

9. Anagrams

In force in crosswords as in other word games, *anagram clues* present the answer as an anagram of other words. Occasionally seen in quick crosswords, where they are always indicated explicitly, usually with an appendix of "(anagram)" or "(anag.)", in cryptic crosswords they are indicated by an *anagram indicator* (also called an *anagrind*), which indicates that some letters (the *anagram fodder*) must be rearranged into the answer. As a general rule, anagram indicators must be suggestive of rearrangement, disorder, destruction or otherwise somehow being out of the ordinary. A simple example would be

Bloody wild orgy (4)
Bloody / wild orgy (4)

for GORY (bloody), as an anagram of ORGY, as indicated by "wild" (as in "crazy, deranged"). In this case, the anagram indicator could apply to either "bloody" or "orgy", but a quick letter count allows us to rule out the former possibility.

Sometimes the anagram indicator is not quite what it seems to be:

Engineer had ample light (8)
Engineer had ample / light (8)

On the surface, "engineer" appears to be a noun, but it is actually a verb, instructing us to "engineer" the letters of HAD AMPLE into HEADLAMP, a type of light.

Other times, the deception is in the anagram fodder itself:

Bear mutilated with CD is put down (8)
Bear mutilated with CD is / put down (8)

This one leads to ASCRIBE ("put down" as in "attribute [as a cause]", again contrary to the surface!) as an anagram of BEAR CD IS, which must be "mutilated" into the answer. This time, the anagram fodder is not contiguous, and the two halves must be collected and considered together by order of "with". Notice also that "is" looked to be a linking word but was actually part of the fodder! This kind of thing can also be sussed out with a letter count: BEAR only gives us four letters and BEAR CD only six, but we need eight, so IS must be part of the fodder too.

Sometimes the anagram is indicated as something which will or must happen to letters, as in

Near impossible to change – or not! (14)
Near impossible to change / – or not! (14)

for IMPRESSIONABLE as an anagram of NEAR IMPOSSIBLE, as indicated by "to change", with "or" as linking word. The definition, "not", references the rest of the clue, telling us that the answer means something which is **not** "near impossible to change". IMPRESSIONABLE is certainly a good candidate.

Anagram intermission: indirect anagrams

We now take a short breather from the inexorable onslaught of clues to reflect briefly on some crossword history. There is a good reason for this, I promise!

In the mid-1920s, when crosswords were an emerging artform – when even quick crosswords were still establishing themselves – early setters such as Edward Powys Mathers, who set for *The Observer* under the pseudonym Torquemada, began introducing unmistakably "cryptic" elements into their crosswords, including anagrams, classical allusions, incomplete quotations, and other forms of reference and wordplay. Torquemada was the first to use cryptic clues exclusively in his crosswords, which were renowned for being arcane and extremely difficult. This tradition of extreme clue difficulty persisted for many years, until a brave few began to set out "principles of fairness", to which all crossword setters would have to adhere. Alistair Ferguson Ritchie, who set crosswords for *The Listener* under the pseudonym Afrit, provides one of the earliest and most basic principles in the introduction to his 1946 compendium *Armchair Crosswords*:

The Clues, we learn, may be either Honours or Tricks. The Honours, which demand knowledge, do not concern us; the Tricks which demand wits, do. We must expect the composer to play tricks, but we shall insist that he play fair. *The Book of the Crossword* lays this injunction upon him: "You need not mean what you say, but you must say what you mean." This is a superior way of saying that he can't have it both ways. He may attempt to mislead by employing a form of words which can be taken in more than one way, and it is your fault if you take it the wrong way, *but it is his fault if you can't logically take it the right way.*

Later setters continued the quest to provide fair foundations for cryptic crosswords. The most important single publication in this vein is *Ximenes on the Art of the Crossword* (1966), written by Derrick Macnutt (pseudonym Ximenes), who took over as chief crossword setter for *The Observer* following Torquemada's death in 1939. One of Ximenes' many lasting legacies is his denouncement of a particular form of wordplay, the *indirect anagram*, where the anagram fodder is not given literally. As he himself writes in his book (pp. 51-52):

Secondly – and here, for once, I differ from Afrit – I hate what I call an *indirect anagram*. By that I mean "Tough form of monster" for HARDY (anagram of HYDRA). There may not be many monsters in five letters; but all the same I think the clue-writer is being mean and withholding information which the solver can reasonably demand. Why should he have to solve something before he can begin to use part of a clue? He has first to find "hydra" – and why shouldn't it be "giant"? – and then use the anagrammatic information to help him think of "hardy". ... My real point is that the secondary part of the clue – other than the definition – is meant to help the solver. The indirect anagram, unless there are virtually no alternatives, hardly ever does. He only sees it after he has got his answer by other means.

