

PUZZLE WRAPAROUND

The new *Harper's Puzzle*, which makes its first monthly appearance on page 87, is an American adaptation of English-style crosswords. English crossword puzzles are different from American ones. In place of definitions, they offer clues which have to be solved, clues which exploit the deviousness of the English language in order to create a game of wits.

In the *Harper's Puzzle* clues, every effort will be made to mislead you purely through the use of language. The answers will be common words; if unusual words are ever used they will be labeled. Forget, thank God, those five-letter words for Bantu hartebeest. You will be called upon to use your head, not a dictionary. It will not hurt, however, if your head contains a devious mind.

WHAT IS A CLUE?

A clue is simply two indications of a desired answer, written consecutively. One is a definition (i.e., a synonym); the other, called the subsidiary, may be either a second definition or a description of the way the answer looks, sounds, or is constructed. This could be seen as an advantage over American puzzles because, in getting *two* indications of the answer, you will generally *know* that the answer you've found is the right one. The trouble is that the clue is out to fool you.

The two parts of the clue may be separated by punctuation, but more often they are written together as a single thought or sentence. This is where the deception comes in. We don't often realize it, but language—at least the English language—operates largely on assumptions. A good clue will try to use those assumptions against you. To decipher a clue it is necessary to forget your assumptions as to what the clue *seems* to be saying in order to learn what the clue is actually saying.

Here is a typical clue: "Row about stray dog (7)." (*The number in parentheses after a clue indicates the length of the answer, saving you the bother of counting squares in the diagram.*) "Row about stray dog" creates an immediate assumption as to its meaning: it refers to a fight over a homeless animal—and it is baffling since no word in English carries that meaning. But wait. The words can be read differently. Forget the "meaning" of the phrase and think of the clue as an instruction. As an instruction, the words say: a word meaning "row" about a word meaning "stray" will produce a word meaning "dog." If the clue were repunctuated "Row" about "stray": "dog," any puzzle lover would suddenly feel free to consider that the "row" being sought might be the other pronunciation of the word, meaning *paddle* or *line* or *tier*, and the "stray" being sought might be the verb meaning "to err," not the adjective. Indeed those are both the case, and, with a little thought, a solver can construct the answer TERRIER. I(Err)ier.

Here's another typical clue: "Lamps repaired for a song (5)." A sign for a fix-it shop? An obvious assumption. But no. As an instruction, this clue says: the word "lamps" repaired in order to produce a word meaning "a song." In the language of clues, the answer, PSALM, defined by "a song," may be said to be printed incorrectly as the word "lamps," and if it were "repaired"—i.e., corrected or fixed—it would produce the answer. Mentally repunctuate the clue as: "lamps," repaired, for "a song," and the process becomes—almost—obvious.

Whether you realize it or not, you've just learned the three things you need to know about clues:

1. A clue contains, in two distinct parts, a definition and a subsidiary indication of the same answer. (There is an exception; see below.)
2. Any process you are to follow to find the answer will be told to you, in a veiled way, by the clue.
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THE DEFINITION

In deciphering a clue, your first task is to figure out which word or words are the definition and which the subsidiary. To do so you need to know what will constitute each part. The definition will usually be just that—a simple synonym. But rest assured—of course—that if "post" is going to be used in the clue to define the answer POLE, every effort will be made to make you think of the word in the sense of "mail," or "display," or even "bounce up and down on a trotting horse." That's only sporting. But the definition may also be oblique, or even be a pun. For example, "I run" might define MILER or RIVER or MOTOR or even POLITICIAN; and "They're groovy!" might define RUTS or NOTCHES or even RECORDS. (Note:

punctuation is conventional in these puzzles: question marks and exclamation points in clues are used only to indicate a pun or some other outrageous misuse of meaning.) In looking for the definition, keep a literal mind, and remember that it's your assumption that "stray dog" is a single thought that misleads you from considering the words separately.

THE SUBSIDIARY INDICATIONS

The first rule of clues is that a clue will give you a definition of an answer, and then it will give you a second indication of that answer. There are eight different methods the clue may employ in order to give you this second, or subsidiary, indication.

1. *Second definitions.* Often the clue writer will simply juxtapose two different meanings of a single answer in such a way as to cloud the meaning of either or both. For example, "Crib author (3)" isn't a reference to plagiarism; it is simply two meanings of PEN put together to misdirect you to think of "crib" as a verb and "author" as a noun instead of the other way around. Here's another: "Sound from a blind charlatan (5)." Baffling? Try repunctuating it as "Sound from a blind": "charlatan." Of course: QUACK. And since you did that so easily, see if your assumptions lead you astray on these two:

(a) Associate suggests recount (6).

(b) Your very top chopped liver (4). (Answers on the puzzle page.) And if you'd like a head start, look at clue 28A in this month's puzzle.

