



Cryptic Clue Reference

created by Tim Lipus, Justin Melvin, and Cathy Saxton

This sheet explains some of the common cryptic clue wordplay you're likely to see in DASH puzzles.

Cryptic clues contain two parts: a "straight" definition and wordplay. The straight definition will always be at either the beginning or end of the clue (never in the middle).

Numbers in parentheses after the definition specify how many letters are in the answer; multiple numbers indicate separate words, e.g. "(6 4)" for "puzzle hunt."

Charade – The answer is formed by joining individual words/letters from the clue together.

Clue: 1000 in family (3)

Answer: KIN (family)

Explanation: K (1000) + IN

Note that in this example, K was clued by 1000 whereas IN came directly from the clue. This type of wordplay is commonly combined with other types.

Double Definition – In a double definition, two different senses of a word are given, typically with no explicit indicator.

Clue: Able to preserve (3)

Answer: CAN (able to & preserve)

Anagram – The letters of part of the clue are rearranged. Anagrams are clued with indicator words like "changed," "messy," or "crazy."

Clue: Captures crazy parts (5)

Answer: TRAPS (captures)

Explanation: an anagram of PARTS

Hidden Word – In a hidden word clue, the answer is hidden within the clue itself. Typical indicators include "found in," "search," "scan," etc.

Clue: Vacate everyone held in contempt yesterday (5)

Answer: EMPTY (vacate everyone)

Explanation: hidden in "contEMPT Yesterday"

Container – One part of a clue is put inside another. Containers are clued with indicator words like "surround," "inside," or "within."

Clue: Ship structure, as in Bozeman's st. (4)

Answer: MAST (ship structure)

Explanation: AS "in" MT (Bozeman's state)

Deletions – Letters are removed from a word in the clue. Deletions may be at the beginning ("headless," "no start"), middle ("heartless"), end ("tailless," "unfinished"), or even both ends ("endless").

Clue: Writer Virginia unfinished yarn material (4)

Answer: WOOL (yarn material)

Explanation: WOOLF (writer Virginia) without the final letter (unfinished)

Selections – The flip side of deletions; instead of removing a letter we select one or more letters from a word. This may occur at the beginning, middle, or end (or both ends) of a word with similar indicator words as deletions (e.g. "at the extremes," "heart of"). Other types of this clue are initials (take the first letters of a sequence of words), and even/odd.

Clue: Even Elvis meets citrus fruits (5)

Answer: LIMES (citrus fruits)

Explanation: the "even" letters from the phrase Elvis meets

Reversal – Here a part of the clue is read backward. Reversals are clued with indicator words like "reverse" or "the wrong way."

Clue: Flying mammals impale the wrong way (4)

Answer: BATS (flying mammals)

Explanation: STAB (impale) backward

Homophone – In a homophone clue, a word sounds the same as the answer. An indicator is used that indicates sounds, like "out loud" or "rumored."

Clue: Noisily propelled boat to street (4)

Answer: ROAD (street)

Explanation: homophone of ROWED