

THE WORLDWIDE HIT

minute cryptic

OVER 160

WORDPLAY PUZZLES

TO DECIPHER, UNLOCK AND UNTANGLE

ANGAS TIERNAN AND LIAM RUNNALLS



OVER 160
WORDPLAY PUZZLES
TO DECIPHER, UNLOCK
AND UNTANGLE

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Angas

To Annika and Neve –
I love you both with all my heart.

Liam

For cryptic cheer, offline (5,7)

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Welcome to the hidden world of cryptics!

When I was a kid, some of my favourite novels and movies had a clue to solve that would lead the protagonist deeper on their hero's journey – to their destiny, to another world, to treasure, to love! It was amazing that a simple puzzling-looking sentence could be unlocked before my eyes to reveal a truth or a path forward that had been staring me in the face the whole time.

But real life seems empty of this kind of clue-solving. Where's my treasure map? Where's my Da Vinci code? I want to steal the declaration of independence, dammit!

I was wrong, though: the world isn't empty of these kinds of clues. In fact, there are more than I could have possibly realised. Every day, for a hundred years, these cryptic clues have been hiding in plain sight. They've been hiding in cryptic crosswords.

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What is a cryptic crossword?

Many of us will know them as the 'other' crosswords: the ones in the paper that sit next to the 'normal' crosswords, the ones full of bizarre phrases. It turns out that each of those phrases is a kind of riddle – a strange little adventure for those who've taught themselves to look in just the right way.

Knowing what to look for comes with even the smallest amount of experience. And when you see a clue in just the right way, it unlocks itself, and you simultaneously enjoy the clue writer's brilliance and your own. If anyone was ever to observe me solving a cryptic clue, they'd probably see a lot of smiling, head shaking and sometimes a laugh.

But before I learned about cryptic crosswords, I had no idea how to even begin. They felt like they'd been designed for those who already knew how to solve them, appearing in newspapers as 20 to 30 clues, but with zero guides. Guides do exist – this book is an example! But none of the guides are where the crosswords are – the guides are even sometimes more hidden than the clues! The result of this, I think, is that cryptics have sadly been largely inaccessible.

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What is Minute Cryptic?

It's our way of making cryptics more welcoming! I'm Angas, and I started Minute Cryptic by walking through one clue a day on TikTok and Instagram. When it started to take off online, I teamed up with Liam – my go-to clue writer – and we turned it into a daily game that anyone could play. Each clue comes with handy hints and a video that unlocks when you solve it. It's bite-sized, beginner-friendly, and – for our growing community of over 100,000 solvers – a daily moment of 'Oh! I get it!'

This daily clue set-up also allows us to highlight the beauty of an individual clue. For the entire history of cryptic crosswords, it's been as much about the crossword as it has been about the cryptic. But to me, the delight is in a single clue – that's what makes me grin, what makes me get my phone out to share it. And also, that's what I have time for; rarely do we have time to tackle a whole crossword, but we can all make time to puzzle over a single clue.

So, throughout this book, we're going to solve cryptic clues together. **You don't need to know anything to get started; we'll learn everything bit by bit as we go.**

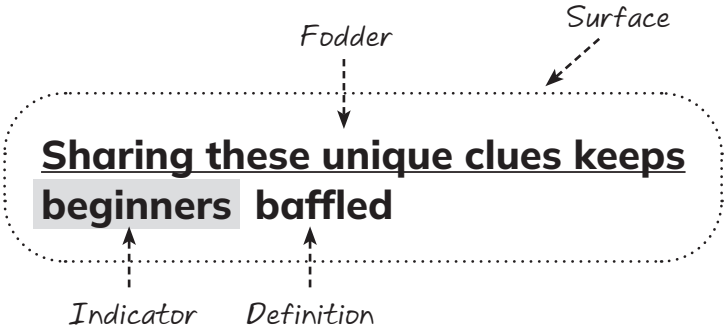
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What makes up a cryptic clue?

