

A Cryptic Crossword Puzzle in Honor of Martin Gardner

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About Cryptic Crosswords

Although most Americans have not been exposed to cryptic crosswords, they are the more popular form of crossword in England. The unusual diagrams are the most visible difference from conventional crosswords, but the real difference is in the clues. In a conventional crossword, a clue is a simple definition or synonym of the answer. In a cryptic crossword, the clue contains a definition, but it also contains some wordplay giving another route to the answer. Thus, each clue provides an independent, hopefully entertaining, word puzzle.

The main challenge in cryptic crosswords lies in figuring out how to parse the clues. Here is a simple example. (The (6) following the clue means that the answer has six letters. (5, 3) would indicate a five letter word followed by a three letter word.)

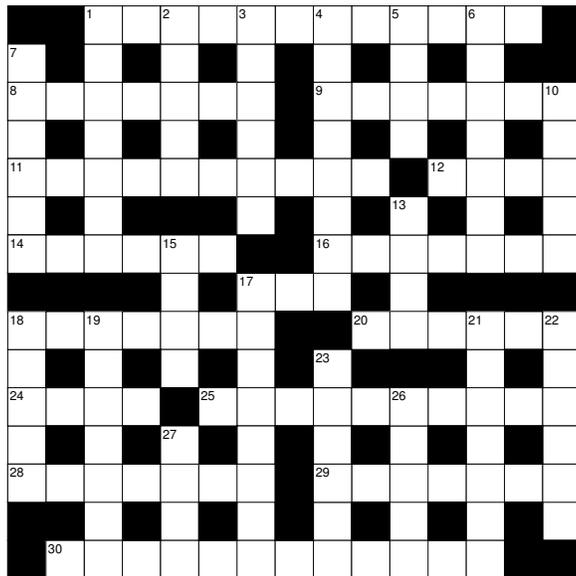
Don't succumb to Twisted Sister. (6)

The answer is "resist". If you've never done a cryptic crossword before, this will not be obvious. The tricky thing about the clues is that the wording and punctuation often lead you away from the answer, and towards an unrelated, whimsical interpretation. Once the above clue is more elaborately punctuated, the answer becomes less mysterious.

Let's adopt the following "extended punctuation" conventions: parentheses are used for grouping, and brackets [,] are used to enclose words that need to be substituted with a synonym. This will become clearer below. Here is the newly punctuated version of our clue:

[Don't succumb to] (twisted "sister") (6)

This punctuation makes it apparent that "don't succumb to" is the definition, and the wordplay consists of twisting (i.e., forming an anagram of) the letters of "sister".



Across

- 1 In the cinema, thematic allegory is rarely precise. (12)
- 8 Abruptly start east, side by side. (7)
- 9 Tangle, tangle, tangle – finish with grace. (7)
- 11 Lunatic incites officer to retract offer – not quite rational. (10)
- 12 Idly alter end of poem. (4)
- 14 Swallow most of cocktail. (6)
- 16 A tall, hollow insect: get one in Georgia. (7)
- 17 Enjoyment ends if you frown. (3)
- 18 Fish dinner, without marlin tail? I'm a skeptic. (7)
- 20 Sly mob defaced sign. (6)
- 24 Plans for bouncing spam. (4)
- 25 Saint from Malta to lead traveler who's lost faith. (5, 5)
- 28 Actions intended to elicit a response strangely limit us. (7)
- 29 Time to ascend crest – take out notes, divide into three. (7)
- 30 Helga, an ex-fox, needs work to become a flexible model. (12)

Down

- 1 Top off Perrier with a bit of rum – that's beginning to get more festive. (7)
- 2 Educate retinue. (5)
- 3 Imply ailment ends, then begins. (6)
- 4 Nationality of a man harboring Greenland's founder. (8)
- 5 Thought that's four-fifths perfect. (4)
- 6 A boy with some dingy lamp! (7)
- 7 Occurs throughout first presentation; assimilate half. (6)
- 10 Crushed talus in oil-producing state. (5)
- 13 Pay about 50, as you like it, perhaps. (4)
- 15 Some prions found in plasma. (4)
- 17 Ability to choose document that's priceless? (4, 4)
- 18 For amusement, go risk life. (5)
- 19 Alligator could be violent – repel it. (7)
- 21 Catcall comes before cant: true or false? (7)
- 22 Lion is mighty surly, at first – it's in restraints. (6)
- 23 Search all over Texas for mountain summit. (6)
- 26 One caught in heartless, flabbergasting affair. (5)
- 27 Left an Italian in orbit. (4)

Usually the definition occurs at either the beginning or the end of the clue, so the first thing to do when you see a clue is to try to pick out the definition. Then look for cue words indicating the kind of wordplay involved. Anagrams are common – look for words like “broken”, “scrambled”, “disturbed”, “out”, etc. But there are many other kinds of wordplay allowed, and often a single clue will contain multiple kinds of wordplay.

