partly out of the letters of the previous answer, read left to right. So if the top word is CLUE, the second clue might be "CLUbs or spadEs," for the answer SUIT. This continues twice more, until you create the bottom word of the column, which should be the only answer possible for the final clue, checked by any crossing phrases. As such, these bottom answers tend to be nouns, quite often proper nouns.

As you're writing each clue, substitute blanks for the letters of the previous answer. Ideally, a middle or last clue should be mostly comprised of the word that came before. You shouldn't be able to guess a word without the previous input, unless your top clue is hard and you want people to start in the middle or at the end (which I often do).

Let's take a look at two of the columns, to show two different ways to attack the problem.

For column 5, I started in the middle. I noticed that eight of the ten letters in the third clue formed a word, which naturally made a phrase that could be used in the entry that followed to define the bottom answer. This left me with a 6-letter word at the top, which was crossed by my topmost answer. I had several options for this, and picked a clue that was difficult to figure out without the first clue being solved correctly.

In column 10, however, I started at the bottom, with a word that crossed phrases C and D. This was one of the only elegant words I could find that did so. It's hard to clue this word without a number, but I found a phrase that did so. I needed that O in the middle of whatever word I came up with to top that, and found an answer I could clue. The rest of that column was easy to clue.

3. Prepare the final clues and grid
Now clue the crossing phrases. After what you just did, this will seem quite easy.

Replace each blank with something the solver can write in or on. If you use regular blanks, make sure you're not using a font where the blanks will run into each other. It's a good idea to check to see if you can make any clue a bit more efficient at this point. As a sanity check, print your clues and write in the right answers to make sure you didn't miss any blanks.

Make a grid where you subdivide each column by where the answers go. There's no reason to be clever and not give these breaks, since the answer lengths are built right into your clues.

One thing I've found about waterfalls is that some clues that might seem too easy elsewhere become more appealing. In a normal crossword, the clue at the bottom of column 2 would give away the first letter of the answer, normally okay only in the easiest puzzles. But here, the solver can't see that letter without solving the previous clue, so I deemed it perfectly fine for a waterfall.

CRAFTING A CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

Finally, we come to the greatest word puzzle type of all time. The cryptic crossword is the second-greatest contribution the British ever made to the United States, the greatest being the United States. Popularized in the U.S. by composer Stephen Sondheim in *New York* magazine, the cryptic combines everything in the wordplay chapter and everything in the crossword chapter. Making a cryptic crossword is one of the most arcane and bizarre activities a puzzlesmith can try, but once you learn the rules, you'll want to make them forever.

1. Make a cryptic grid
In a cryptic crossword, unlike in a regular one, you don't want every letter to appear in both an Across and Down entry. If you "check" (that is, use in both an Across and Down entry) every letter, then the solver won't get to solve all the clues. There are two main types of crossword grids that allow you to have unchecked letters: the black-square grid and the barred grid.

A **black-square cryptic** is built like a letter cross. It has normal crossword symmetry. Every other letter is crossed by another entry, leaving you room to choose the words you want. Make sure you cross at least half the letters in every word (rounding up).

A **barred cryptic** is built like a blackout crossword, with a letter in every square. However, the heavy bars not only separate words from each other, they can isolate a letter in an Across entry so it doesn't appear in any Down entries, or vice versa. The grid doesn't have to be a rectangle; you can make a circle or a star or a house or anything else.

Unlike a normal crossword, which can be as big as 25×25 and still be fun, a cryptic needs to be small (no more than 13×13 for a barred cryptic, or 17×17 for a black-square, generally).

When you've chosen your grid type, fill in the grid with the words you'd like. Don't worry about making your words long; short words can be just as satisfying to clue as long ones.

I made a simple black-square grid that could show off each type of clue at least once. I made it pangrammatic (containing every letter of the alphabet) for no particular reason whatsoever.

2. Learn the syntax of cryptic clues
A cryptic clue is like an equation, and it is always something like "A + B = C" or "A = B + C." There's a lot of tricks to master in writing these equations.

