

Puzzle Editing Handout

Editors Canada Conference 2021: Editors Transform

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Thanks for watching my presentation on puzzle editing. I hope I was able to show you some ways to help puzzle constructors maximize the fun for their intended solvers. Interested in finding out more? The annotated list of links below should help you dive down the rabbit hole of solving, constructing, and editing puzzles.

Speaking of solving, I hope you will download and solve “Letter Imperfect,” a delightful meta crossword puzzle made especially for this conference by Mike Shenk, master puzzle constructor and editor. Like all meta crosswords, this puzzle has an “answer” beyond just filling in the grid, which you will discover by solving. Email me the one-word answer by Saturday, June 19, and I will enter your name in a draw to win a copy of my puzzle book, [Every Night I Go Abroad](#). (I’ll send out three copies.) I’ll post the solution after I do the draw.

If you enjoy “Letter Imperfect” and are looking for more meta crosswords, check out these links:

The WSJ’s Friday crossword (free): <http://blogs.wsj.com/puzzle/>

Matt Gaffney’s Weekly Crossword Contest (\$3/month): <https://xwordcontest.com/>

CONSTRUCTING AND EDITING PUZZLES

Puzzlecraft: How to Make Every Kind of Puzzle by Mike Selinker and Thomas Snyder

A comprehensive introduction to a huge number of word, logic, and other puzzle types, with step-by-step instruction on how to construct them. Includes many solvable example puzzles.

<http://lonesharkgames.com/puzzlecraft-how-to-make-every-kind-of-puzzle/>

Crossword Constructor’s Handbook by Patrick Berry

The essential resource for anyone wanting to construct (or edit!) American crosswords.

<https://aframegames.com/store/>

New York Times series: How to Make a Crossword Puzzle

Star constructors explain how to build a theme, construct a grid, fill the puzzle, and write the clues.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/crosswords/constructing-themes.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/11/crosswords/how-to-make-crossword-puzzle-grid.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/13/crosswords/how-to-make-a-crossword-fill.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/crosswords/how-to-make-a-crossword-puzzle-4.html>

The Globe's crossword guru on this year's holiday puzzle (2017)

My puzzle mentor Fraser Simpson talks about how he became the *Globe's* cryptic constructor, and about self-editing his enormous annual holiday-themed crossword.

<https://youtu.be/xy4lr6QgsHA>

"Some Thoughts on Puzzle Standards" by Foggy Brume

A brief list of tips from a well-regarded and prolific constructor of hunt-style puzzles

<https://foggyb.livejournal.com/42978.html>

"Some Puzzle-Writing Thoughts from an Amateur" by Evan Chen

A thoughtful reflection on writing puzzlehunt-style puzzles with lots of great tips, from a member of 2021's MIT Mystery Hunt constructing team.

<https://usamo.wordpress.com/2021/02/18/some-puzzle-writing-thoughts-from-an-amateur/>

"With wit and guile, puzzle constructors lay out a path for solvers to follow," by Joshua Kosman

Interviews with constructors of various types of puzzles

<https://datebook.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/with-wit-and-guile-puzzle-constructors-lay-out-a-path-for-solvers-to-follow>

"More Than a Clue," by Raymond Simon

ACES blog post about editing crosswords.

<https://aceseditors.org/news/2021/more-than-a-clue>

National Puzzlers' League

Founded in 1883, the NPL is the world's oldest puzzling organization. There's a wealth of puzzle resources on their site, and lots of fellow puzzle enthusiasts to meet if you join the Krewe. (Most members are from the US, with some Canadian and other international members.)

<https://www.puzzlers.org/>

PUZZLE TOOLS

Wordplay Tools

Quinapalus

Qat (first link) is a powerful suite of tools allowing you to search for words that match a given pattern. (E.g., "edi..." means "search for 6-letter words starting with 'edi'." [result: EDIBLE, EDICTS, EDISON, EDITED, EDITOR]. The second link has a huge number of other puzzle tools.

<https://www.quinapalus.com/qat.html>

<https://www.quinapalus.com/cruciverbal.html>

OneLook

Search for words that fit patterns or look up definitions. OneLook pulls words, phrases, and names from over 1000 online dictionaries. You can sort by commonness and various other parameters.

<https://www.onelook.com/>

Nutrimatic

“A pattern-matching word-search tool designed for puzzle solving and construction, based on a dictionary of words and phrases that commonly occur in Wikipedia, using a regular expression based pattern syntax.”

<https://nutrimatic.org/>

Ag

A powerful downloadable anagram tool. You can use your own wordlist with this anagrammer.