Let's explore the following example:

Sharing these unique clues keeps beginners baffled (5)

Well, that's the opposite intention of this book – we're here to unbaffle beginners! Let's start by identifying the basics. Every cryptic clue has three important components. These are: a definition, some fodder and an indicator.



1. ***Definition*** – The definition is one or more words that directly represent the answer. The clue's answer will be a synonym or an example of the definition, and the definition always appears at the beginning or end of the clue. Here, it's **baffled** – our answer will be another word for baffled.
2. ***Fodder*** – Fodder words provide the building blocks of our wordplay. You'll need to manipulate them to find our answer. Here, our fodder is **Sharing these unique clues keeps** – we need to act on these words to find another word for baffled.

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3. ***Indicators*** – Wordplay indicators are words that tell you what to do with the fodder – how to manipulate it – and they're always immediately next to the fodder, either before or after. Each chapter of this book is dedicated to teaching you a different type of indicator commonly used in cryptic clues – we'll explain this a bit more soon! Here, our indicator is **beginners** – this tells us what to do with the wordplay fodder.

How does our clue work?

Normally when you try and solve a cryptic clue, you won't know which parts are the definition, fodder and indicator – that's part of the fun of experimenting and finding out. But in this example we do, so, looking at the indicator, **beginners** is a selection indicator (we'll learn more about this in Chapter 2) – telling us to take the 'beginning' letters of the fodder – **Sharing these unique clues keeps**. When we do this, we get the word STUCK, which is a way of saying **baffled**!

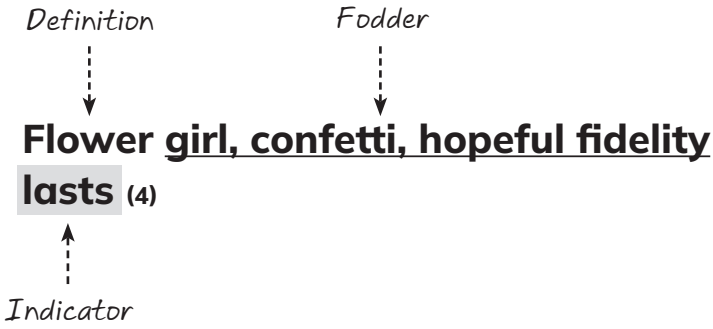
That might be your first Minute Cryptic clue – well done! We hope that, even in this one example, you can start to see how wonderfully satisfying cryptic clues can be.

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One more thing to know: the surface

It's useful to also understand what the surface of a clue is. In my opinion, it's just as important as the wordplay. The surface is how the clue reads on first glance, and it often makes the difference between a mediocre and an excellent clue.

Take this clue, which uses a similar technique to our first example:



Even with what you know so far, you've got a good shot at solving it. The indicator is lasts, so we take the last letters of **girl**, **confetti**, **hopeful**, **fidelity** to get LILY – a kind of flower.

It's a simple clue, but the surface *elevates* it. It reads almost like a poem: a bride or groom quietly questioning their marriage as the wedding unfolds. There's a strange elegance in how it's written. That's a big part of what I love about cryptics. They can be beautiful or bizarre on the surface, with something clever waiting underneath.

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How to use this book

As we've already mentioned, every cryptic clue consists of a definition, fodder and an indicator, so the first step is identifying which parts are which. In my experience, new solvers are often fixated on first identifying the definition, but it can be much easier to start by identifying likely wordplay indicators. Some clues will have one indicator, while more complex clues might have two or more.

There are around eight common types of indicator. Learn how they work and you'll have the key to cracking most cryptic clues. That's how this book is set up: each chapter teaches one type, with quick examples and a bunch of clues to try.

There are over 160 in total – each one a chance to build confidence. Here's what you'll see on each clue page:

1. The clue – this is the puzzle you need to solve!
2. A grid – here's where you can write your final answer.
3. Workspace – use this space to scribble things down, make notes and organise your thoughts. Get the jumble out of your head and onto paper!

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4. Checking letters – we'll introduce these towards the end of Chapter 1. For now, you just need to know that there'll be a way of adding letters to the grid whenever you want some extra help.

