

Cryptic Classroom #5: Homophones

By Anne Drupar

Welcome back to another installment of the Cryptic Classroom. This month marks the midpoint in the course, and we will start by reviewing some basic solving strategies that have been taught over the first four lessons. Incidentally, you can find the previous lessons posted in our Facebook group, Games Magazine Enthusiasts, and on the GAMES WORLD OF PUZZLES website, www.gamesmagazine-online.com.

First, some basics:

1. Every cryptic clue consists of two parts: a literal definition and some kind of wordplay.
2. The literal part is just like a normal crossword clue. If you can guess which part of a cryptic clue is the literal part, you should be able to solve for the answer using only that part of the clue.
3. The wordplay part of the clue can also be solved for the answer, but the challenge for many solvers is determining the style of wordplay that is being used.
4. Indicator words suggest a particular type of wordplay. Words like "shuffled" or "mixed" suggest an anagram clue. A hidden word clue may be indicated by words like "housed" or "contained." A savvy solver knows that charade clues and double definition clues don't have indicator words.
5. It is up to the solver to determine the dividing point between the literal and wordplay parts. Sometimes the literal part is at the beginning of the clue, and sometimes the wordplay comes first.
6. The literal and wordplay segments, when combined effectively, appear to have surface meaning.
7. Punctuation and capitalization can usually be ignored.
8. The length of the answer (shown in parentheses) is useful when solving anagram clues and hidden word clues.

This month, let's "talk" about homophones. For those of you who have forgotten about this linguistic phenomenon, homophones are words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings, such as "peace" and "piece." Homophone clues are not as common in cryptic crosswords as the other wordplay styles we have previously studied, but it is prudent to be able to identify homophone clues when

they do appear. Like anagrams and hidden words, homophone clues always have an indicator word (or words). The indicator will refer to something being spoken or being listened to. Words like "heard" and "aloud" are good examples of indicators for a homophone clue (and, coincidentally, are homophones themselves). Let's try a few!

Speaker consumed a number of pints, making a gallon (5)

In this example, the word, "speaker" indicates that we have a homophone clue. Can you determine the two homophones that are suggested by "consumed" and "number of pints making a gallon?" The words are ATE and EIGHT. So, how do you decide which spelling of the word should be entered into the grid? Remember that the indicator word is always a part of the wordplay portion of the clue, and since the indicator word for this example is at the beginning of the clue, the word that follows (consumed) must also be in the wordplay part of the clue. The answer to the literal part of the clue is EIGHT, and it is the literal portion that provides the answer for the grid. Let's try another.

Orca's audible laments (5)

When the indicator word appears in the middle of the homophone clue, it can be difficult to know which spelling of the homophone is the intended answer. The length of the answer can often clarify in this situation. The homophones in this clue are WHALE'S and WALLS. Since the answer is a five-letter word, WALLS must be the intended answer. In a situation where both homophones are the same length, you would have to rely on some crossing answers in the grid to determine which is the correct homophone.

To hone your homophone skills, try to complete this cryptic acrostic, where every clue is a homophone. When completed correctly, the heavily outlined column will spell an appropriate two-word phrase. Full disclosure: The phrase is not my own invention. I first read it in an old issue of GAMES. The wordplay delighted me enough to stick in my brain for over 3 decades.

Move passengers to a different row, say, with proof of purchase (7)

Was clad in verbal battle (4)

60 Minutes broadcasts belonging to us (4)

Take possession of oceans' sound (5)

Religious ceremonies narrated by Orville and Wilbur (7)

Ugh, adult talk (5)

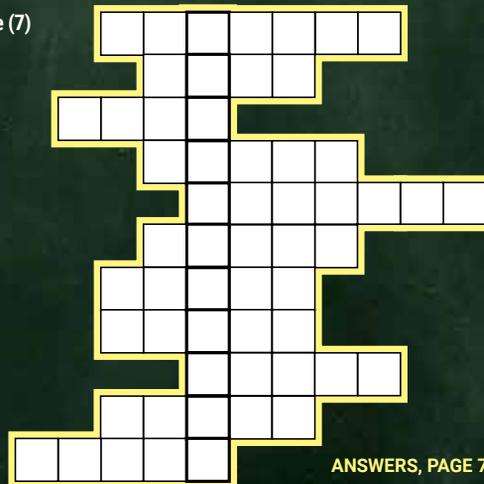
Speaker sold fuzzy leather (5)

Sharp supporters announce levy (5)

Reportedly, proboscis senses (5)

Visitor estimated broadcast (5)

Heard a froglike animal, emulated a tug (5)



ANSWERS, PAGE 75