2. *Charades.* Many words break down into convenient parts, so a clue, in addition to defining the answer, may as a subsidiary define its component parts. PARROT, for example, is the word PAR next to the word ROT; it might be clued as "Repeat the average nonsense (6)." (Repunctuated, it's "Repeat": "the average," "nonsense.") There's the definition of the answer, and beside it definitions of its two component words. What could be easier? What indeed? When, on occasion, the components read together in some sensible way, the clue may even offer a pun on the entire word, as in "Sinister purpose of an auction? (10)" Answer: FOR-BIDDING. (Note the question mark indicating a pun.) Try these, and then, in this month's puzzle, try clue 12D.

(c) He poisoned Cleopatra with Irish slander (7)

(d) Scheme to put a horizontal line atop a vertical line! (6)

The second rule of clues is that if you are to follow any process in order to get your secondary indication of the answer, the clue will, in some veiled way, "tell" you what to do.

3. *Containers.* Some words break into components, like Charades, but have their component parts inside and outside rather than side by side. Our old friend TERRIER is one, and "Row about stray dog" is a Container clue. As you get used to clue-solving, you'll learn to respond to certain words in a clue as if a warning flag had gone up. In this case, the word is "about." Similarly, when you see words such as "in," "around," "holding," "embraces," and "on the periphery" in a clue, you should be alert to the possibility that they may be telling you to put one word inside or outside another. Consider this clue: "Cooks like getting into spoilages (6)." "Getting into" should set off the alarm and lead you to consider this possible repunctuation: "Cooks": "like" getting into "spoilages." Then test it out. Is there a word meaning "like" which, if it "got into" a word meaning "spoilages," would produce a word meaning "cooks"? Yes, RO(AS)TS. The clue defined the answer, ROASTS (with a little misdirection to lead you to think of "cooks" as a noun), and then it "told" you one way to go about constructing the word. This in essence is the pattern of all compound, or process, clues. No matter how complex they get—and they do occasionally get quite complex—they will all have this essential structure. Try another, and then look at clue 2D.

(e) When Peg holds a note, it comes out clear (5)

Remember that the components may be more than two words, as in:

(f) Someone else not found in a lady's embrace (7)

4. *Beheadings, no ends, et cetera.* Following the same logic as Containers and Charades, some answers can be described to you in a clue as being transformable into another word with the addition or subtraction of a first or last letter—or of an entire word part. Words such as "almost," "not quite," "tailless," "headless," "don't start," "missing a" are typical instructions for this sort of process. Try these, and then try clue 23A.

(g) Scandinavian girl almost sitting on a horse (6)

(h) "Topless ugly women—merely irritations (6)

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5. *Reversals*. Similarly, a clue may want to tell you that the answer being sought, if spelled backward, will spell another word, or words. If the clue uses a word or phrase which has as one of its meanings "reversed," "going backward," "going the wrong way," or, in the case of a Down clue, "turned over," "going up," "upset," "rising," be prepared to look for a reversal. For example: "Members remitted binder (5)." The word "remitted" literally means "sent back," ergo: "Members" remitted: "binder"—a word meaning "members," PARTS, sent backward will produce a word meaning "binder," i.e., the answer STRAP. Simple? Elementary! Now try clue 43D. (The word "rising" should alert you.)

The reversal may be of more than one word, as in:

- (i) Put up one store drain in delicatessen (8) (*Down clue*).
- (j) A prostitute's back sees many beds (6)

6. *Anagrams*. The most common subsidiary indication of an answer is to give an anagram of its letters, and it is in anagrams, and the language indicating them, that cryptic clues reach their glory (or totally flip out, depending on your bias). In the language of these puzzles, any word or phrase that has as one of its meanings "to change the natural order of" or "in an unnatural form" may be telling you to make an anagram of the adjoining word or words. The range is almost limitless.

It's impossible here to give you examples of all the forms of anagram indications you may encounter, but you'll soon learn to be wary when you see words such as "corrupted," "bad," "naughty," "torn," "confused," "in motion," "dancing," "possibly," "could be," or indeed any word or phrase which suggests change or motion or wrongness. The anagrams will always be of the letters exactly as you see them on the page, i.e., "Mad Doctor No" would not be an anagram of DR. NO. These examples will have to suffice, along with clue 24D.

- (k) Pitchman's deceptive replies (7).

- (l) Deny it if given wrong name (8)

(m) Beginner might be a riot in it (9) (Here the apostrophe is misleading; it looks like the possessive, but it is actually the contraction of "is." Read the clue as: "Pitchman" is deceptive "replies." Got it?)

7. *Homonyms*. Instead of directing your attention to how an answer is spelled, the subsidiary may tell you that the answer sounds like another word, or words. Indications such as "we hear" or "resounds in" or "when spoken" will be used to lead you to listen to the answer rather than try to construct it. Here's a nice misleading one which you ought to be able to work out if you resist your natural assumptions:

- (n) Shrubbery in vocal use (4)

And, as usual, the homonym may be of more than one word, as in:

- (o) Ghost speaks of one way to kill a fish (6)

Now try this month's clue 38A.