Turn each clue page over and you'll find a hints page. We're big fans of learning just enough to get going, and figuring out the rest as you go. So each clue comes with a hint section that gently uncovers its secrets, along with general tips and tricks.

Stuck? Read one hint, two hints, or as many as you like to help nudge things along. We recommend covering the hints with a piece of paper and sliding it down to reveal them one at a time. That way, you can keep the challenge at just the right level.

Even if you crack the clue without help, it's worth reading the hints after. They're great for building up your cryptic instincts.

You'll find the answers at the end of each chapter, and with a bit of practice, you might find yourself using them less and less.

We've also included some mini crosswords so you can flex your cryptic muscles, and at the end of the book, a full crossword to bring everything together.

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What to do if you do get stuck

It's going to happen! And it'll happen on different clues for different people. If you get stuck, here's what we recommend:

Use the checking letters and hints – This isn't cheating! In fact, there's really no such thing (I think) as cheating in cryptic clues, and this is all about learning anyway. Every part of this book is here to help you learn, and you should use every part of this book.

Take a break – Putting the clue down and coming back later with a fresh mind and a different perspective can really help. Often people say that when they come back to a clue after a while, it just clicks.

Search stuff online – I told you there's no such thing as cheating! Sometimes I can tell what's going on in a clue, but I can't quite remember what the Roman numeral for 1000 is (we'll get to that in the substitutions chapter). I google stuff, and you should too!

Talk it over – We've found that talking through clues is extremely helpful – you can learn a lot by hearing from others about how they worked out certain things, and Minute Cryptic followers do this every day via our social media accounts.

That's all for now. Good luck (you've got this!), have fun and welcome to the world of cryptics.

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CHAPTER 1

anagrams

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KEY

anagram

substitution

selector

container

hidden

deletion

reversal

homophone

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The first kind of wordplay we're going to explore is anagrams: where we take one or more words and mix up their letters. Anagrams are perhaps the most fundamental and intuitive kind of letterplay to play around with. Have you ever taken your name and seen what words you can make out of its letters? I have! Angas becomes 'a snag', which could be seen as complimentary (perhaps I'm a catch?!) or otherwise (in Australia, a snag is a term for a sausage). Either way, you can't spell ANAGRAMS without ANGAS (if you're wondering if the rest of the book is like this, yes, it is – I won't be stopped).



Make sure you read about the key parts of a cryptic clue in the introduction on page 10! It's important you know what definition, fodder and indicators are before you get stuck in.

Spotting the anagram indicator

Anagram indicators are words that reference mixing, movement, fiddling, damage or strangeness. The idea is that if you were to mix a word, move a word, fiddle with a word, damage a word, or make a word strange, its letters might change order. Here are some example potential anagram indicators:

- *order*
- *destroy*
- *hit*
- *sort*
- *tamper*
- *arrange*
- *throw*

They don't have to be verbs though. Adjectives and nouns can also be anagram indicators, like:

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- *bad*
- *terrible*
- *muddled*
- *disaster*
- *cocktail*
- *confusion*



You'll never find a comprehensive list of indicators! It's your job to get inside the clue writer's head and figure out if they could be using a word to suggest mixing.

That might sound like a very broad set of words that could indicate anagrams, and it is! Anagram indicators are easily the most diverse and inclusive of all wordplay indicators; sometimes viewers on the Minute Cryptic social media channels say, 'It seems like almost any word can be an anagram indicator!'

But there is another trick that helps narrow down if a word is an anagram indicator: it needs to be next to the right number of letters to anagram. So, if the answer is eight letters long, and you see a potential anagram indicator next to words that have eight letters between them, you should try to anagram those letters and see if you can find a word that corresponds to the definition.

So, let's take a look at a clue

A seal pup playfully clapping (8)

Here our anagram indicator is **playfully** and it's next to **A seal pup**, which has eight letters (the same number of letters as our answer). The idea is that we take the letters ASEALPUP and treat them playfully, by jumbling them up and mixing them around.

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Using an anagram wheel

One trick to making anagramming easier is to use an anagram wheel. Placing the letters you want to anagram in a circle can make it easier to spot different combinations of those letters.



