



Cryptic Clue Reference

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This sheet explains cryptic clues, which may be unfamiliar to some players.

Cryptic clues contain two parts: a “straight” definition and wordplay. The straight definition will always be at either the beginning or end of the clue (never in the middle).

Numbers in parentheses after the clue specify how many letters are in the answer; multiple numbers indicate separate words, e.g., “(6,4)” for “puzzle hunt.”

Here are some of the common types of cryptic clue wordplay that you’re likely to see in DASH puzzles.

Charade – The answer is formed by joining individual words/letters from the clue together. This type of wordplay is commonly combined with other types.

Clue: 1000 in family (3)

Answer: KIN (family)

Explanation: K (1000) + IN

Note that in this example, K is clued by 1000 whereas IN comes directly from the clue.

Container – Words/letters are put inside another word. Containers are clued with indicator words like “surrounds,” “embracing,” or “within.”

Clue: Break down artificial intelligence in Miami’s state (4)

Answer: FAIL (break down)

Explanation: AI “in” FL (Miami’s state)

Anagram – The letters of part of the clue are rearranged. Anagrams are clued with indicator words like “changed,” “messy,” or “fresh.”

Clue: Captures crazy parts (5)

Answer: TRAPS (captures)

Explanation: an anagram of PARTS

Hidden Word – The answer is hidden in consecutive letters within the clue itself. Typical indicators are “found in” and “featuring.”

Clue: Evacuate group held in contempt yesterday (5)

Answer: EMPTY (evacuate)

Explanation: hidden in “contEMPTYesterday”

Double Definition – In a double definition, two different senses of a word are given.

Clue: Is able to preserve (3)

Answer: CAN (is able to & preserve)

Deletions – Letters are removed from a word. Deletions may be at the beginning (“headless,” “starting late”), middle (“heartless”), end (“tailless,” “unfinished”), or even both ends (“boundless”).

Clue: Writer Virginia’s unfinished yarn (4)

Answer: WOOL (yarn)

Explanation: WOOLF (writer Virginia) without the final letter (unfinished)

Selections – One or more letters are selected from the clue. This may occur at the beginning, middle (“heart of”), end, or even both ends (“at the extremes”) of a word. Other types of this clue are initials (take the first letters of a sequence of words), and even/odd.

Clue: Odd characters in play rate role (4)

Answer: PART (role)

Explanation: the “odd” letters from the phrase play rate

Reversal – Words/letters are read backward. Reversals are clued with indicator words like “in reverse” or “backward.”

Clue: Impale flying mammals the wrong way (4)

Answer: STAB (impale)

Explanation: BATS (flying mammals) backward

Homophone – In a homophone clue, a word or phrase sounds the same as the answer. An indicator is used that indicates sound, like “out loud” or “for the audience.”

Clue: Moved a boat route, we hear (5)

Answer: ROWED (moved a boat)

Explanation: homophone of ROAD (route)