

Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords

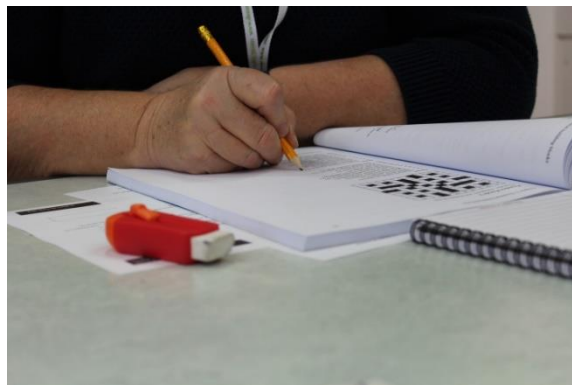
A Course for Beginners

U3A course guide

“I have finished the weekend Telegraph crossword for the first time ever.
Am thrilled, your course is super.” Pauline Manson, Poole U3A 2016

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Who has used the course

450 adults inside and outside the U3A movement

This course has been taught to over 450 adults, including 243 U3A members.

It has been used by a number of U3A group leaders and has been taught at seven U3As and two U3A National Summer Schools.

“A brilliant course.” Sylvia O’Brien, Crickhowell U3A, National Summer Schools 2016

It has also been taught at adults learning centres outside of the U3A movement, including the WI’s Denman training centre, Knuston Hall in Wellingborough and the Green Park in Pitlochry.

“Great course, I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of it.” Norman Lindsay, The Green Park, January 2016

How the course has developed

The course has been developed by Henry Howarth, a qualified teacher with experience of designing and authoring learning content for adults.

The first course was run by Henry at Age UK in Dorchester in the autumn of 2011, and since then it has been run at the following U3As: Bournemouth (6); Dorchester; Christchurch (6); Poole (3); Yeovil; Wimborne (2); and Ravenshead.

The course was originally developed using printed sheets and then consolidated into a comprehensive 192 page A4 course book in April 2014, once all the learning content had been fine tuned.

Five U3A members who have attended a course have started groups at their local U3As: Christchurch; Horncastle; Countesthorpe; Wimborne; and Ravenshead.

Ravenshead U3A: a case study

A beginners group started by a beginner

Inspired by attending a U3A Summer School course on cryptic crosswords, Frances Gilbert decided to start a crossword group in her area despite being a beginner herself.

She engaged the help of an experienced solver, and with Sue Butler acting as the facilitator, the Ravenshead Cryptic Crosswords group was started in the autumn term in 2017.

The group are finding it easy to plan and manage their sessions using the course book, and are setting their own pace as they learn together.

With the support of Alan Paul, the U3As webmaster, Frances has developed the group web page as a blog and you can follow the groups progress here: <https://u3asites.org.uk/ravenshead/page/71759>

How the course works

Modular structure

The course consists of six learning modules, starting with the simplest ideas and easiest types of clue:

1. Getting started
2. Essential Building Blocks
3. Taking Clue Structure Further
4. Completing the itinerary of clue types
5. Tackling trickier clues
6. Developing your crossword skills further

It builds step by step to the advanced aspects of solving cryptic puzzles.

Clear explanations

Each topic is explained clearly, with examples to show how the different types of clue work and diagrams to support the written explanations.

Theory and practice

Every topic is followed by specially designed exercises and practice clues to reinforce the key learning points.

The level of difficulty of the practical work gradually increases as the course unfolds.

Practice puzzles

Each course module ends with practice puzzles. These are designed to consolidate topics covered in the chapter and integrate them with learning from previous chapters.

The final module includes newspaper puzzles at different levels of difficulty to help learners find an appropriate source of puzzles for further practice.

Reference tools

There is an extensive set of practical reference tools to use when solving, with look-up tables of some of the more common indicators, short word substitutions and abbreviations used in cryptic puzzles.

“Excellent course! Really clear and logical explanations for stuff I’ve never understood before.” Wendy Barton, Christchurch U3A, 2017

What the course consists of

Here is a summary of the topics in each learning module:

1. Getting started

- Hidden Word clues
- Anagram clues
- Clue structure fundamentals
- Introduction to crossword puzzles
- Practice Puzzle 1

2. Essential building blocks

- Charade clues
- Short word substitutions
- Abbreviations
- The Solving Compass
- Practice Puzzle 2

3. Taking clue structure further

- Definitions
- Connectors
- Punctuation
- Sandwich clues
- Deletion clues
- Reversal clues
- Practice puzzle 3