8. *Hidden*. There is one final way the clue may give you a second indication of a desired answer, and it is both the easiest and the most deceptive. The clue may spell out the answer right before your eyes, either within another word or as a bridge between several words. Watch for indications such as "seen in," "containing," or "some of." For example: "Part of Asia Minor describes what position Iago holds (5)." What does "position Iago" hold? For one thing, it holds the answer, IONIA. Did you see it, staring you right in the face? Now try these:

- (p) Beg for core of apple a day (5)

- (q) Head on saffron talisman requires it (7)

I won't give you an example from this month's puzzle because hidden clues only work when they are unexpected. I'll only tell you there are three clues of this type in the puzzle.

COMPLEX CLUES

These are the eight different methods a clue may employ to give you a second indication of a desired answer. Now for the kicker: when a clue is instructing you how to spell or construct the answer, it may tell you to perform more than one process in a single clue. The answer may be described as, for example, a reversal containing an anagram, or an anagram next to a synonym which contains a beheaded word. Just remember that, no matter how complex the processes are which will lead you to the answer, the clue will always tell you what to do. One example will have to suffice: "Return to look around dilapidated tavern for tires (9)." By now you should be ready to suspect a number of words in this clue. "Return,"

for example, should suggest a reversal. Return what? Return "to look." "To look" is to see (always start with the easiest choice), so do what the clue says—"return" it: EES. The word "around" suggests that EES is "around" another word. It's unlikely that a nine-letter word will start with EE, so the possibility is E-----ES. You consider putting EES "around" a six-letter word meaning "dilapidated tavern." But wait. Your now-warped mind should consider another possibility: "dilapidated" (which means "broken down") might indicate an anagram. Indeed, "tavern" is six letters long, so you give it a try. E(NTREAV)ES? Run to the dictionary to see if it's an obscure word for automobile wheels ("tires"). No, I told you there will be very few obscure words. Try again for a more common word. There it is: E(NERVAT)ES, the *other* meaning of "tires," the verb which means "weakens."

The process may sound complicated, but all you've been doing in your head is finding the proper way to repunctuate the clue: Return "to look" around dilapidated "tavern" for "tires." Of course it may be possible to repunctuate a clue in more than one way, and with a complex clue the correct instruction may not reveal itself at once—but this is a crossword puzzle and you will eventually get some help from the diagram.

So there you are. You have the rules, and even—if you want them—a few head starts on this month's puzzle. The sample clues I've given are only a beginning, and it may take a while before the language of clues really sings to you, but plunge in, resist assumptions, keep a literal mind, and it won't be at all long before you join the elite ranks of mental deviates who instantly recognize that *The Last of the Mohicans* in a clue may merely indicate the letter "s," "half a sixpence" may be defining ENCE, and "tailless bird" BIR. Very well-known symbols and abbreviations are used in construction-type clues, and you'll soon learn to recognize them because they pop up continually. When you see "North," "South," "East," or "West" in a clue, think of "N," "S," "E," or "W." Seeing "left" or "right," think of "l," "r," or "rt." Seeing "nothing" or "goose egg" or "love" (as in a tennis score), think of "o." For "about," keep in mind "re" (meaning "concerning") or "c" (the abbreviation for "circa"). "Note" may refer to notes of the scale: "do," "re," "mi," et cetera. "One" may mean "a," "an," or "I." Numbers may indicate Roman numerals: "V," "X," "L," "C," "D," and "M." "Steamship" may indicate "ss"; "saint" or "street," "st." "Acceptable" or "high-class" may define "U" (as opposed to non-U); "first-rate" may mean "A1"; "soft," "P" and "loud," "F" (the musical dynamic marks). These are just a few indications, all common. Unusual abbreviations will always be indicated by a word or phrase such as "briefly" or "in short," e.g., "general, in short" would indicate GEN as part of a word. Here's just one example of a Down clue employing a common symbol (which also contains a dazzling definition):

- (r) Sign for and take \$100 off vacation dwelling on beach (9)

As I mentioned earlier, there is one exception to the rule that clues always divide into two parts. In some pun clues (always indicated by "?" or "!"), the *entire clue* can be read two ways to give the required double indication of an answer. Examples: "Kind of sentence delivered by a hung jury? (9)" which is a play on two meanings of SUSPENDED; and "Arranges zero gains? (9)" which, repunctuated, is only a subsidiary (arranges "zero gains") but whose entire process defines the answer, ORGANIZES. This month's clue 11A is this sort of clue.

I've saved until last one of the most enjoyable features of the *Harper's Puzzle*. Each month's puzzle will have a gimmick of some sort, fully explained in that puzzle's instructions, which you will have to solve or work out in addition to solving the clues. The diagrams may be of odd shapes and sizes, or the words you place in the diagram may vary somewhat from the clue answers according to a pattern you'll have to puzzle out as you go along. The monthly game gives to these puzzles one thing that normal crosswords never have: a satisfying conclusion—when the mystery of the gimmick is finally unraveled and all the final pieces of the puzzle suddenly fall together.

There will be a contest accompanying the *Harper's Puzzle*. One-year subscriptions to *Harper's Magazine* will be awarded to the senders of the first three correct solutions opened (we will open submissions not in order of receipt but all at once, in order to be fair to contestants in outlying areas). The puzzle page tells you how to enter.

I am indebted to Stephen Sondheim for several examples in this article—and, indeed, for introducing me to these puzzles and their principles in the first place.

—R. M.

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