The Times Crossword Book 5

INTRODUCTION

"I would like to compile crosswords for *The Times…"* begins an enquiring letter. How realistic is this ambition?

Currently there are ten regular compilers, each contributing between one and four crosswords a month, and a lengthy list of occasionals, all of whom have proved their mettle. The regulars are guaranteed their frequencies until they decide to retire, or let their standards slip. The queue of occasionals can be joined, but it cannot be jumped by sheer confidence or optimism – some experience is a *sine qua non*.

"I have been a *Times* solver for many years…" Unfortunately, expertise in solving them does not guarantee skill at composing clues, especially for *The Times*. Many of the sharpest solvers unravel the cryptic implications of a clue so quickly that the effort put into making it grammatically sound, and read like a more or less sensible piece of prose, is all but lost on them.

"I enclose a sample of my work…" is more promising, but only if the sample, whether or not it has been published elsewhere, demonstrates a basic understanding of the general principles of crossword compiling, and particular evidence of sympathy with *The Times* style.

"I appreciate the value of a crossword which needs little or no editing…" in one covering letter impressed John Grant (Crossword Editor 1983-95). The writer had studied and analysed which techniques were used in *The Times* crossword, but just as importantly, noted those which weren't. John said the puzzle was better than those of some of his longer-term contributors, but he couldn't bring himself to put them out to grass just yet, and occasional gaps occurred only rarely – about three times a year, as it turned out.

The ambition is realistic only if accompanied by the appropriate skill, willingness to adapt, a lot of patience – and perhaps a little bit of luck!

This book covers the second half of 2000. My thanks to David Akenhead for proof editing

Mike Laws
Crossword Editor of *The Times*
October 2002

Cryptic crossword compiling is a deceptive art. Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's 'Through the Looking-Glass' sums it up when he says, "When I use a word…. It means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

I chose this introduction by Mike Laws my dear departed friend, whose legacy and that of my beloved father and the magical mindset accompanying two geniuses lives on in this faithful retainer, trying to confound his doctors and determined to complete his first London Wheelchair marathon on Sunday 26th April unaided. He believes in not just travelling light but like Matt Weston, and his harmony with his skeleton bobsleigh courtesy of a dedicated team at Bath university enabled him to overcome superb athletes at Cortina, with a simple formula minus ice and snow which earned him an Olympic Gold medal, I have engineered a similar challenge for those commuters who delight in passing the odd hour or two cerebrally challenged with a digital crossword game on Great Western twixt say, Bristol Temple Meads and Paddington or wherever your travel takes you!
Despite his handicaps which include a hand incapable of writing thanks to an accident, and an inbuilt dread of small hand held machines requiring a manual dexterity he no longer possesses, this author has compensated with his own abilities as a mathematician and technician to produce an utterly addictive crossword game, in the spirit of Mike Laws's lovely introduction, who liked my stuff and I liked his!

Proof of pudding being in the consumption thereof here is my solace for the 8.34 to Paddington!

Introducing the Revolutionary:
Alpha Beater, a Computer Crossword Game by David Akenhead

Consider our wonderful alphabet all 26 letters of it and you have both the recipe for all the best-selling crosswords on the market in a 13 x 13 bracket! But also an insight into the inner strengths of the human mind to help it remain fit and active. I have appropriately named my invention my Alpha beater as Omega is my witness from beginning to end, and in between I have devised 15 samples by way of demonstration. I choose to dispense with the old boundaries of cryptic and concise in true Richard Browne style with his earlier Times 2 creations!

I go further. I have being following Mick Hodgkin, Puzzles Editor's challenges, with Wordhunt, Saturday 28th Feb, which though ingenious is labour intensive for a 5x5

for 25 letters of the alphabet – mine by contrast, not only covers 26, but reveals 1,000 concise crosswords awaiting a quantative assessment of an 11x13 area of the original area of play awaiting the editor's setting of each. The other 2x13 space heads my challenge as representing each letter of the alphabet and the number of each letter present in each challenge, and also the fact that every challenge being different, a number of letters will have zero weighting from the off, which further adds to the fun. So, the editor's task, which I undertake in pre-setting each, makes my work child's play for an editorial promotion.

Putting my money where my mouth is. I have decided that the first seven Times Concise crosswords and the first eight Nital crosswords exhibiting European as well as classical Latin crosswords are to be liberally assessed by the public at large on my Visits Page prior to my new Market Place currently under construction. The beauty of my system is that as the solving progresses, what remains becomes easier to deduce, and the game is on to reduce the granary to zero, at which stage you can shout Eureka to your inbuilt monitor!

Let us begin at the beginning in good old Dylan Thomas fashion.

Both systems work on similar principles, so Times Concise 1 is all we need for a demonstration.