4. Completing the itinerary of clue types

- Other letter-wordplay clues:
 - Sequence clues
 - Moving Letter clues
 - Letter Substitution clues
- Homophone clues
- Double Definition clues
- Cryptic Definition clues
- Letter selection wordplay
- Finer points of clue presentation
- Practice puzzle 4

5. Tackling trickier clues

- Compound clues
- All-in-one clues
- Novelty clues
- What makes clues harder to solve
- Less familiar clue content
- Deceptive word meanings
- Extending the Solving Compass
- Disguising clue structure
- Reversing clue logic
- Practice puzzle 5

6. Developing your crossword skills further

- A brief history of the cryptic crossword
- Sources of crosswords for practice
- Cryptic crossword resources
- Attempting crossword puzzles
- Building your crossword skills
- Sample newspaper puzzles:
 - Daily Mirror Cryptic Crossword
 - The Sun Two-Speed Crossword
 - Daily Express Crusader Crossword
 - Daily Telegraph Cryptic Crossword

Reference tools

- Summary of wordplay and clue types
- Lists of some common indicators:
 - Hidden Word
 - Anagram
 - Sandwich
 - Reversal
 - Deletion
 - Homophone
- Abbreviations and short word substitutions: look-up table
- Glossary

“Extremely comprehensive course Excellent!” Nauman Butt,
Alston Hall, March 2015

What you will need

Course books, table and chairs

Each member of the group will need a copy of the course book *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners*.

The course book includes all the course content. The first module, Getting Started, is available at the end of this document to illustrate the content and enable groups to try it out.

Apart from this, each group member will need some desk space and a chair, and something to write with. There are no other essential requirements, although access to a board for rough work would be helpful.

No need for photocopying or preparing presentations

There are a number of advantages to using a course book:

- learners like having a course book - everything is in one place, in an easy to manage format
- it avoids all the effort involved with photocopying and administering separate sheets
- it is a cost-effective way of providing a substantial quantity of printed course material.

Because of the clarity and structure of the course book, it is not necessary to use teaching content presented on boards — such as flip charts, projectors and smart boards. This saves on the management involved with presenting content in this way, and the associated costs.

A good course book is a practical solution for U3A groups and a great way to deliver bespoke learning content.

“Our group enjoy using the course book as a ‘workbook’ in our sessions and for further reading and practice at home. The only additional item we have used is a small portable whiteboard for displaying anagrams or to demonstrate some aspect of wordplay.

The Course book is clearly and carefully structured in a way that enables the beginner to develop the skills and understanding necessary to solve cryptic crosswords. There are plenty of examples, practice clues and practice puzzles throughout to develop these skills and advice regarding further resources. The Reference tools section at the back of the book is a very valuable resource.

We are working at our own pace and consolidating our learning before moving on to Chapter 5: Tackling trickier clues.” Frances Gilbert, Ravenshead U3A, March 8 2018

Getting copies of the course book

Special U3A pricing: £10 including free delivery

Group leaders and U3A committee members can order the book for £10 per copy, including free delivery.

Send an email to books@czdcrosswords.co.uk with the number of copies required and the delivery address, using your U3A name as the email subject. You will then receive an invoice with payment details (payment can be made online or by cheque). Once payment has been received your order will be placed and the book(s) printed. Allow ten working days for printing and delivery.

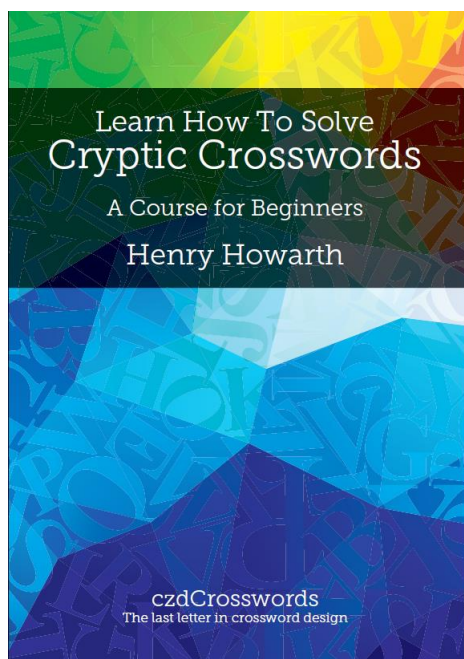
List price: £14.95

The book is also available online at Amazon and Lulu (www.lulu.com) and can be ordered at any book shop.

