

Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners

U3A Sample Module

Module 1: Getting Started

This 20 page document contains the whole of the first chapter of the course book *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords*:

Contents

1. Getting started

2. Essential Building Blocks

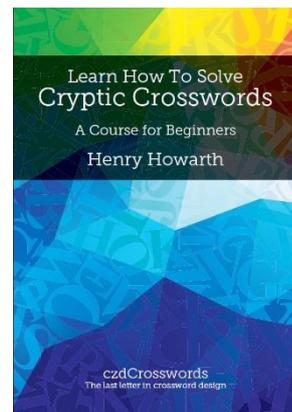
3. Taking Clue Structure Further

4. Completing the itinerary of clue types

5. Tackling trickier clues

6. Developing your crossword skills further

Reference Tools



It enables U3A members to evaluate the course and groups to try the first module.

Further details about the course and getting copies of the course book are available in the document 'Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords U3A course guide'. This can be downloaded from the Subject Advice page in the Resources section of the U3A website by following this link:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/resources/subjects/272-cryptic-crosswords>

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Chapter 1: Getting started

Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the two simplest types of cryptic clue—Hidden Words and Anagrams. It establishes the principles of how cryptic clues are structured; what they consist of and how they work. It also draws the distinction between what a clue appears to mean and the cryptic interpretation which leads to the answer.

The chapter includes exercises to develop skills in finding hidden words and anagrams, and practice clues for you to apply these skills in solving simple Hidden Word and Anagram clues.

The practice puzzle at the end of the chapter will help you consolidate what you have learnt. A section explaining the general features of crossword puzzles and how they work comes just before the practice puzzle.

This is an extract from the course book *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners*.

It is the first of 6 chapters, and each chapter is a course module.

Further information about the book is provided in a course guide at the U3A national website. The course guide is in the Subject Advice section for Cryptic Crosswords, under the Resources tab.

Hidden words

Words hidden within other words can often occur in written English.

Here are some examples of hidden words:

the word 'rack' is hidden in the word 'cracking' cracking

the word 'last' is hidden in the word 'plaster' plaster

the word 'agent' is hidden in the word 'magenta' magenta

Here are some examples in which all the hidden words are types of fish:

cod is hidden in encoded

hake is hidden in shaken

eel is hidden in Speelman

Hidden words can also occur across word boundaries. For example:

the word 'met' is hidden in 'time trials' time trials

the word 'each' is hidden in 'idea change' idea change

the word 'toffee' is hidden in 'best of feelings' best of feelings

It is harder to spot hidden words when they run across word boundaries.

Practice with hidden words

These activities are designed to give you practice with the skill of spotting hidden words before moving on to the Hidden Word clue:

- How many hidden words of three or more letters can you find in Constantinople?
You will find the answer on page 20.
- Choose a few paragraphs of text in a newspaper or book and scan through them to spot hidden words.
See if you can find some hidden words that run across word boundaries.

The Hidden Word clue

Hidden Word clues use the idea that words can be found in other words or groups of words. The occurrence of hidden words in normal writing is unintentional, but in a Hidden Word clue the hidden word is deliberate and is the solution to the clue.

Here are our first examples of Hidden Word clues:

Clue 1:	Fish hidden in <u>creels</u> (3)	Answer:	EEL
Clue 2:	Bird hidden in hollow larch (3)	Answer:	OWL
Clue 3:	Item of furniture hidden in stables (5)	Answer:	TABLE

The answer is already underlined in Clue 1. Check that you can spot the answers in Clues 2 and 3—you may find it helpful to underline the hidden words.

These examples illustrate a couple of points about how crossword clues are presented:

- we are given the number of letters in the answer in brackets, which is a big help
- the answer, or solution, is often written in CAPITALS, because that is how we would write it in a crossword grid.

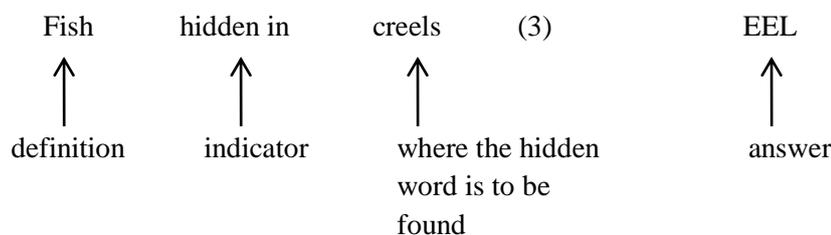
Structure of the Hidden Word clue

All Hidden Word clues have the same structure and this consists of three elements.

