

HOW DO YOU SOLVE CRYPTIC CROSSWORD CLUES?

A cryptic crossword clue has two distinct parts, in either order:

WORDPLAY | DEFINITION

DEFINITION | WORDPLAY

What kind of wordplay? Only what the clue clearly tells you to do ... even if it isn't clear when you first read it. Any kind of fair wordplay is on the table; the following examples show the most common kinds.

Classy lady | **made** bananas (4)

MADE
DAME

▶ **ANAGRAM** Look for words indicating motion or disorder

Numbers in parentheses are how long the word is — commas indicate **TWO WORDS** (3,5) like so.

Caused to be **endlessly** | **upset** (3)

MADE
MAD

▶ **DELETION** Look for words indicating loss or abridgment

Composed bit of dialogue for **French girl** (8)

MADE + LINE
MADELINE

▶ **CHARADE** Build an answer out of synonyms and other bits and pieces

Created | **commercial** **plugging me** (4)

AD ME
M(AD)E

▶ **CONTAINER** Look for words indicating covering or inserting

Flipped **processed** | **cheese** (4)

MADE
EDAM

▶ **REVERSAL** Look for words indicating turning or rising

Housekeeper | **appointed by phone** (4)

“MADE”
MAID

▶ **HOMOPHONE** Look for words indicating speaking or hearing

Forced | **some comma** **deletion** (4)

MADE

▶ **HIDDEN** Look for words indicating an inner, partial or connected nature

Made | **like cheese that went bad** (6)

MOLDED

▶ **DOUBLE DEFINITION** No wordplay; just two meanings for one word

- The “surface” reading of a clue is intended to mislead. Deceptive capitalization? Odd punctuation? Yes and yes.
- Clues may have multiple kinds of wordplay. Keep an eye out for small pieces of wordplay within clues, such as “first in line” for L or “heart of stone” for O, and for common figures of speech, such as “carbon” for C, “Hawaii” for HI, or “five” for V.
- A question mark often warns the solver of an incoming pun.
- An exclamation point at the end may mean the clue is both 100% wordplay and 100% definition. This is called an **&LIT**, as in “and literally so.” For instance, “Horribly vile!” (4) is 100% a definition for EVIL, but also 100% wordplay instructions to treat V-I-L-E horribly — the “disorder” sense of anagrams.



Cryptics are trying to trick you, but fairly: When you get the answer, you'll see how the whole clue leads you there. Visit therackenfracker.com/start-here for more solving guides and beginner puzzles. **One last recommendation — bring a friend! Two minds are better than one.**