We'll include a wheel in our hints section for each clue that involves an anagram, but you can get ahead of us by writing out your own in the workspace section.

In this example, by playing with the words **A seal pup**, we can rearrange them into the word APPLAUSE, which corresponds with our definition **clapping**.

OK, let's try your first solo clue!

If I were you, I'd totally jump to the hints on this first clue. You don't have to, but we're learning as we go here, so if you moved quickly to read through Clue 1's explanation, no one would blame you! If you want to challenge yourself, see if you can spot a possible anagram indicator first.

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Clue #1

Little tune I'm playing (6)



workspace

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1 The anagram indicator is **playing**.



This is very similar to our ‘playfully’ example from the introduction – we’re easing you in gently!

2 **tune I’m** is our anagram fodder, with six letters – the same number of letters as our answer.

3 **Little** is our definition – our answer will be another word for little.

4 Use the anagram wheel.



just a little clue to start

I chose the name Minute Cryptic because of the dual meaning of ‘minute’ – the puzzle was small, and the videos were short in time (but I pronounce the ‘Minute’ in Minute Cryptic like the unit of time).

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Clue #2

Knocked dead ends down (8)



workspace

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1 The anagram indicator is **Knocked**.



If something is knocked, it's hit or damaged or disturbed. If you took some words and knocked them, you might imagine them becoming jumbled up.

2 **dead ends** is our anagram fodder, with eight letters between the two words – the same number of letters as our answer.

3 Use the anagram wheel.



4 **down** is our definition.

Don't be misled by the surface of the clue. It's presenting the word **down** as in downwards or below. But what else can **down** mean?

General meanings of **down**:

- *downwards*
- *lower*
- *depressed*
- *drink*

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Clue #3

Player eats bananas on their own (10)



workspace

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1 The anagram indicator is **bananas**.

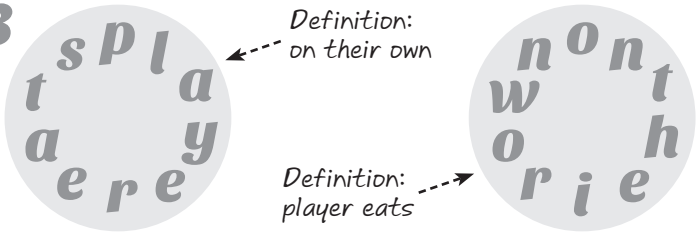


What?! Yep, **bananas** is a colloquial term for 'crazy'. And, if you take some words and make them crazy, you switch the letters around.

2 Both **Player eats** and **on their own** have ten letters – the number of letters in our answer. So, which one is the anagram fodder and which one is the definition?

Sometimes, you just need to try them both. One question you might ask, though, is which seems more like a definition with a one-word synonym?

3



4 **Player eats** is our anagram fodder and our definition is **on their own** – what's a ten-letter word that can mean that?

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Clue #4

Cathy crashed boat (5)



workspace

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1 The anagram indicator is **crashed**.



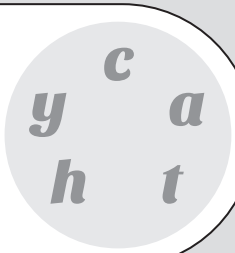


If something's crashed, it's hit, broken up or damaged.

2 **Cathy** is our anagram fodder, with five letters – the same as our answer.

3 This means our definition is **boat**.

4 Use the anagram wheel.



smooth sailing?