We can use Clue 1 to illustrate what these three elements are, with each element of the clue shown in *italics*:

<i>Fish</i> hidden in creels	a definition of the answer
Fish <i>hidden in</i> creels	an indicator to tell us it's a Hidden Word clue
Fish hidden in <i>creels</i>	and where the hidden word is to be found

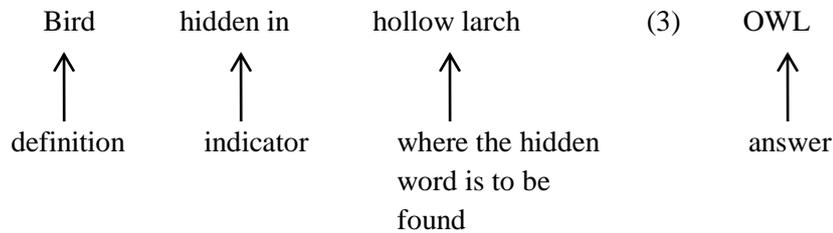
The structure of the clue can also be represented in a diagram:



Clue 2 has the same structure:

<i>Bird</i> hidden in hollow larch	a definition of the answer
Bird <i>hidden in</i> hollow larch	an indicator to tell us it's a Hidden Word clue
Bird hidden in <i>hollow larch</i>	and where the hidden word is to be found

And as a labelled diagram:



Now check that you can identify these three elements in Clue 3.

Hidden Word indicators

The Hidden Word indicator tells us to look for a hidden word and directs us to where it is to be found.

For a Hidden Word clue, the indicator doesn't have to be 'hidden in'—any word or phrase which indicates that the answer is to be found as a sequence of consecutive letters will do—such as 'inside', 'spotted in', 'held by', 'partly', 'revealing', 'in', 'section of' or 'some'.

So our three clues could be:

- Clue 1: Fish held by creels (3)
 Clue 2: Bird spotted in hollow larch (3)
 Clue 3: Item of furniture inside stables (5)

Where to find the definition of the answer

In the examples we have looked at so far, the definition of the answer comes at the beginning of the clue—but it could equally well come at the end.

So our three clues could be:

Clue 1: Creels holding fish (3)

Clue 2: Hollow larch conceals bird (3)

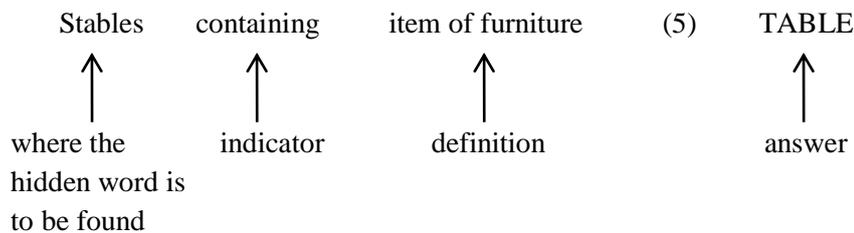
Clue 3: Stables containing item of furniture (5)

The structure is the same—the same three elements are present—but in a different order.

For Clue 3:

Stables containing <i>item of furniture</i> (5)	a definition of the answer
Stables <i>containing</i> item of furniture (5)	an indicator to tell us it's a Hidden Word clue
<i>Stables</i> containing item of furniture (5)	where the hidden word is to be found

And as a diagram:

**Practice with Hidden Word clues**

We have now covered what you need to know about the Hidden Word clue. The exercises on the next page are designed to give you practice in spotting hidden words and solving Hidden Word clues.

Hidden word exercises

Activities

A. Excluding plural nouns, find 19 five-letter hidden words in the following paragraph:

Many Londoners at the Hague station? Baloney! Slow, agonising journeys cast a real shadow over hope rail services could match essential needs. Bookings made at hotels are often settled late as Europeans lack cash, owners of franchises go bust and banks slam on gratuitous costs. Enough already!—in March I depart for the Maldives.