Each clue has a literal **definition half**, either on the left or right side of the clue. You can be a little vaguer than you might in a regular crossword, so "cat" is a perfectly acceptable definition for TIGER. You can put

SHADOWBOXES

In a cryptic crossword, each clue is an equation, featuring a definition half and a cryptic half. The number of letters in each answer is indicated after its clue, with commas separating words. The gray squares, reading left-to-right by row, spell a final cryptic clue with a 7-letter answer.

ACROSS

1 Witch's cloaks and black purses (8)

5 Cover bridges of La Paz (4)

8 Roll stood in front of after-dinner drink (5)

9 Transport lech I've condemned (7)

11 They flatten carriers for youngsters carrying Mae West (12)

13 State, "Inevitable to lose iron shell" (6)

14 Measurement over Korean War site (6)

17 Strange world where a king is amid property (12)

20 Was a match for the French in Eastern University area (7)

21 Resort town's opening a cultivator (5)

22 Heartless gas haulers (4)

23 Mental hang-ups twisting our sense (8)

DOWN

1 Conceal skin (4)

2 Cite Ken's wild garment (7)

3 Polish a highball off, cowboy (7,4)

4 Hangover now overwhelms control (6)

6 Bait includes bit of cash money (5)

7 Primarily providing laughter and making more comfortable! (8)

10 Actress, male contact afterward (5,6)

12 Triumph cut short over pinch of omelet with cheese (3,5)
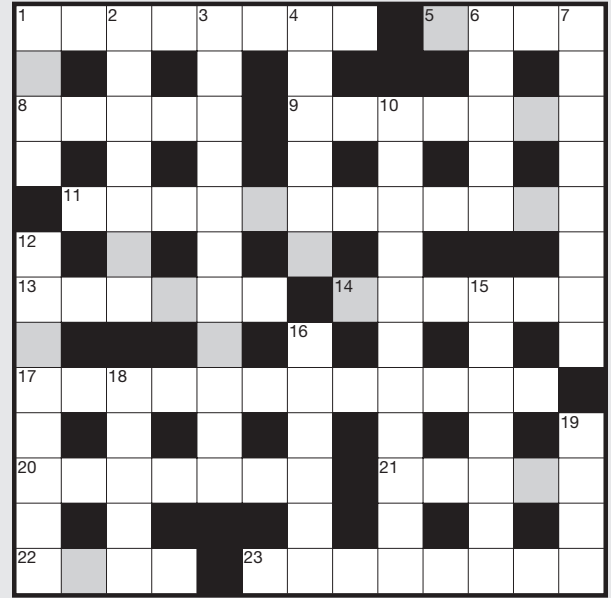
15 Lumberjacks' tools cutting out centerpiece of outer doors (7)

16 Teller's award for monkey (6)

18 Arizona university concerned with color (5)

19 For example, Hasidim train to leave precious stones (4)

in puns if you like, or define the answer as one part of speech and treat the definition as a different part of speech when completing the clue. (For instance, if you define SONG in the classical music sense as "lied," you can write your clue using "lied" to mean "told a lie.")

In the middle, either stated or implied, is a **connector** representing the equation's equals sign. You don't have to have anything here, but if you do it should be a present-tense singular verb or a preposition implying equivalence, like "is" or "from," (if the definition is on the left) or "turns into" or "for" (if the definition is on the right). Some conjunctions such as "or" and "and" also work.

On the other side from the definition is the **cryptic half**. This is some sort of operation you'll ask the solver to perform on some letters or words, such as "scramble these letters" or "put this word inside this other word," to get the answer defined by the definition. An **indicator** word or phrase will tell the solver how to perform the operation.

I tried to vary whether the definition half was on the left or right. I put only two connectors in, the "where" in 17-Across and the "for" in 16-Down.