Here is a more complicated example, that doesn't use an anagram, appropriately punctuated:

([Shady scheme:] “way”) to become [a mathematician] (6)

The answer is “Conway”, i.e., a mathematician; the substitution for shady scheme is “con”. Note that, as with conventional crosswords, substitutions can yield more specific words: [state] can be “Texas”. However, [Texas] can't be “state”, but [Texas, e.g.] could be.

Another form of wordplay involves picking out pieces of words or phrases. E.g., [the heart of Texas] could be “x” (also “exa”); [some fish] indicates merely that some of the letters of “fish” should be used; [the head of state] is “s”. Sometimes the entire answer is literally spelled out, hidden in the clue:

[Edge] (in “the middle”) (3) = HEM

Sometimes the wordplay will consist merely of a second definition, using a different sense of the word:

[Canine] [speaker] (6) = WOOFER

In addition to being scrambled or picked out, letters can be reversed: backward could be read as back “ward” = “draw”. In general, any word that makes sense as an operation to apply to a string of letters can be used that way. When combined with the rule that substitutions can be made arbitrarily, this is theoretically all you need to know to solve cryptic crosswords. However, there are a lot of standard patterns and substitutions. Some of the more frequent substitutions are Roman numerals ([six] = “VI”), compass directions ([point] = “N”, “S”, “E”, ...), foreign articles ([“the” French] = “le”), and common abbreviations.

There are two special punctuation conventions that deserve mention. When a clue ends with a question mark, it often flags a pun, or an outrageous substitution. When a clue ends with an exclamation mark, it signals

what's called an "and literal" clue: instead of being entirely separate, the normal definition and the wordplay then overlap completely – the clue can be read both as a normal definition, and literally as instructions for forming the word.

Finally, be warned that many clues use several of the above techniques, all at once! For more examples of cryptic crossword clues, see <http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/wordgame/cluesolv.htm>.

The "extended punctuation" conventions used here are not standard, but seem to me to be a reasonable way to explain clues (and to justify answers!).

WARNING – the answers are on the next page.

Answers

Across

- 1 (In “the cinema thematic allegory is rarely”) [precise] = MATHEMATICAL
- 8 ((“Abruptly” start) “east”) [side by side] = ABREAST
- 9 (Tangle (“tangle” (“tangle” finish))) [with grace] = ELEGANT
- 11 ((Lunatic “incites”) (“officer” to retract (“offer” not quite))) [rational] = SCIENTIFIC
- 12 (“Idly” alter end of) [poem] = IDYL
- 14 [Swallow] (most of [cocktail]) = MARTIN
- 16 (“A” (“tall” hollow) [insect] get [one]) [in Georgia] = ATLANTA
- 17 [Enjoyment] (ends “if” “you” “frown”) = FUN
- 18 ([Fish] (“dinner” without (“marlin” tail))) [I’m a skeptic] = GARDNER
- 20 (“Sly mob” defaced) [sign] = SYMBOL
- 24 [Plans] for (bouncing “spam”) = MAPS
- 25 ([Saint] “from” (“Malta” to lead)) [traveler who’s lost faith] = PETER FROMM
- 28 [Actions intended to elicit a response] (strangely “limit us”) = STIMULI
- 29 ([Time] [to ascend] (“crest” take out [notes])) , [divide into three] = TRISECT
- 30 (“Helga an ex-fox” needs work) to become [a flexible model] = HEXAFLEXAGON

Down

- 1 ((Top off “Perrier”) with (a bit of “rum”) that’s beginning) to get [more festive] = MERRIER
- 2 [Educate] [retinue] = TRAIN
- 3 [Imply] (“ailment” ends then begins) = ENTAIL
- 4 [Nationality] of (“a man” harboring [Greenland’s founder]) = AMERICAN
- 5 [Thought] that’s (four-fifths [perfect]) = IDEA
- 6 [A boy with some dingy lamp] , (“A” [boy] with some “dingy lamp”) = ALADDIN
- 7 [Occurs throughout] ((first “presentation”) (“assimilate” half)) = PASSIM
- 10 (Crushed “talus”) [in oil-producing state] = TULSA
- 13 (“Pay” about [50]) [as you like it, perhaps] = PLAY
- 15 (Some “prions”) [found in plasma] = IONS
- 17 [Ability to choose] ([document] that’s [priceless?]) = FREE WILL
- 18 [For amusement] [go risk life] = GAMES
- 19 [Alligator, could be] (violent “repel it”) = REPTILE
- 21 ([Catcall] comes before [cant]) [true or false] = BOOLEAN
- 22 ((“Lion” “is” “mighty” “surly” at first) “it”’s in) [restraints] = LIMITS
- 23 (Search “all over Texas”) for [mountain summit] = VERTEX
- 26 ([One] caught in (heartless “flabbergasting”)) [affair] = FLING
- 27 ([Left] [an Italian]) [in orbit] = LUNA