B. Can you find words meaning ‘period’, ‘traitor’ and ‘proportion’ in the word ‘generation’?

C. This exercise gives practice in spotting hidden words across word boundaries.

Example: Find a word meaning ‘ruler’ in ‘marque engraving’ (5) QUEEN

- 1 Find a word meaning ‘wishes’ in ‘attitudes I respect’ (7)
- 2 Find a word meaning ‘pursuing’ in ‘music has, in general’ (7)
- 3 Find a word meaning ‘back’ in ‘belief in ancestry’ (7)

The answers to these activities are on page 20.

Practice clues

Solve the following Hidden Word clues, making sure that you can identify the indicator and definition in each clue:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Young chap spotted in glade (3) | 6 Chameleon camouflages sign (3) |
| 2 Partly trimmed edge (3) | 7 Wake up in trousers (5) |
| 3 Gem found in chest on Exmoor (5) | 8 Some sacred area of land (4) |
| 4 Best section of light opera (3) | 9 Sitcom for TV features cosiness (7) |
| 5 Tree in Chelmsford (3) | 10 Sequence from J.S.Bach I eventually accomplish (7) |

Only some of the indicators in these practice clues were given as examples at the bottom of page 8. You will find a larger list of words that could be used as Hidden Word indicators in the Reference tools section on page 162.

The answers to these practice clues are on page 20.

Anagrams

An anagram is a word formed by rearranging the letters of another word, name or phrase.

Here are some examples of anagrams:

rat is an anagram of art:

A R T \Rightarrow R A T

fooled is an anagram of old foe:

O L D F O E \Rightarrow F O O L E D

alignment is an anagram of lamenting:

L A M E N T I N G \Rightarrow A L I G N M E N T

Finding anagrams

Now see if you can find words that are anagrams of the following:

gum, owl, drop, Mary, fates, flesh, hated, super, battle, hornet, reside

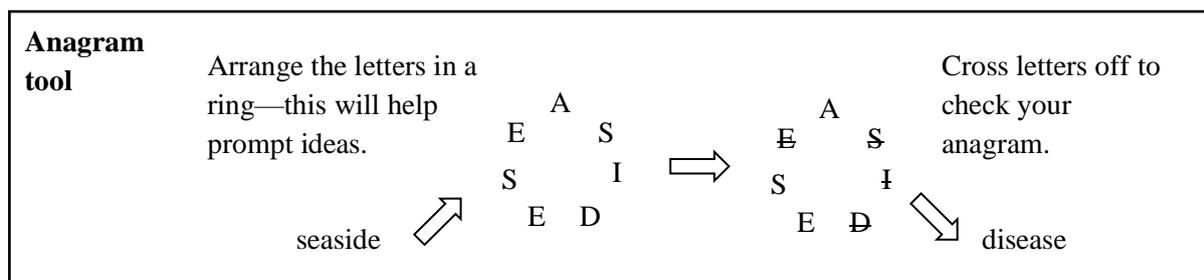
You will find the answers on page 21.

Anagram tool

Finding anagrams gets more challenging as the number of letters involved increases. Using the following technique can be helpful:

- write the letters in a rough circle to suggest possible orders of letters and letter groupings
- when you think you have the answer, cross the letters off in the order they are spelt in your answer to check that the anagram works.

This technique is demonstrated in the diagram to find an anagram of ‘seaside’:



The Anagram Clue

Here is our first example of an anagram clue:

Clue 1: Gain control of unruly stream (6) MASTER

All Anagram clues have the same structure and this consists of three elements:

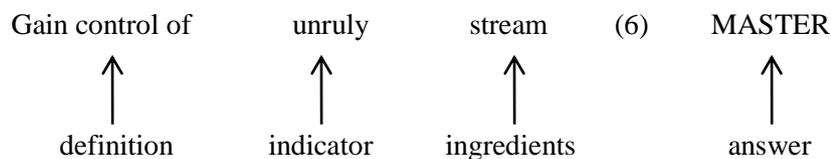
Gain control of unruly stream a definition of the answer

Gain control of *unruly* stream an indicator to tell us it's an Anagram clue

Gain control of unruly *stream* the **ingredients** for the anagram

The ingredients for the anagram are the letters we need to rearrange to get the answer. For this clue, we rearrange the letters in 'stream' to get the word MASTER—a word that can mean 'gain control of'.