You are presented with a 13x13 grid and all you have is your mouse or equivalent to serve you. The top two lines of 13 comprise all the letters in the alphabet, and the number of letters available for each challenge. Left click on 1 across on the grid starts a non-intrusive clock for people who like to time their efforts. I don't, but I guess I may be in a minority! First clue announces: Give meal to (4) but this seemingly easy clue has a wee catch, 2 down is appended within it, so the whole being equal to the sum of its parts the down clue needs to be attended to first. 2 down reads: Formula One, Milan (2,5) with cryptic play on Formula One, and where you, as a racing driver are coming from, and EX MONZA requires no further explanation! So the next thing you do is go to your stack safe in the knowledge that you have cracked this one! And if you haven't, don't worry, you can return your letters to stack or anywhere else on the grid. A simple left click on a letter's number (top right) reduces the count by 1, and another click either augments your stack whence the letter came, or places it elsewhere. So all the letters in EX MONZA are now entered except the last. Because it's correct the addition of the last 'A' turns the light experimental print to bold, and the solution is effectively sealed and locked for the remainder of the crossword.

Though you always have the facility to start the whole crossword from scratch again. As I say, no scores in this, just mental therapy! Continue in the same vein for remainder of the crossword and earn its approbation when you eventually select Submit Entry when all your readings in the alphabet stack register a sweet zero! Enjoy, and if you like it pass the word!

An appropriate introduction penned by my late father follows:

Grateful acknowledgment to Richard Browne, previous Crossword Editor of *The Times* whose work is included in the computer crosswords, together with that of *The Times* crossword team and former editors, Mike Laws, Brian Greer, John Grant, Edmund Akenhead, Jane Carton, Ronald Carton, and never to be forgotten our founding father, Adrian Bell.

Enjoy! **David Akenhead, Author of the Computer Crosswords 2026**

Introduction to The Times crossword (and others of that ilk)

By Edmund Akenhead, Times Crossword Editor, 1965-83

The devices used by a cryptic crossword compiler are so many and varied that an introduction such as this can only give the beginner a glimpse of them. Experience will prove the best teacher, but I hope that the following tips will help the beginner in his or her first steps towards mastering 'The Times' (and similar) crosswords.

The best known device is the anagram. "Terribly angered" is a definition of the answer "enraged", which is also an anagram of "angered", the word "Terribly" being used in the clue as an anagram indicator. The solver should always be on the look-out for words suggesting arrangement, change, wrongness, confusion, strangeness and the like which may point to anagrams in the clue: "new" is sometimes used, also "sort" and "out" (in the sense of "wrong"), while "perhaps", "maybe", and "possibly" will probably indicate anagrams. Then there are words which have different meanings: "refuse" in a clue may appear to be a verb meaning "decline", but it may really mean the noun describing "rubbish": "tent" may mean not a canvas shelter, but a Spanish wine: "saw" or "gnome" may mean a maxim. Solving crosswords certainly helps to enlarge one's vocabulary. All sorts of words have hidden meanings in crosswords with "do" clued as a party, "letter" as a landlord, "number" as an anaesthetic (that which numbs) and so ad infinitum, the oldest chestnut being

"flower" as a river, while "sewer" may mean a sempstress and "cover for a sewer" will mean not a manhole but a thimble, and "tour de France" is not a cycle race but the Eiffel Tower.

Many a crossword answer is made up of other words indicated by the clue. "Loudly disapprove royal skating display? Some reservations here (7-5)" is solved by joining up Boo-king off-ice, while Mild-red is well known as a girl with slightly communist sympathies. A word may consist of one word containing another (Envelope), and there are many other ways in which words (including abbreviations) may be combined either in their normal, or in anagrammatic or reversed forms to make the answer. In such "build-ups" the word "river" may refer to one of the compiler's favourite British waterways - Dee, Exe, Fal or Ure (tributary of the Yorkshire Ouse).

Solvers should be familiar with many common abbreviations, such as e.g., i.e., the points of the compass N.S.E.W. (sometimes clued as bridge players), musical notes A to G (or doh, re, mi etc) and Roman numerals M, D, C, L, X, V, I. The clue " 1,200 less 200 (10)" needs conversion into Roman numerals "MCC less CC" and anyone interested in cricket will know that the M in MCC stands for Marylebone. Chemical abbreviations for elements are sometimes used such as "au" (gold), "ag" (silver), "fe" (iron) etcetera. The letter L could be clued as money (pound sign), 50, lake, or as student, tyro, novice or learner (driver with L Plates. Solvers are also expected to know simple words in the more familiar foreign languages, particularly the articles, e.g. el (clued as "the Spanish), der ("the German") un ("a French") etc.

Finally, to mention four other types of clue: (a) Hidden answer clue "Something more in the next race (5)", here the answer EXTRA appears in consecutive letters in the clue (nEXT RAce"). (b) Surgery, which requires a certain amount of doctoring of words to produce the desired effect. Associated words like "beheaded", "curtailed", "reduced", often indicate this type of clue: "Humperdinck in turn to some extent a singer (6)" answer TREBLE is one of my favourites. Engelbert ("in turn") gives in reverse form TREBLEGNE and "to some extent" indicates a need for surgery or reduction. (c) "Sound" clues with sound-indicators such as "say", "we hear", "it's said", or "sound" telling the solver to look to the sound of the words used. "Some measure of spirit? I say! (5) gives the answer OPTIC (optic measures used in bars). "Say" in the clue tells the solver to look to the sound of "I", that is "eye" revealing an alternative meaning. (d) The acronym or word made up from the initial letters of other words. "Paddy as the normal agriculture initially here (5) PATNA.

An ounce of practical demonstration being worth a pound of theory I leave the rest up to you.