Cryptic Crossword Clue Description

Cryptic Crossword clues are based on various forms of wordplay. Every clue has two non-overlapping parts to it - one part that provides a standard crossword style clue, and a second part that includes the wordplay involved. In general, punctuation is completely ignored and is there to provide more reality to the clue standing alone as a “single” clue. Below are examples of types of cryptic crossword clues with a “/” to separate the two parts.

1) Hidden words: In this type of clue, the cryptic part indicates that the word is hidden within other words in the clue.
   Indicator words: ”in part,” ”partially,” ”in,” ”within,” ”hides,” ”conceals,” ”held by”
   Example: Founded ermine, deer hides / damaged (10)
   Cryptic part: ”damaged"
   Discussion: As described, ”found ermine deer” “hides” a word that is described by “damaged”… here it is again with the answer underlined: “foUND ERMINE Deer.”

2) Reversals: The cryptic part describes a word that gets reversed to make a new word.
   Indicator words: ”receding,” ”in the mirror,” ”going the wrong way,” ”returns,” ”reverses,” ”to the left,” or ”left” (for across clues), and ”rising,” ”overturned,” or ”comes up” (for down clues)
   Example: Returned beer / fit for a king (5)
   Cryptic part: ”Returned beer"
   Discussion: When parsed correctly, this clue indicates that a word described by “beer” is reversed (or ”returned”) to create a new word that is described by ”fit for a king.” ”Lager” is a type of beer and, when reversed, makes the right answer: REGAL.

3) ”Charade” clues: Here the answer is formed by joining individually clued words to make a larger word (namely, the answer).
   Indicator words: Here, words can simply go next to each other in the clue as they do in the answer - it is not necessarily specified. However, where the parts go in relation to others is sometimes indicated with words such as ”against,” ”after,” ”on,” ”with,” or (in a down clue) ”above"
   Example: Outlaw leader / managing money (7)
   Cryptic part: ”outlaw leader"
   Discussion: Here, a word described by “outlaw” is combined with a word that is described by “leader” to create a word that is described by ”managing money.” Thus, the word “ban” is combined with “king” to create the answer: BANKING.

4) Double definition: Here, the “cryptic part” is actually just a 2nd definition.
   Indicator words: These clues tend to be short and do not generally have indicator words.
   Example: Not seeing / window covering (5)
   Cryptic part: ”not seeing”
   Discussion: Here, the cryptic part is straightforward and simply indicates a second definition. A word that is described by “not seeing” and “window covering” is BLIND.

5) Containers: A container clue puts one set of letters inside another.
   Indicator words: Other container indicators are “outside of,” ”inside,” ”over,” ”around,” ”clutching”, ”enters”, and the like.
   Example: Apostle / friend outside of university (4)
   Cryptic part: ”friend outside of university”
Discussion: Here, a word described by “friend” is placed “outside of” a word (or letter) that describes “university” to create a word (or name) described by apostle. So, “pal” (a friend) is put around the letter “U” (often times found in acronyms to mean university). This creates the correct answer: PAUL.

6) Anagrams: An anagram is a rearrangement of a certain section of the clue to form the answer.
**Indicator words:** This is usually indicated by words such as 'strange', 'bizarre', 'muddled', 'wild', 'drunk', or any other term indicating change.

**Example:** Chaperone / shredded corset (6)
**Crossword part:** “chaperone”
**Cryptic part:** “shredded corset”
**Discussion:** The word “shredded” indicates that the letters in “corset” are rearranged to create a word that is described by “chaperone.” Here, that word is ESCORT.

7) Homophones: Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings, such as "night" and "knight".
**Indicator words:** These are always a word or phrase that has to do with phonetics, such as "reportedly," "they say," "utterly," "to the audience," "by the sound of it," "is heard," etc.

**Example:** We hear twins / shave (4)
**Crossword part:** “shave”
**Cryptic part:** “we hear twins”
**Discussion:** Here, we are looking for a word that is described by “twins” that sounds like a word that is described by “shave.” In this case, the word “pair” sounds like the word that is the right answer: PARE.

8) Initialisms: In an initialism clue, the first letters of part of the clue are put together to give the answer.
**Indicator words:** “Initially,” “Firstly,” and “To start” can indicate initialism.

**Example:** Initially amiable person eats / primate (3)
**Crossword part:** “primate”
**Cryptic part:** “initially amicable person eats”
**Discussion:** Initially here indicates to take the first letters of the rest of the cryptic part of the clue. Those letters are A, P and E – or, the right answer: APE.

9) Deletions: Deletions consist of beheadments, curtailments, and internal deletions. In beheadments, a word loses its first letter. In curtailments, it loses its last letter, and internal deletions remove an inner letter, such as the middle one.
**Indicator words:** These clues tend to be short and do not generally have indicator words.

**Example:** Challenging / sweetheart heartlessly (6)
**Crossword part:** “challenging”
**Cryptic part:** “sweetheart heartlessly”
**Discussion:** Here, the word “heartlessly” indicates that the center letter from a word described by “sweetheart” will mean “challenging.” “Darling” is a word that means sweetheart and – without the “L” in the center, we get the right answer: DARING.

Final comments: Generally, cryptic crossword clues are given without the “/” to separate the two parts. This makes it more challenging because confidently parsing the clue can be difficult. We felt it would be more appropriate for your first shot at it to include the separation.