3. Choose the best type of clue for each entry

You have a number of options for each clue. Not all of them will work great for any given word, so try a couple for each until you find one you like. You have these main choices:

- A **double definition**. Both halves clue different words that happen to be spelled alike; they shouldn't share any root words. There's no indicator in these clues. *Example: 1-Down. Both halves are common definitions, but not etymologically related.*

- A **charade**, so named for the parlor game. This joins two or more defined or stated parts. You generally won't need an indicator for this, though an "and" every now and then can't hurt. *Example: 14-Across. The parts are defined in order before the definition.*

- A **hidden word**. The word is spelled out for the solver as part of another word or phrase. The indicator may focus on the hidden item ("part of," "found in") or the phrase doing the hiding ("on the edges of," "flanking"). *Examples: 5-Across (the former), 4-Down (the latter).*

- A **homophone**. The word sounds like another word. The indicator makes it sound like something spoken ("said to be," "discussed") or heard from an audio source ("on the radio," "speaker's"). Never put the indicator between soundalikes of the same length, or the solver won't know which goes in the grid. *Example: 16-Down. "Teller" is defined here as "someone who tells."*
- A **container**. Some part goes inside another defined part. The indicator moves one part into the other, either A into B ("stuck in," "forced into") or A taking B ("eats," "keeps"). *Examples: 17-Across (the former), 11-Across (the latter).*
- A **reversal**. Some letter strings are reversed. The indicator says the word goes either left ("turned back," "from the East") or up ("climbing," "upturned"). "Up" indicators are only used in Down clues (and some constructors never use them). "Left" indicators are just fine for Down clues, since the reversal applies to how the word is normally written. Again, don't put the indicator between a definition and reversed word of the same length (unless it's an imperative verb that could only apply to what comes after it). *Example: 8-Across. "Roll" here is a verb meaning "overturn."*
- A **deletion**. Some part, often just a letter, is removed from a longer word or phrase. The indicator says which part leaves, possibly the front ("topless"), the middle ("uncentered"), the back ("inconclusive"), or a defined part ("without a" to remove an A). *Example: 19-Down. The word for "train" is leaving the word for "precious stones."*
- An **anagram**. Some letters—always spelled out—are scrambled. The indicator next to the words to be anagrammed can indicate oddness, craziness, movement, fixing, cleaning up, or similar modifications. *Example: 2-Down. The letters of CITE KEN are made wild.*
- A **combination clue**. Two or more of the above operations are used. *Example: 12-Down. This requires a deletion to the first part of the charade (specifically, the last letter of CONQUEST) before the charade can be completed.*
- An "**& lit.**" clue. From "and literally so," this clue's definition and cryptic halves are the same. Traditionally, this is indicated by an exclamation point at the end of the clue, though some constructors now favor using a question mark instead. *Example: 7-Down. The answer is defined by the whole clue, but also by a charade of the initials of "providing laughter" and a word meaning "making more comfortable."*

I laid out all the clues, ending up with at least one of each type. Then I picked a light theme I could pull off in a black-square cryptic: a hidden clue. After completing the

grid, *the solver will be left with a 13-letter clue for which they know the enumeration, but not much else. This is hardly the most involved cryptic theme I've made, but it's still a good payoff.*

4. Clean it up
Polish (a fine double definition) the clues and put a word (homophone of WHIRRED) enumeration in parentheses (RENT hidden inside) at the end of each, separating (container of SEATING around PAR) multi-word answers (anagram of RAWNESS) with commas. Then create (deletion from CREMATE) a pristine (charade of P.R. + IS + TINE) grid for your avid (reversal of DIVA) solver.

Whoops, got a bit carried away there.

CRAFTING A VARIETY CRYPTIC

A variety cryptic is a cryptic crossword that has a wacky theme that may change some entries or leave some entries unclued. The form was lionized in England, brought to the U.S. by Stephen Sondheim, and then perfected in *Atlantic Monthly* by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon and in *Harper's Magazine* by Richard Maltby Jr. and E.R. Galli. A variety cryptic can use any trick in the book—that is, this book or any other. If you can make great variety cryptics, you will be lauded around the world. At least, by a very small and arcane group of rabid fans.

