

Cryptic Classroom #1: ANAGRAMS

By Raw Nerd Rap

My relationship with GAMES began when I was barely a teenager. At that time, the majority of the Pencilwise section was beyond my grasp, but I knew there was something special about the magazine, and I wanted to be a part of it.

Like any talent, my puzzle solving skills (and later, puzzle constructing skills) took time to develop. But, with practice, it wasn't too long before I felt the satisfaction of successfully completing a crossword grid without having to check the answers. I mastered other puzzle varieties too, but the biggest obstacle for me was figuring out how to solve a cryptic crossword. And judging from the conversation in our Facebook group, Games Magazine Enthusiasts, there is a sizable population of readers who still haven't experienced the exhilaration of completing a cryptic grid.

Well, bewildered solver, this is the column you've been waiting for! It's the first in a series of master classes designed to explain the different types of cryptic clues. In the cryptic classroom, you will find straightforward lessons, examples broken down from the constructor's perspective, an inside peek at clue writing, and opportunities to practice solving clues, all focusing on one type of cryptic clue per issue.

Before we get to this month's topic, there is one important thing you need to know about cryptic clues, and it is the reason I couldn't solve cryptic crosswords as a teenager: **Cryptic clues are partly literal, and partly wordplay.** Read that sentence again. Now read it out loud. Now whisper it to your significant other. I'll wait here...

Are you back? Good. Let's explore clueing in more detail by creating both a literal and a wordplay clue for the word RESIST. A regular crossword may clue this with the word "refrain." We can use "refrain" as the literal part of our cryptic clue. Now we'll dress up our clue with some wordplay. This is where cryptics earn their triple-lightbulb rating. There are many different types of wordplay to master if you want to solve a cryptic, but today, we will only focus on anagrams.

Two possible anagrams of RESIST are "sister" and "set sir."

We could use either

of these as our wordplay portion of the clue, but I prefer "sister." To complete our clue, we must remember that **anagram wordplay always includes an indicator word.** This is a word or phrase that suggests a rearrangement of some kind. "Scrambled," "shuffled," "ordered," "mixed-up," "crazy"—there are many possibilities. For our example, let's use the indicator word "twisted." Thus, our wordplay portion of the clue is "Twisted sister" (which, coincidentally, was the quintessential hair metal band of the 1980s).

Now that we have determined our literal and wordplay segments, we need to put them together in a way that, hopefully, reads like a clue with surface meaning. "Twisted Sister refrain (6)" does the job nicely. In this case, the wordplay comes first, and the literal part follows. It's up to the solver to determine the dividing point between the literal and the wordplay parts. It's important to note also that any added punctuation or capitalization can usually be ignored.

Another possible clue for RESIST is "Refrain from disorganizing set, sir (6)." In this example, the literal part comes first. The anagram indicator word is "disorganizing."

A tip for solving anagram clues is to look at the answer length (shown in parentheses). Since our answer is 6 letters long, solvers should look for a word (or consecutive words) in the clue that totals six letters in length to be anagrammed.

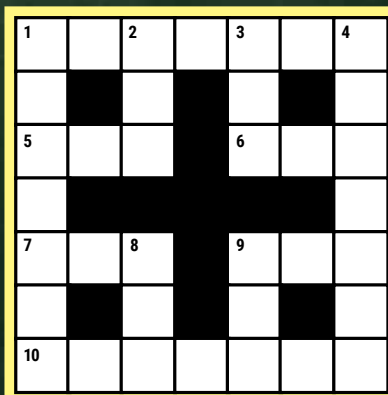
It's practice time! Try your hand at solving this mini cryptic. Every clue features an anagram in the wordplay segment.

ACROSS

1. Woe! Messy diapers (7)
5. Act poorly, Mr. Mistoffelees (3)
6. Haul two wrecks (3)
7. One of the Stooges is confused emo (3)
9. Fib manipulated law enforcement agency (3)
10. Shuffling, dealing, winning (for now) (7)

DOWN

1. Botched medical is separator of dollars and cents (7)
2. TSA organized test for high school students (3)
3. Garfunkel stirred tar (3)
4. Owl grin disturbed author J.K. (7)
8. Ear-bending years (3)
9. Thurs. follower splintered fir (3)



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