The structure of the clue can also be represented in a diagram:



Anagram indicators

Any word or phrase that indicates a disturbance to the natural order of things will serve as an anagram indicator. For example 'in error', 'about', 'unusual', 'cooked', 'out', 'change' etc. You will find more examples of anagram indicators on page 163.

Here are some more clues to illustrate different anagram indicators:

Clue 2: Discontinue post *in error* (4) Answer: STOP

Clue 3: *Change* models infrequently (6) Answer: SELDOM

Clue 4: Coach *rearranged* the race (7) Answer: TEACHER

The ingredients for the anagram need to be adjacent to the indicator and, as is the case with Hidden Word clues, the definition may come at the beginning or at the end.

Sometimes the ingredients consist of more than one word, as shown by Clue 4.

What are the definitions and ingredients for each of Clues 2–4? The answers are on page 21.

Anagram exercises

The answers to all these exercise are on page 21.

Anagram activities

Find a word that is an anagram of each of the following groups of letters. Use the anagram tool (see page 11) for the longer ones:

A tca, ugbr, iptna, xtrpoe, managar, ooddefl, gsliplne

Now try these—each group of letters for the anagram is separated by a comma:

B a bit, has info, T.S.Eliot, wings? Ha!, calm Serb, melodic pact

Anagram practice

This exercise provides practice with anagrams in a format that is similar to the structure of an Anagram clue.

Example: What anagram of 'plate' is a word meaning 'jumped' ? (5) LEAPT

- 1 What anagram of 'eager' is a word meaning 'concur' ? (5)
- 2 What anagram of 'Nepal' is a word meaning 'flat' ? (5)
- 3 What anagram of 'garden' is a word meaning 'peril' ? (6)
- 4 What anagram of 'rearing' is a word meaning 'more annoyed' ? (7)

These next ones include anagram indicators:

Example What 'disorganised notes' is a word meaning 'rock' ? (5) STONE

- 5 What 'strange devil' is a word meaning 'existed' ? (5)
- 6 What 'unusual shape' is a word meaning 'period' ? (5)
- 7 What 'messy red rag' is a word meaning 'look at' ? (6)
- 8 What 'confused marine' is a word meaning 'stay' ? (6)

Practice clues

Solve the following—and identify the indicator, ingredients and definition in each clue:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Strange devil existed (5) | 6 Left altered fabric (4) |
| 2 Many lost out (4) | 7 Learnt about animal horn (6) |
| 3 Competitive group cooked meat (4) | 8 Told off idiot (4) |
| 4 Unusual pastel dishes (6) | 9 Domestic taverns refurbished (7) |
| 5 Delicate lager if blended (7) | 10 Burn my hat in a frenzy?—it's not true! (5,4) |

Clue structure fundamentals

Clue structure and wordplay

We have now covered two types of cryptic clue—Hidden Words and Anagrams—and found that both types have a structure consisting of three elements.

We have also found that for both types, getting to the answer involves performing an operation on groups of letters:

- finding a sequence of letters for a Hidden Word clue
- reordering a sequence of letters for an Anagram clue.

We can now make this structure more general, so that it works for both types of clue. Each Hidden Word or Anagram clue consists of:

definition	a definition of the answer	}	wordplay
indicator	this tells us what operation to perform		
ingredients	raw materials for the operation		

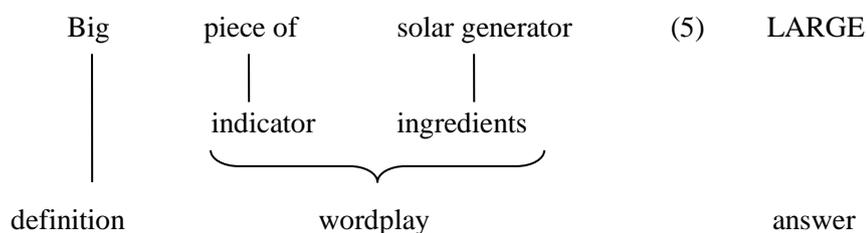
The indicator and ingredients are referred to together as the **wordplay**.

