

7. Homophones

No puzzle involving wordplay would be complete without homophones, and *homophone clues* do exactly what you would expect: they indicate, via a *homophone indicator*, that the answer is a homophone of another word, for which a synonym may be given. For example, Chifonie of *The Guardian's* clue

Musical work that's melodious to the ear (5)
Musical work that's / melodious to the ear (5)

suggests SUITE (musical work) as a homophone of "sweet" (melodious), as indicated by "to the ear", with "that's" as linking word.

By no means are we limited to homophones of single words, however! The clue

Word! Respect! Count Noble on the microphone! (12)
Word! / Respect! Count Noble on the microphone! (12)

presents ONOMATOPOEIA (a word imitating a sound) as a homophone of "honour matter peer" ("respect count noble"), as indicated by "on the microphone". Note that "count" must be taken as a verb meaning "to be of importance" (i.e. matter) and that the exclamation marks in this case are nothing more than decorators which may be freely ignored. We shall see some cryptically significant functions of the exclamation mark later on.

Now for a word of warning: although I have called these clues "homophone" clues, because of differences in pronunciation across accents and regions, some "homophones" may in practice merely be "soundalikes", as in

Pitiful sound of fowl (6)
Pitiful / sound of fowl (6)

for PALTRY (pitiful), which sounds like "poultry" (fowl), as indicated by "sound of".

In true bug/feature tradition, regional pronunciations can also be integrated into the clues themselves, as this cracker from *The Guardian's* Tramp demonstrates:

70s clothing sounds like Noddy Holder's cup of tea (6,3)
70s clothing / sounds like Noddy Holder's cup of tea (6,3)

This one leads to KIPPER TIE (a type of necktie fashionable in the seventies), which supposedly sounds like "cup of tea" pronounced in a broad Black Country accent, like that of Noddy Holder, frontman for Slade. The indicator in this case is the entire phrase "sounds like Noddy Holder's".

Notice in particular that this clue does not mask "cup of tea" with a synonym – it provides the "homophone fodder" *literally*. This is an instance of a general rule within cryptic crosswords: whenever it is permissible to provide a synonym or piece of wordplay, it is also permissible to provide the word itself or the result of the wordplay. The converse is emphatically **not true**, as we shall see in a few sections' time.

Other homophone indicators include "announced", "broadcast", "on the radio", "pronounced" and "told". See [the page on Cryptipedia](#) for a more exhaustive list.