<http://ag1.sourceforge.net/>

Internet Anagram Server/I, Rearrangement Servant

An easy-to-use browser-based anagram tool.

<https://wordsmith.org/anagram/>

Crossword-Making Software**Crossword Compiler**

The industry standard. Requires a PC/Windows system. This is what I use for making cryptics.

<https://www.crossword-compiler.com/>

Qxw

A very good program for making crosswords and other word puzzles that has the benefit of being freeeee!

<https://www.quinapalus.com/qxw.html>

Crossfire

The best crossword-making option for Mac users

<http://beekeeperlabs.com/crossfire/>

Matt Ginsberg's clue database

A downloadable database of crossword clues from major outlets, sortable by difficulty, publisher, etc.

<http://tiwwdty.com/clue/>

MISCELLANEOUS LINKS RELATING TO AMERICAN CROSSWORDS

Fun Stuff

xwordinfo

A site that “celebrates NYT crosswords and the people who make them.”

<https://www.xwordinfo.com/>

Crossword links page

This page lists places where you can find free crosswords online.

<http://www.crosswordese.com/links2.html>

“Oreos and the Art of Puzzle Construction” by Russell Goldenberg

A fun story about a weird clue for OREO

<https://pudding.cool/2021/01/oreo/>

“Famous Examples of Schrodinger Puzzles” by Kristen Seikaly

Entertaining blog post about Schrödinger puzzles

<https://blog.crosswordhobbyist.com/examples-schrodinger-puzzles/>

Crossword Plagiarism Scandal

In 2016, a plagiarism scandal shook the crossword, exposing systematic plagiarism on the part of a *USA Today* and *Universal Syndicate* crossword editor. Find out more about this story below...

“A Plagiarism Scandal is Unfolding in the Crossword World” by Oliver Roeder

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-plagiarism-scandal-is-unfolding-in-the-crossword-world/>

How a File Format Led to a Crossword Scandal — Saul Pwanson

<https://youtu.be/9aHfK8EUlzg>

NPR talks to Will Shortz about the scandal

<https://www.npr.org/2016/03/06/469383354/crossword-plagiarism-scandal-a-first-in-the-puzzle-community>

“How to Spot a Plagiarized Crossword” by Matt Gaffney

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/03/how-to-spot-a-plagiarized-crossword.html>

Diversity in Crossword Puzzles

“The Hidden Bigotry of Crosswords” by Natan Last

<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/03/fight-to-make-crosswords-more-inclusive/608212/>

“Crossword Constructors are Mostly Male. Here’s How We Fix That.” by Stella Zawistowski

<https://paw.princeton.edu/article/crossword-constructors-are-mostly-male-heres-how-we-fix>

Women constructors in the Shortz era

<https://www.xwordinfo.com/Women>

“How the New York Times Crossword Became Too Big to Fail” by Chris Erik Thomas

<https://studyhall.xyz/how-the-new-york-times-crossword-became-too-big-to-fail/>

“Broaden the Audience for Puzzles? She’s Game” by Melissa Guerrero

A profile of Everdeen Mason, editorial director of Games for the *New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/insider/puzzles-director-mason.html>

Notes on the February 6, 2021 NYT Saturday puzzle

(Scroll down to see constructor Kameron Austin Collins’s notes)

<https://www.xwordinfo.com/Crossword?date=2/6/2021>

Crossword Puzzle Collaboration Directory

If you are interested in becoming a crossword constructor, you may want to check out the Crossword Puzzle Collaboration Directory, a Facebook group "for people from underrepresented groups who are interested in making crossword puzzles."

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1515117638602016>

VIDEOS ABOUT THE ULU

I found these wonderful videos when researching the correct pronunciation of “ulu” (plural “uluít”).

The Fastest Woman with an Ulu

<https://youtu.be/w0EXRKpDVeM>

All About the ULU

https://youtu.be/_ZJxQ2ID7Do

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD RESOURCES

How to Solve Cryptic Crossword Puzzles | The New Yorker

Fun video with simple animations explaining how cryptic clues work. The video features crossword superstars Erik Agard and Anna Schechtman.

<https://youtu.be/HrKiYFJxgic>

Solving *The Nation's* Cryptic Crosswords, by Joshua Kosman and Henri Picciotto

A detailed guide to solving cryptics.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/solving-nations-cryptic-crosswords/>

“Solving Cryptic Crosswords” from the National Puzzlers’ League

Another detailed guide to solving cryptics.

<https://www.puzzlers.org/solving-cryptics>

Out of Left Field Cryptic Crosswords

Out of Left Field is a weekly cryptic subscription service run by Joshua Kosman and Henri Picciotto, formerly constructors of *The Nation's* cryptic (which has been discontinued). They also have an e-book called *Word Salad*, which is a fantastic guide to cryptic crosswords, the people who make them in North American scene, and “the debates that liven [the scene] up.”