Let's confirm that this structure works, firstly with a Hidden word clue:

Big piece of solar generator (4) LARGE

<i>Big</i> piece of solar generator	definition	a definition of the answer	}	wordplay
Big <i>piece of</i> solar generator	indicator	it's a hidden word		
Big piece of <i>solar generator</i>	ingredients in ' <u>solar</u> <u>generator</u> '		

And as a labelled diagram:

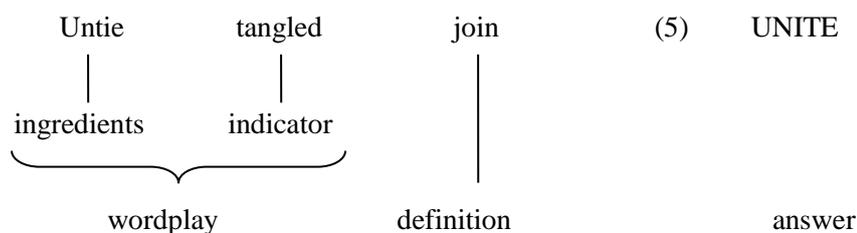


And now with an Anagram clue, this time with the definition at the end of the clue:

Untie tangled join (5) UNITE

Untie tangled <i>join</i>	definition	a definition of the answer	
Untie <i>tangled</i> join	indicator	it's an anagram	} wordplay
<i>Untie</i> tangled join	ingredients of U, N, T, I, E	

And as a labelled diagram:



We will find that most of the other types of cryptic clue use this structure—definition, indicator and ingredients—not just Hidden Word and Anagram clues.

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Surface meaning and cryptic reading

When we read, a complex process happens of which we are not consciously aware.

A simplified explanation of the process of reading is that the subconscious mind recognises words as groups of characters, and creates meaning using the context and a set of internalised grammatical rules.

We can't stop this process of creating meaning when we read—it's automatic.

So when we read Change models infrequently our mind will conjure up a plausible scenario from this. This might be about sticking to the same model of car, perhaps, or swapping photographic models in a fashion shoot. This process is enabled by our subconscious having identified 'change' as a verb, 'models' as a noun and 'infrequently' as an adverb—and by our memory of what these three words can mean.

But when the same text is a cryptic clue Change models infrequently (6) the meaning we get from interpreting the clue in the normal way—referred to in crossword terms as the **surface meaning**—will not lead us to the answer to the clue!

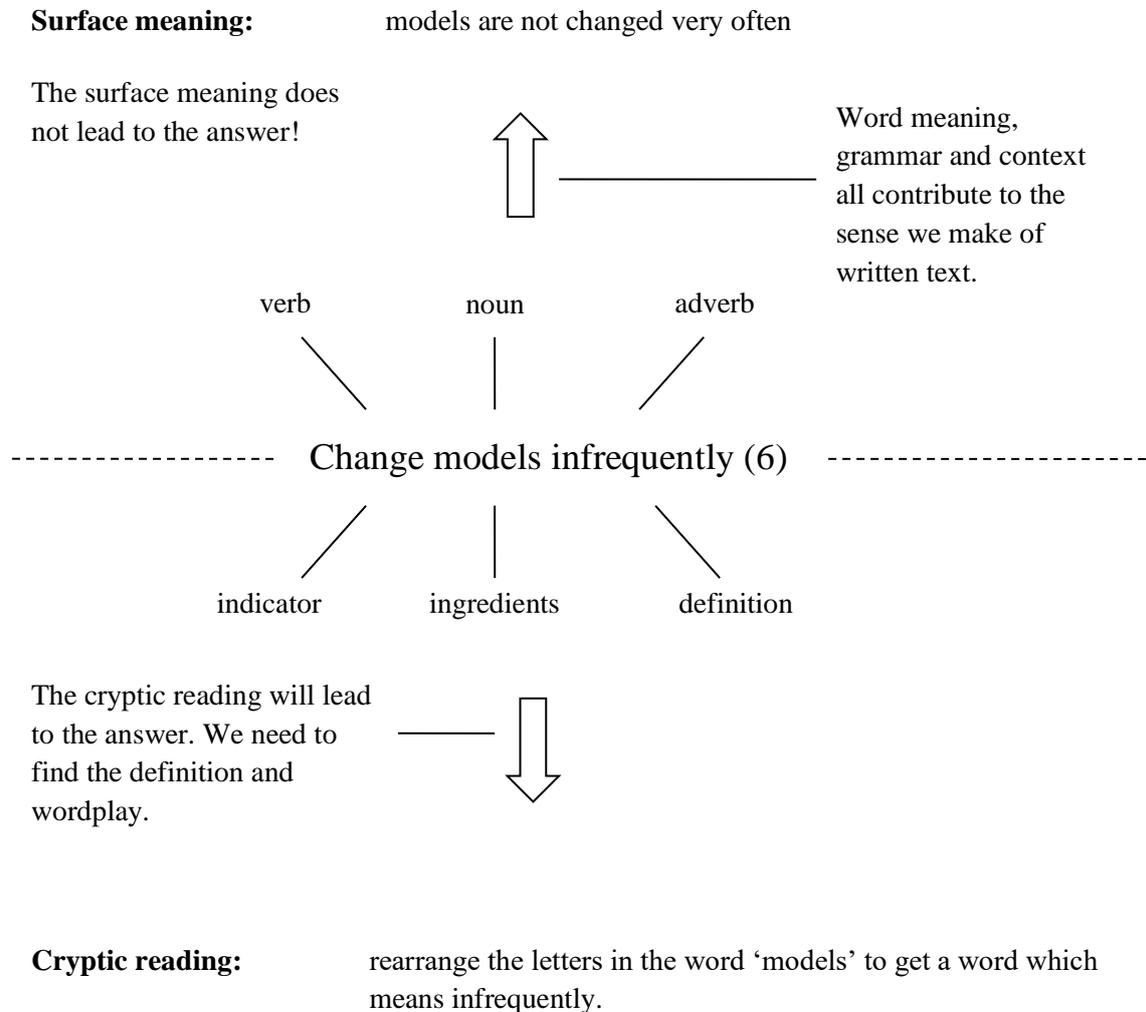
Instead, we need to ignore the surface meaning, and interpret the clue in a different way. We need to look 'under the surface' to find the cryptic structure of the clue:

