

11. Reversals

A staple of all crosswords, *reversal clues* present the answer as a reversal of other words or items of wordplay (but not anagrams or homophones), indicated by (of course) a *reversal indicator*. In

Poet is dull, on reflection (4)
Poet is / dull, on reflection (4)

for example, we must consider DRAB (dull) backwards to get BARD (poet), as indicated by "on reflection", and in

Go flipping crazy (4)
Go flipping / crazy (4)

we must reverse STAB (go; both mean "an attempt") to get BATS (crazy), as indicated by "flipping". This latter clue is actually ambiguous, in that it could also be parsed

Go / flipping crazy (4)

which indicates BATS is reversed to give STAB. Checking letters would be required to disambiguate between these two in a real crossword situation, but ambiguous clues are thankfully very rare.

Some reversal indicators only make sense in down clues, thanks to the vertical convention, as is the case in this down clue adapted from one by The Guardian's Rufus:

Served up drink fit for a king (5)
Served up drink / fit for a king (5)

Here LAGER (drink) must be **served up** – since down clues are entered downwards, this means that it must be reversed – to get REGAL (fit for a king).

Reversal clues also appear with other types of wordplay, as in

Talk about a long story (4)
Talk about / a / long story (4)

a charade of GAS (talk) reversed ("about") plus A, yielding SAGA (long story), or in

Irishman turned round then fell over — here? (7)
Irishman turned round / then / fell over / — here? (7)

which is a charade of two separate reversals: PAT (Irishman) is reversed by "turned round" to yield TAP, and MOOR (fell, as in an upland) is reversed by "over" to yield ROOM; the two are then combined via the juxtaposition indicator "then" to yield TAPROOM. The definition, simply "here?", references the awfully stereotypical surface of the clue, suggesting that the answer is somewhere where an Irishman might be found leglessly drunk. A TAPROOM is certainly one possibility, but it is definitely not the **only** one, whence the question mark. Pay particular attention to how ROOM is indicated as a common phrase

("fell over"), the component words of which must be analysed and understood separately, because many common reversal indicators are also commonly found at the end of phrasal verbs like this one. "Round", "around", "up", "about", "over" and "back" are all prime suspects in this regard.