1. Choose your variety
To make your cryptic a variety cryptic, you have all the options under the sun. You can have clues that contain extra letters, which you read clue by clue to spell a message. You can have all your Across entries lose a letter. You can scramble one word in each clue. You can make the grid in the shape of a baseball diamond, and make all the clues baseball-themed. You can splay out a six-sided die into the shape of a cross, and have all the letter O's be pips on the die. (I did that in a puzzle then-Games editor Mike Shenk titled "Holy Roller."[31])

Whatever you do, make it clever. The variety cryptic is often seen as the pinnacle of word grid design, as it is so complicated—it's a crossword, but with cryptic clues, but with something else crazy going on, and maybe we're not even going to tell you exactly what. If you make a variety cryptic for expert solvers, expect it to be greedily devoured. They'll let you know if you reached the pinnacle.

I picked a theme of commercials. I figured that nearly everyone skips them when possible, so this book should too. It started with the idea that some clues' definition

[31]My original title was "Die on the Cross." Thankfully, Mike changed that.
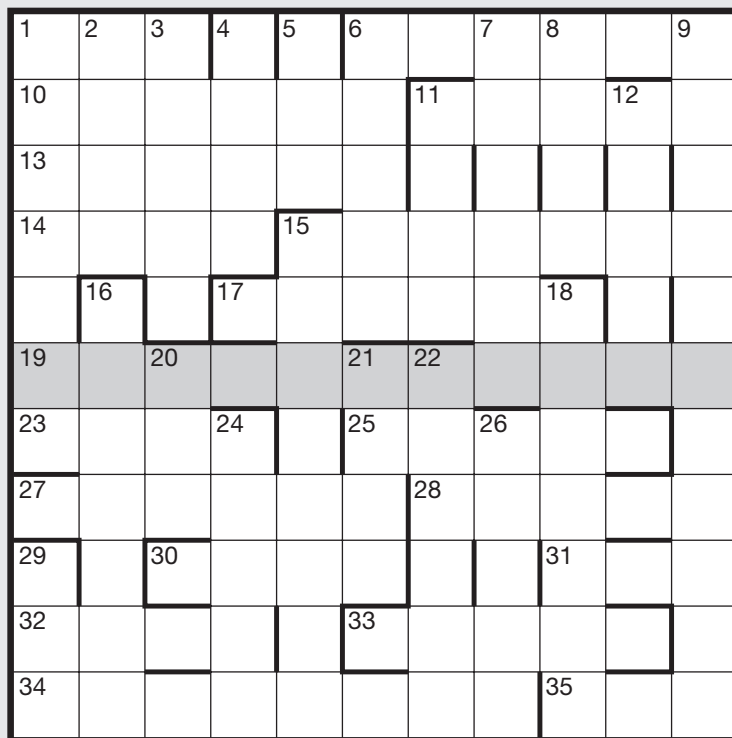
COMMERCIAL-FREE ENTERTAINMENT

And now, no words from our sponsors! Each clue has a definition half that's missing one of 15 synonyms for "commercial"—but to disguise it, we have respaced, repunctuated, and/or recapitalized the definition half. (If you need a hint, a list of which synonym has been removed from each clue is on page 250.) Enjoy this commercial-free variety cryptic!

Removed commercials

AD	NOTICE	PROMO
BILL	OFFER	SIGN
COUPON	PITCH	SPAM
FLYER	POSTER	SPOT
HYPE	P.R.	TEASER

ACROSS

1 To data clerks, these areas Ed paces unevenly (3)
6 Reflective menace showed ideas, an example (6)
10 It's pre-OU's Cal/NYU clashes (6)
11 Described slime, energy to fashion leer (5)
13 One performing emotion as Reba goes wild (6)
14 *Rio*'s, for example, seen in *White Christmas* (4)
15 Act like one that I, or in glosses, put time into Cuba movie about a clown (3,4)
17 Mix sepals, briers (6)
19 Ragged carpet fuzz gets large— use it to become an enigmatic deer (11)
23 It's e-tail time that's out of whack (4)
25 Sung from a bed set after turning light out first (3,2)
27 Sr. son's action: tsk-tsking after the opener (6)
28 More like one who would out his friends in Napoleonic era (5)
30 They're what's being enjoyed when people saw out Washington Democrats (4)
31 Relic with sides worn away is, familiarly, a giant O (3)
32 Retracted New York club event any further (4)
33 Ja! Meter skid in grass around railroad (5)
34 That printable T's rivals hopin' stress ends like this (8)
35 Oddly single broadcaster of sockets in the '80s & '90s (3)