At least partially as a result of this, indirect anagrams – once commonplace in cryptic crosswords – are now widely considered unfair to the solver and are all but abandoned. At least one modern setter, Gordius, who sets for *The Guardian*, occasionally uses them, but

he is the exception rather than the rule.

Ximenes laid down a great many other principles of cluing fairness, which has led to the adoption of the terms *Ximenean* and *Libertarian* to describe a setter's cluing style. Broadly, Ximenean setters stick to his principles to the letter, ensuring that their clues are free of all superfluous material, are logically and grammatically watertight, and strictly follow the aforesaid "tripartite anatomy of a clue"; Libertarian setters play much faster and looser with wordplay and definitions, and may be happy with "close enoughs". I myself am mostly Ximenean, with mild Libertarian leanings; what exactly this means will become clearer over the coming sections.

We now return to scheduled material.

Anagrams (continued)

Although indirect anagrams are in contemporary disuse, it is almost universally considered fair to use common abbreviations (and more generally, as we will see later, bits and pieces of words) as part of the anagram fodder, particularly when they abbreviate to the first one or two letters of their full form. Precisely how many can be used before it is considered "unfair" is not set in stone and is the subject of much disagreement. This clue, for example,

Rose West's special offer? (5)
Rose West's special / offer? (5)

constructs WORSE ("offer"; see below) as an anagram of ROSE W, as indicated by "special" and linked by "'s" = "is", where W is the abbreviated form of "west" (note that we ignore the capitalization per convention). Just as in this clue, abbreviations are usually employed without warning, though in practice only a mercifully small number are actually in common use; if they **are** explicitly indicated, an *abbreviation indicator* such as "short", "little" or "small" is used, as in "short female" for F or "little left" for L. Abbreviations required to solve my example clues will always be mentioned explicitly.

A question mark, in general, unless used as innocuous and cryptically meaningless punctuation, indicates that part of the clue preceding it is an example, only a possibility, somewhat loose, must be interpreted literally, or is used in some nonstandard way. For this clue, consider that "off" can mean "bad" (as in "rotten" or "spoilt", when talking about food), so that the presumable equivalent of the presumable comparative "off-er" is the comparative of "bad", WORSE, despite the fact that "offer" and "worse" are not normally used in this sense. The question mark in this clue alerts us to this nonstandard use of "offer" to mean "more bad", which would otherwise be unfair. Such playfulness with words is very common in cryptic crosswords. You will be either pleased or horrified to hear that there will be many more examples in the clues to come.

Continuing the theme of unfairness, consider this clue, which has a mathematical surface:

Sly Gaussian manipulation that's not pretty (2,4,2,3)
Sly Gaussian manipulation / that's not pretty (2,4,2,3)

Here we are instructed to find a "manipulation" of SLY GAUSSIAN to get AS UGLY AS SIN (not pretty), but there's a problem: the anagram indicator is a noun, so how can it modify

SLY GAUSSIAN? A similar issue arises in clues like

Whole lotta trouble (5)
Whole / lotta trouble (5)

for TOTAL as an anagram of LOTTA, as purportedly indicated by "trouble". If the indicators were "manipulated" and "troubled" then there would be no problem, though it would ruin the surface readings. Many, mainly Ximeneans, contest that these nounal anagram indicators are at odds with natural language use, and cannot be logically interpreted in the necessary way, thus flouting Afrit's maxim that the setter should say what they mean. Whatever your personal views on them, be aware that more Libertarian setters and publications are likely to use them as and when they see fit. I personally take a very dim view of them and use them only as a last resort, so you can rest assured that no more will appear in my example clues.

We are not finished with anagrams quite yet, but this is as far as we can go with what we currently know. Stick around for several more exciting variants!