- Where is the definition of the answer?
- What wordplay is involved?

This way of interpreting the clue is called the **cryptic reading**.

In this case, our cryptic reading is that 'change' is the indicator that tells us it's an Anagram clue, 'models' provides the ingredients for the anagram, and 'infrequently' is the answer definition. And this leads us to the answer—SELDOM.

Here is a diagram to summarise these two interpretations of a cryptic clue and compare the processes involved:



Getting prepared for Practice Puzzle 1

We have now covered all the theory topics in this chapter, and you have had some practice in solving Hidden Word and Anagram clues.

The final exercise in this chapter is in the form of a crossword puzzle, and the next section explains the general features of crossword puzzles and how they work.

Introduction to crossword puzzles

A crossword puzzle consists of a grid and an accompanying set of clues.

The grid is made up of small black and white squares arranged in rows and columns, and is usually square with an odd number of rows and columns. Common sizes for cryptic crossword grids are 13 x 13 and 15 x 15 but you will also come across “jumbo” puzzles, which can be much bigger.

There are two sets of numbered clues—Across and Down—and the answers to the clues are entered in the grid in the white squares, one letter per square. Corresponding clue numbers in the grid show you where to enter the answer—with consecutive letters running across the grid for Across clues, and down the grid for Down clues.

The numbering starts in the top left corner of the grid and sometimes an Across clue and Down clue will share the same starting square.

A square where an Across Clue and a Down clue intersect is said to be **checked**. Checked squares can be very helpful when solving puzzles:

The diagram shows the top left section of a puzzle with some of the answers already filled in.

1 Down has two checked squares. Assuming the answers to 1 and 8 Across are correct, the answer to 1 Down must fit the pattern C–K –

.

So whatever the clue, the answer to 1 Down must be CAKE, COKE or ¹CUKE.