DOWN

1 Ducked beings apply it loosely (7)
2 Shape of, i.e., a Chicago baseballer error (4)
3 1,000 tins overturned lay at *O.C.* hips, e.g. (5)
4 What's in AC right out of collision (4)
5 Ignore opening to race from Area L, a tennis court (3)
6 Can Ian export substance of sassy RuPaul? (5)
7 Ion, e.g., in sedate emergency room (6)
8 Casablanca airport detains sports group he quartered in Indianapolis (4)
9 Convert radical to it, sponsoring deism (11)
11 Bravo! Tugs at sea (4)
12 Chlorine symbol providing fluorine symbol: N, T, or Y (5)
15 Logical end around interior vent has one (8)
16 Some ballplayers stilt us out of order (7)
18 Parts from a vice car's use rattled (7)
20 Authorize dictionary to display "i" or letter in the OED (3)
21 They come in Oz, enforce real alternatives—for example, thousands (4)
22 I'm comedian O'Brien enthralling Bond's boss (3,3)
24 *La Bohème* character takes over a city formerly in DE county (5)
26 They are often orated in bizarre rites (5)
29 You and me starting to assume it's next, Tom—exit his continent (3)

halves would lose a synonym for "commercial," respacing and repunctuating as needed. Then I realized I could make them all like that with a little more effort.

Okay, a lot *more effort.*

2. Build a grid shape

A variety cryptic is likely to be a barred cryptic. If you have a theme like this, you want to use bars because you will want to have more than just half the letters checked. Barred cryptics are often, but not always, diagonally symmetrical; some aren't symmetrical at all.

Not every variety cryptic is a square or rectangle. I've seen ones in every shape imaginable. One was the shape of Texas, another a splayed out twelve-sided die. When you tackle a variety cryptic, don't be afraid to reach for the moon.

That said, I made a boring 11×11 square, because I wanted to highlight a specific word in the center. Making it a square looked good to me, so I went with it. I started adding bars in plausible places and went from there. Having found a set of interesting definitions for some nice, long (and challenging to find ways to delete) synonyms for "commercial," I discovered that the words that went with those definitions were uncooperative and wouldn't interlock symmetrically. Oh well.

3. Enter your answers and clues, keeping your theme in mind

Everything you do from here out will be done in the service of your theme. Maximize for as much weirdness as possible, but make sure you're consistent.

Because solvers of variety cryptics fancy themselves the top of the solving chain, you can make your clues fairly hard. But there's nothing wrong with an easy variety cryptic. A lot of people shy away from trying to solve variety cryptics because of their reputation for being so difficult, so you can help that by giving your solver something to grab onto as they're drowning in your brilliance.

Use enumerations if they make sense. If your answer words are changing sizes due to letter manipulation, you want to leave off the enumerations so your solver doesn't know what's where. But if your answers stay consistent in length, leave the enumerations in.

For the answers I didn't already have a plan for, I brainstormed clue definitions that could incorporate deletions. Some were nice and smooth, such as 22-Down. Others were convoluted, such as 3-Down. In fact, most of my clues were all bonkers now. I wondered if it would look too strange, and then realized that strange actually helped in figuring out which halves were definitions. A little, anyway.

4. Present a good story

The theme of your puzzle should tell a story from start to finish. You can set it up with an interesting rationale for your word changes, or hide it as much as desired. There can be a payoff at the end, or just a consistent use of fun variations. When the solver is done, they should feel like they accomplished something.

By removing the commercials I never intended to put in this book, I come off way more generous than I really am. Enjoy Thomas's chapter on logic puzzles commercial-free!