Book details

Title:	Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners
Author:	Henry Howarth
Publisher:	CZD Crosswords
ISBN:	978-0-9927382-0-4
Cover:	Paperback
Inside:	Black and White print
Size:	A4
Stitching:	Perfect bound
Page count:	192 pages

Front cover



“An excellent book!” Marian Starkey,
Bournemouth U3A, 2014

“Most enjoyable, the splendid book
allows me to build my confidence and
skills at cryptic crossword solving”
Lavinia Culshaw, Milton Keynes U3A,
National Summer Schools 2017

Learning outcomes

“Before the course, cryptic crosswords were a complete mystery. I only did ordinary crosswords. By the end of the course I was able to do about 75% of the Observer crossword, much to my amazement” Sheila Burns, Christchurch U3A, January 2015

On completing the course

After completing the course, beginners should:

- understand the principles of how cryptic clues work
- be aware of the variety of wordplay and clue construction
- be familiar with the more common types of clue and wordplay
- be able to solve easier clues and puzzles
- be able to attempt intermediate clues and puzzles
- understand how to develop their solving skills further.

They will be able to progress to an improvers group.

“I now have a new hobby” Julie Wall, Thatcham U3A, National Summer Schools 2017

Course feedback is consistently very good

Feedback from people attending this course inside and outside the U3A has been consistently very good, as exemplified by the quotes included in this document.

A number of surveys have been undertaken to gauge the perceptions of the course by attendees and assess course outcomes. These provide quantitative feedback on specific aspects of the course and the results of two surveys follow on the next pages:

- A survey from a group at Bournemouth U3A who completed the course in the autumn of 2013. At this stage, the course content was still delivered on photocopied sheets and had not yet been extended and integrated into the course book.
- A survey from three U3A groups (Dorchester, Christchurch and Bournemouth) who completed courses in the autumn of 2014. This was after the course book was published and the survey focussed on the course book itself.

Bournemouth U3A Autumn 2013: Survey results

A successful result: rated 4.5 out of 5 overall

The 12 attendees of a course run at U3A (University of the Third Age) in Bournemouth were surveyed to gauge their perceptions of the teaching quality, learning outcomes and benefits of the course.

How the survey was conducted

At the end of the course, each attendee was issued with a feedback form and a stamped addressed envelope. They were asked to return their completed forms anonymously (to reduce bias) after a period of time for reflection.

The form consisted of a set of statements about the course. The attendees indicated how strongly they agreed with each statement using the following attitudinal scale:

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

Survey results

The table of results shows the average response for the group arrived at by aggregating the responses of each individual:

Sections	Statements	Average
Teaching and materials	The topics in the course were clearly explained	4.83
	I was able to get answers to my questions during the sessions	4.67
	The theory and exercises were at the right level for me	4.25
	* The course sheets provided were useful	4.83
Learning outcomes	I understand how the clues in cryptic crosswords work	4.08
	I have acquired skills that help me solve cryptic crosswords	4.33
	I know how to develop my cryptic crossword skills further	4.17
	The course has met my expectations	4.58
The benefits of doing the course	I enjoyed doing the course	4.58
	I found the course interesting	4.58
	Doing the course has contributed to my personal development	4.08
	I intend to continue doing cryptic crosswords	4.58
Overall average		4.47

(* At this stage the course content was still being delivered using photocopied sheets.)

The average response for each statement was midway between “Agree” and “Strongly agree”

Conclusions

The results show that the attendees rated the course very positively across all the aspects that were measured.

Three U3As autumn 2014: Survey results

How the survey was conducted

At the end of courses taught in autumn 2014 at three U3As (Dorchester, Christchurch and Bournemouth), attendees were issued with feedback forms and stamped addressed envelopes.

They were asked to return their completed forms anonymously after they had finished reading Chapters 1– 6 of *Learn How to Solve Cryptic Crosswords: A Course for Beginners* and attempted some activities at the end of each chapter.

The form consisted of a set of statements about the book. The respondents indicated how strongly they agreed with each statement using the following attitudinal scale:

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

The numerical scores for each response were then aggregated and averaged, as shown in the above table.

The respondents also indicated an overall assessment of the book on a scale of 1 to 5.

Readers rated this book very highly overall

Maximum = 5.0

What is your overall assessment of the book?

4.8

Readers also rated this book very highly on a range of individual measures

I found the book engaging	4.6
The topics in the book are clearly explained	4.8
The diagrams make it easy to see how cryptic clues work	4.6
The exercises and practice clues have enabled me to develop solving skills	4.6
The practice puzzles have helped me to consolidate my learning	4.8
The explanations given with the answers are easy to understand	4.6
The Reference Tools section is a useful feature	4.9
I can find my way around the book with ease	4.6
I have enjoyed using the book	4.8
The book will be useful to refer to in the future	4.8