The number of letters in the answer to a clue is given in brackets at the end of the clue. This is referred to as the **enumeration**. If the answer consists of more than one word or is hyphenated, this is shown, but not if the answer includes an apostrophe. For example:

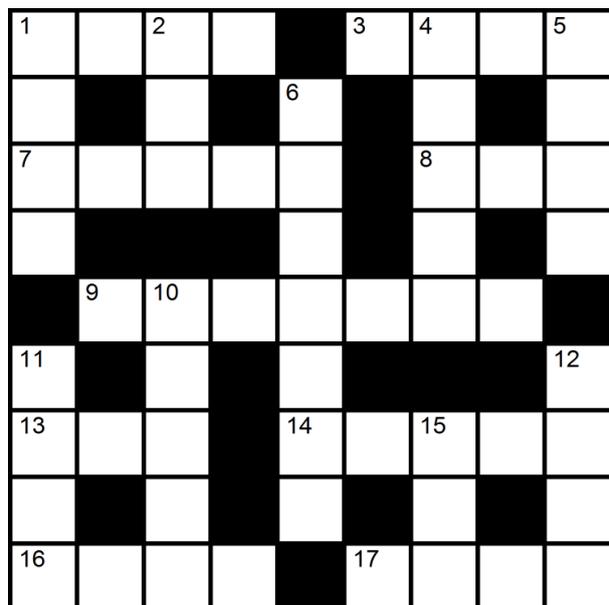
<u>Answer</u>	<u>Enumeration</u>	<u>Entered in grid</u>
class	(5)	CLASS
at once	(2,4)	ATONCE
know-how	(3-4)	KNOWHOW
o'clock	(6)	OCLOCK

Only the letters are entered in the grid — no accents, hyphens or apostrophes.

¹ Cuke is an informal term for a cucumber, and a relatively recent addition to the dictionary.
from *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners* ©Henry Howarth 2016

Practice Puzzle 1

Hidden Word and Anagram clues.



Across

All the Across clues are Hidden Word clues:

- 1 Strongbox found in Odessa ferry (4)
- 3 Relaxed among local members (4)
- 7 Giant spotted in rural Argentina (5)
- 8 Aristotle concealed a small drink (3)
- 9 Tricky sequence from Mohawk war dance (7)
- 13 Ancient part of Colditz (3)
- 14 Text ramblings hold more (5)
- 16 Lord some desired (4)
- 17 Position inside Midlands pottery (4)

Down

All the Down clues are Anagram clues:

- 1 Seasoning adjusted last (4)
- 2 Distant RAF organisation (3)
- 4 Croat becomes thespian (5)
- 5 Partner reformed team (4)
- 6 Confused bee went in the middle (7)
- 10 Drew a different type of bird (5)
- 11 Yobs scattered lads (4)
- 12 Oriental seat arrangement (4)
- 15 Pat changed faucet (3)

The solution and clue explanations are on pages 22 and 23.

Hidden words: answers to exercises

Practice with hidden words

con, cons, constant, tan, ant, anti, tin

Activities

²A Many Londoners at the Hague station? Baloney! Slow, agonising journeys cast a real shadow over hope rail services could match essential needs. Bookings made at hotels are often settled late as Europeans lack cash, owners of franchises go bust and banks slam on gratuitous costs. Enough already!—in March I depart for the Maldives.

B era, rat, ratio

C DESIRES attitudes I respect
 CHASING music has, in general
 FINANCE belief in ancestry (the verb ‘back’ can mean ‘finance’)

Practice clues

	Clue (with hidden word underlined)	Answer
1	Young chap spotted in <u>glade</u> (3)	LAD
2	Partly <u>trimmed</u> edge (3)	RIM
3	Gem found in chest <u>on</u> <u>Exmoor</u> (5)	STONE
4	Best section of light <u>opera</u> (3)	TOP
5	Tree in <u>Chelmsford</u> (3)	ELM
6	Chame <u>leon</u> camouflages sign (3)	LEO
7	Wake up in <u>trousers</u> (5)	ROUSE
8	Some <u>sacred</u> area of land (4)	ACRE
9	<u>Sitcom</u> for <u>TV</u> features cosiness (7)	COMFORT
10	Sequence from J.S. <u>Bach</u> <u>I</u> eventually accomplish	ACHIEVE

Here are the indicators and definitions in the clues:

	Indicator	Definition		Indicator	Definition
1	spotted in	young chap	6	camouflages	sign
2	partly	edge	7	in	wake up
3	found in	gem	8	some	area of land
4	section of	best	9	sequence from	accomplish
5	in	tree	10	features	cosiness

You may have found Clue 6 hard. This is because of the answer definition—‘sign’. The idea that this could be a star sign doesn’t immediately spring to mind.