<https://www.leftfieldcryptics.com/>

Cryptic Crosswords, Variety Word Puzzles, and Logic/Number Puzzles, compiled by Michael F. Gill

A huge list of links, with “(\$)” indicating whether payment or a subscription is required.

<https://bbtp.net/puzzle/links.html>

Fraser Simpson’s cryptic crossword collections

I cannot recommend Fraser’s puzzles highly enough, and it’s not just because he’s my mentor. His puzzles are clean, elegant, and always fun.

https://www.amazon.ca/Cryptic-Crosswords-1-Fraser-Simpson/dp/1777561302/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&qid=1623162484&refinements=p_lbr_books_authors_browse-bin%3AFraser+Simpson&s=books&sr=1-1

Cracking the Cryptic

The two videos below are from from [Cracking the Cryptic](#), a YouTube channel with a series of entertaining videos in which the hosts solve cryptic crosswords, sudokus, and other puzzles, discussing their solving process and commenting on the puzzles as they go. The “Miracle Sudoku” video linked below is RIVETING. Trust me. I don’t even like sudokus much and I found it riveting!

- BEGINNER video: How to solve a cryptic crossword

https://youtu.be/-zMchSc_McE

- The Miracle Sudoku

<https://youtu.be/yKf9aUIxdb4>

PUZZLEHUNT RESOURCES

Puzzlehunt Calendar

A list of upcoming puzzlehunt events, most of which are online and open to anyone.

<http://puzzlehuntcalendar.com/>

The joyful, perplexing world of puzzle hunts | Alex Rosenthal

A delightful and informative TED Talk discussing puzzle hunts in general and the MIT Mystery Hunt in particular.

https://youtu.be/v4ly_-IIFCQ

“Introduction to Puzzlehunts” by betaveros

A well-written and comprehensive guide to puzzlehunts: what they are and how to solve their puzzles.

<https://blog.vero.site/post/puzzlehunts>

MIT Mystery Hunt website

<https://www.mit.edu/~puzzle/>

MIT Mystery Hunt Index

A searchable index of all puzzles that have appeared in the MIT Mystery Hunt since 1994 (except 1998).

<https://devjoe.appspot.com/huntindex/index.html>

Puzzled Pint

A monthly puzzling event aimed at beginners. It takes place in bars in cities around the world, including five cities in Canada. Puzzles from past months are posted on the site as free downloads.

<http://www.puzzledpint.com/puzzles/>

Colby’s Curious Cookoff

A fun and beautifully designed online puzzlehunt aimed at beginners. Cost: pay-what-you-can.

<https://curiouscookoff.com/>

DASH

An annual puzzle event that takes place on the same day in various cities around the world (including Toronto and Montréal in 2019). Participants race around their city, solving imaginative puzzles to find out where to go next, and trying to be the first in their city to finish.

<http://playdash.org/>

PUZZLES FEATURED IN THIS PRESENTATION

Perimeter Institute’s “Escape the Forces of Nature Museum”

https://perimeterinstitute.ca/sites/default/files/PI_Escape_the_Forces_of_Nature_Museum_Start.pdf

“How to Best Write an Essay”

<https://2017.galacticpuzzlehunt.com/puzzle/2/4.html>

“Shaggy Cat Story”

<https://www.mezzacotta.net/puzzle/puzzles.php>

“Parlor”

<http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/october-2019>

“They Had Character”

<http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/october-2017>

“Bog of Eternal Stench”

<http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/september-2018>

SELF-PROMOTION CORNER

The Browser Cryptic Crosswords

I’m one of six constructors making cryptic crosswords for *The Browser*, an online article curation service. Some sample puzzles are available to solve for free.

<https://thebrowser.com/crossword-archive/>

New Scientist Puzzles

British cryptic constructors (or “setters,” as they are called in the UK) have a tradition of writing under pseudonyms. I write a science-themed cryptic each month for *New Scientist* under the pseudonym “Rasa.” You can solve one cryptic and one “quick” crossword (with American-style clues) for free as a non-subscriber.

<https://www.newscientist.com/crosswords/>

Puzzled Pint sets

I’ve written three puzzle sets for Puzzled Pint (all free to access):

Dracula: <http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/october-2017>

Labyrinth: <http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/september-2018>

Haunted House: <http://puzzledpint.com/puzzles/october-2019/>

Every Night I Go Abroad

I made a weird and challenging little puzzle book with my friends Jack Masters and David Montle.

www.everynightigoabroad.com