

# A Beginner's Guide to Completing a Cryptic Crossword

1. Identify the indicator words. Knowing what type of wordplay is at hand is half the battle.
  2. Anagrams, hidden words, and homophones tend to be easier to solve, so try to find those clues first. These clues have relevant indicator words.
  3. Double definitions can be easy to solve as well. Although these clues lack an indicator word, the clues can be easy to spot because they are often as short as two or three words.
  4. If you get stuck on longer or more difficult clues (these are often charades or combination clues), try solving them using only the literal portion of the clue. Knowing that the literal portion is at the beginning or end of the clue, it's often easy to guess which chunk of the clue is the literal part. The number of letters in the answer (provided in parentheses) plus any crossing letters you have in place can be big helpers. If you think you know the answer based on the literal clue, it's easier to reverse engineer the wordplay to see if it fits your hunch.
  5. Combination clues are common, especially for longer grid entries.
  6. As always, try to ignore surface meaning and punctuation—except when a clue ends with an exclamation point, which indicates an & lit. clue; or a question mark, which indicates a punny answer.
  7. Solve with a friend! My fellow Games Magazine Enthusiast and longtime friend, Rebekkah Wilkin, and I routinely work on a cryptic crossword together on the weekends. Between the two of us, we can complete any grid that comes our way—usually. It's interesting to see how two people can interpret a clue in different ways. Having a different perspective can often help you think through a challenging clue.
  8. Check the answers! The wordplay is always explained in the answers, so consider each answer as a little tutorial lesson.
- Now, try this puzzle, which consists of mostly combination clues.

## ACROSS

1. Songbird beheaded; anxiety is tremendous (7)
5. Scruffy, topless hunk bewitching temp (7)
6. Sanctimoniously, Stallone goes after Pence payment pledge (7)
7. Can't take Delaware's admitting exam (7)

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1. Outperformed, Danson consumes booze quietly (7)
2. Sing the praises of eating carbon-free cake (to go) (7)
3. Bro's counterpart and unbounded Yemeni turned back enemy (7)
4. Actress Blanchett (of course!) with feline-inspired makeup (3,4)