² Also: doner (doner kebab), areal (adjective), rails (verb), OK’ing, owner, franc, hemal (US spelling) from *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners* ©Henry Howarth 2016

Anagrams: answers to exercises

Finding anagrams

mug, low, prod, army, feast/fates, shelf, death, purse, tablet, throne, desire

Anagram indicators

	Indicator	Ingredients	Definition
2	in error	post	discontinue
3	change	models	infrequently
4	rearranged	the race	coach

Anagram activities

A cat/act, grub, paint, export, anagram, flooded, spelling

B bait, fashion, toilets/litotes, washing, scramble/clambers, complicated

Anagram practice

1	What anagram of 'eager' is a word meaning 'concur'? (5)	AGREE
2	What anagram of 'Nepal' is a word meaning 'flat'? (5)	PLANE
3	What anagram of 'garden' is a word meaning 'peril'? (6)	DANGER
4	What anagram of 'rearing' is a word meaning 'more annoyed'? (7)	ANGRIER
5	What 'strange devil' is a word meaning 'existed'? (5)	LIVED
6	What 'unusual shape' is a word meaning 'period'? (5)	PHASE
7	What 'messy red rag' is a word meaning 'look at'? (6)	REGARD
8	What 'confused marine' is a word meaning 'stay'? (6)	REMAIN

Practice clues

	Indicator	Ingredients	Definition	Answer
1	strange	devil	existed	LIVED
2	out	lost	many	LOTS
3	cooked	meat	competitive group	TEAM
4	unusual	pastel	dishes	PLATES
5	blended	lager if	delicate	FRAGILE
6	altered	left	fabric	FELT
7	about	learnt	animal horn	ANTLER
8	off	told	idiot	DOLT
9	refurbished	taverns	domestic	SERVANT
10	in a frenzy	burn my hat	it's not true	URBAN MYTH

Practice puzzle 1: solution

1	S	A	2	F	E		3	C	4	A	L	5	M
	A		A		6	B			C				A
7	L	A	R	G	E			8	T	O	T		
	T					T			O				E
		9	A	10	W	K	W	A	R	D			
11	B		A			E						12	E
13	O	L	D			14	E	X	15	T	R	A	
	Y		E			N			A				S
16	S	I	R	E			17	S	P	O	T		

Across		Down	
1	Safe	1	Salt
3	Calm	2	Far
7	Large	4	Actor
8	Tot	5	Mate
9	Awkward	6	Between
13	Old	10	Wader
14	Extra	11	Boys
16	Sire	12	East
17	Spot	15	Tap

Clues

Across

All the Across clues are Hidden Word clues:

- 1 Strongbox found in Odessa ferry (4)
- 3 Relaxed among local members (4)
- 7 Giant spotted in rural Argentina (5)
- 8 Aristotle concealed a small drink (3)
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All the Down clues are Anagram clues:

- 1 Seasoning adjusted last (4)
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- 10 Drew a different type of bird (5)
- 11 Yobs scattered lads (4)
- 12 Oriental seat arrangement (4)
- 15 Pat changed faucet (3)

Clue explanations**Across**

	Indicator	Ingredients	Definition	Answer
1	found in	Odessa <u>ferry</u>	strongbox	SAFE
3	among	<u>local</u> members	relaxed	CALM
7	spotted in	rural <u>Argentina</u>	giant	LARGE
8	concealed	<u>Aristotle</u>	a small drink	TOT
9	sequence from	<u>Mohawk war</u> dance	tricky	AWKWARD
13	part of	<u>Colditz</u>	ancient	OLD
14	hold	<u>text</u> ramblings	more	EXTRA
16	some	<u>desired</u>	lord	SIR
17	inside	Midlands <u>pottery</u>	position	SPOT

Down

	Indicator	Ingredients	Definition	Answer
1	adjusted	last	seasoning	SALT
2	organisation	RAF	distant	FAR
4	becomes	Croat	thespian	ACTOR
5	reformed	team	partner	MATE
6	confused	bee went	in the middle	BETWEEN
10	different	drew a	type of bird	WADER
11	scattered	yobs	lads	BOYS
12	arrangement	seat	oriental	EAST
15	changed	Pat	faucet	TAP

This is an extract from the course book *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners*.

It is the first of 6 chapters, and each chapter is a course module.

Further information about the book is provided in a course guide at the U3A national website. The course guide is in the Subject Advice section for Cryptic Crosswords, under the Resources tab.