to month, the underlying method of clue-making will always be cryptic. Happy solving to all!

Answers to the sample clues: 1. SPRUCE (double def.); 2. RUMBLES (*slumber* anag.); 3. ARENA (hidden); 4. ROOMER (homophone of *rumor*); 5. A-BAND-ON; 6. BITING; 7. SLAP (*pal's* rev.); 9. MA(N)DARIN (a *rind* anag. inside *man*)

## THE ATLANTIC PUZZLER

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