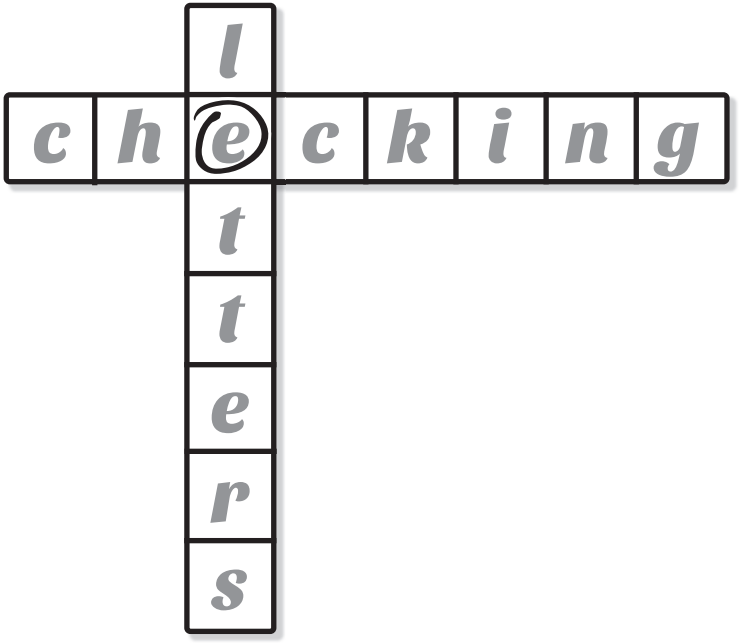
This was a pretty straightforward clue – a clean anagram with a clear surface. We've got two more anagram clues in this chapter, and the waters get a bit choppier from here. Hold tight!

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Checking letters

You've solved four clues so far! This means you've unlocked a new kind of hint: checking letters.

Normally in a cryptic crossword (or any crossword), solving a clue and writing an answer in the grid gives you letters for other answers. These are commonly called 'checking letters', and they essentially mean that every time you solve a clue, you get a reward – you get help towards another clue.



We're going to do the same thing in this book.

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For each clue, we'll identify certain squares that share a letter with a certain square from a previous clue. So, in the next clue:

box 3 = page 25, box 9

box 7 = page 21, box 5

Think of it as a deconstructed crossword. You don't have to use these checking letters if you don't want to, but they're there if you do (and you've earned them!).

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Clue #5

Relate to dancing bear (8)



workspace

box 3 = page 25, box 9
box 7 = page 21, box 5

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1 The anagram indicator is **dancing**.

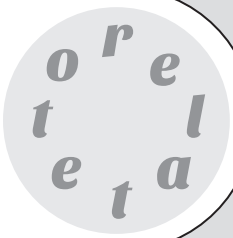


Dancing is an anagram indicator because of how well it represents movement. If words and letters are dancing, they're moving around.

2 **Relate to** is our anagram fodder, with eight letters between the words – the same number of letters as our answer.

3

Use the anagram wheel.



4 **bear** is our definition.

But, as we flagged in the previous clue, this is a slightly misleading definition. Liam wants you to focus exclusively on **bear** as an animal. But **bear** can mean more than that!

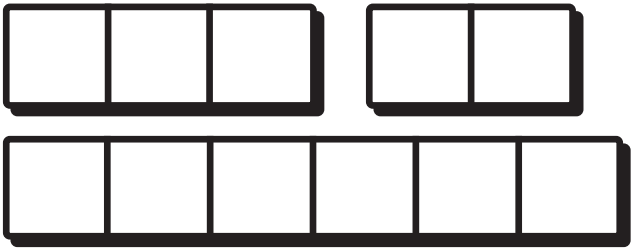
Here are some general meanings of bear that might be useful:

- An animal
- To carry or hold
- To put up with
- To give birth to or produce
- To display

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Clue #6

Ref saw tooth knocked out?
Red card! **(3,2,6)**



workspace

box 1 = page 25, box 7
box 4 = page 31, box 2
box 8 = page 27, box 2

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1 The anagram indicator is **knocked out**.



We've already seen **knocked** used as an anagram indicator before, and **knocked out** suggests that you should consider damaging some words.

2 **Ref saw tooth** is our anagram fodder. As well as seeing that it has the right number of letters for our answer (11), it pays to notice that Liam has used **Ref** instead of 'referee' – a little hint that maybe he specifically needs the letters REF and only REF to make the clue work.

3 Use the anagram wheel.



4 **Red card** is our definition.

We could interpret **Red card** in the sporting context, as a kind of penalty. But we could also think about other kinds of cards that are red. Are Valentine's Day cards red? What else?

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