

3. Cryptic definitions

Our first clue type is the *cryptic definition* clue. These clues, closely allied to the traditional quick clue, provide a single misleading definition of the answer with no subsidiary indication. For example, consider the clue

Relic of a shooting star (3,6)

leading to the answer BOX CAMERA (by convention, all answers and parts of answers are written in capitals). This clue works as follows. Looking past its common meaning, "shooting star" can be alternatively interpreted as "something famous which is good at shooting (taking pictures)", with "relic" understood in the sense of "something old" rather than "a surviving piece". We thus see that, contrary to its surface reading, the clue refers not to a fragment of a meteor, but to an old and distinguished thing which takes photographs, and from the number of letters in the answer deduce that it can only be BOX CAMERA. Here's another example, this time with a distinctly British flavour:

Speed humps (8)

Having learnt from the previous example not to trust common compounds (a "speed hump" is the British name for a speed bump), we immediately suspect that "speed" or "humps" must be misleading us. Indeed, in British slang, a "hump" is an act of sexual intercourse, so "speed humps" could also mean "sexual encounters which are speedy" – QUICKIES, in other words. One final example to round out this section:

Stretcher-bearer (4)

Here we are required to think of "stretcher" in the colloquial sense of "untruth", so that "stretcher-bearer" can mean "someone producing untruths" and hence the answer must be LIAR.