

# THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

## Notes for Setters: Internet Version

### Editorial Team

The first vetter is **Shane Shabankareh**, to whom new puzzles should be sent: see below.

The second vetter and scheduler is **Roger Phillips**, who maintains the portfolio of vetted puzzles.

Setters who wish to make a postal submission (in full or in part) should email

**submissions@ListenerCrossword.com**

for the appropriate instructions and address.

### How to Send a Puzzle

The submission must include:

1	Covering letter	Include the setter's real name and address. Mention if there is any constraint on publication (need for a particular publication date or serial number).
2	Puzzle	Title of puzzle, setter's pseudonym, blank grid, preamble and clues.
3	Solution (concealed)	Expected solution grid and notes for publication, sufficient to explain the theme to unsuccessful solvers in under 200 words. Cite the most accessible reference book(s) required to confirm the theme, if not mentioned in the preamble.
4	Vetters' Notes (concealed)	A <i>detailed</i> explanation of the clues for the benefit of the vetters, including citations for all answers not in the current edition of <i>The Chambers Dictionary</i>

We attempt to solve all submissions "cold", just as solvers would. The solution and notes should therefore be kept concealed and covering letters should avoid discussion of the puzzle's theme or anything else that might give the game away.

### Electronic submission

Email the puzzle to **submissions@ListenerCrossword.com**, in two separate messages, as follows.

- The first message should contain the covering letter and puzzle (items 1 and 2 above). If you require acknowledgement of receipt, say so here. It is particularly important that the setter's postal address is included.
- The second message should contain the solution and notes (items 3 and 4 above). If they are in the body of the email, they must be prefaced by at least 20 lines of spurious text so that they're not seen by accident.

For the preamble, clues and notes, the simplest method is to paste the text into the body of the email. Grid images may also be pasted in, if the email format supports it. Alternatively, puzzles may be sent as attachments, using the following file formats.

<i>Text and grids</i>	RTF (Rich Text); PDF; Word 2007 (.docx)
<i>Text only</i>	Plain text file
<i>Grids</i>	GIF; WMF; JPEG; PNG; BMP

Users of Microsoft Word should note that old-style (.doc) and macro-enabled (.docm) files will *not* be opened due to the danger of viruses.

If any special typefaces or characters fail to appear correctly, this should be shown by annotation [in square brackets].

## Postal submission

Send postal submissions (which can be handwritten if clear) to the first vetter's address. Only *one* copy is required. If you require acknowledgement of receipt, say so in the covering letter and enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope or provide an email address.

If possible, also email a copy of the preamble and clues to **submissions@ListenerCrossword.com**, to avoid errors in transcribing them.

## When to send puzzles

To avoid overloading the vetters, contributors must leave a gap of *at least six months* between each submission (whether successful or not). In addition, we do not wish to hold more than two puzzles for any setter; a setter with two puzzles in the portfolio is free to submit another when one has appeared.

The length of time between submission and publication varies widely, but is generally over 6 months. Because of this, *any puzzle with a constraint on timing should be submitted at least 9 months ahead of the proposed publication date* to ensure that it receives attention in good time.

## What to expect after submission

After submission, the following may happen:

- You may receive a rejection of the puzzle, if it's clearly unsuitable for the Listener series.
- The first vetter may rework the puzzle to improve its chances of acceptance (you will not necessarily be asked to participate in this).
- The puzzle may be sent to the second vetter for the second stage of vetting. This applies both to puzzles with which the first vetter is quite happy and to puzzles he has reservations about.

If your submission reaches the second stage, the following may happen:

- The puzzle may be rejected immediately.
- The puzzle may be modified by the second vetter (again, this could be done with or without your knowledge) before being held in a portfolio of potentially acceptable puzzles.
- In due course you may be notified that the puzzle has been scheduled for publication.
- If a puzzle remains in the portfolio for some years without being published, it will be returned to you.

If your puzzle is scheduled for publication you will be told the expected publication date (in exceptional circumstances this may change later). You will also receive a vetters' proof to check for errors – this shows what will be transmitted to *The Times* for publication. Proofs showing the actual appearance of the puzzle in *The Times* are only available just before publication and are checked by the vetting team.

Payment – currently £200 – follows automatically and normally this is direct to the setter's bank account. It is important, if you wish notification, that you keep the vetters informed of any changes of address. New setters may be paid by a different method, while bank details are collected by *The Times*.

You should also let us know if you are VAT registered, as this affects the way in which payments are processed. Note that copyright in the puzzle is assigned to *The Times* on publication.

## Requirements and preferences

### General

Setters are encouraged to have their submissions tried out beforehand by an experienced Listener solver, to reduce the need for changes during vetting. Setters and checkers should note the following:

- Puzzles must be original (ie, not copied in whole or in part from another published puzzle).
- If a puzzle has been previously submitted to another publication, its rejection or withdrawal must be explicitly confirmed to us.
- The essence of a Listener crossword is elegance and subtlety of theme and clueing, not difficulty per se. Setters shouldn't add gratuitous obstacles simply to make a puzzle less solvable. For example, "carte blanche" presentation, jumbled entries and multiple clue types should be used only if thematically justified.
- Answer lengths are generally preferred to entry lengths, even if this may reveal some thematic information.
- The grid structure and any unusual clueing gimmick should suit the thematic content.
- Ideally, puzzles should be self-contained within the grid: it shouldn't be possible to finish the grid without understanding the theme or solving almost all the clues; *nor should there be an incongruous final step after grid completion.*
- Puzzles for which more than half the clues must be solved before entries can be made in the grid are more likely to be rejected since they fail to deliver a principal feature of a **crossword**.
- Puzzles should not rely upon solvers making unsignalled observations such as noting informative acrostics in clues.
- Setters should avoid typographical complexity in the preamble and clues, to minimise problems in rendering this in print form and online.
- Puzzles that rely on the correct rendering of different font faces, sizes, effects (eg, boldening), superscript, subscript, accented characters, symbols, tabulated information or indenting are likely to be rejected. These constraints do not apply to grid artwork, which is created by the scheduler in the formats required by *The Times*. Also, wording in preambles and clues is liable to be changed to fit the preferred style at *The Times*, provided the puzzle is not affected by such changes. Setters may wish to consult the *Style Guide* at:  
[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools\\_and\\_services/specials/style\\_guide/](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/specials/style_guide/)

### Thematic content

Listener puzzles explore a wide variety of themes, in a wide range of ways. The vetters do not wish to stifle innovation through over-regulation, but setters should note the following guidelines:

- Preference is given to ideas that can be confirmed using commonly available reference books.
- Themes that require the solver to visit large regional libraries or track down out of print versions of popular references (eg, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Fifth Edition*) are discouraged and are acceptable only if the rewards offered compensate the solver for the extra effort.
- Puzzles that rely on the exact layout or contents of a specific edition of any reference book (including *The Chambers Dictionary*) are strongly discouraged.
- The vetters wish to reaffirm that the availability of thematic information at a web site is *not* a sufficient justification of accessibility. There is no 'quality control' for much of the data.
- A partial relaxation of this rule applies to overseas solvers; puzzles relying on information in references readily available only in the UK, such as a Road Atlas, may be viable if there is a reliable easily-located web site that offers it.
- Setters should avoid themes that might cause offence or distress, and exercise care over those referring to proprietary brands.

- Themes that revolve round a living person are also discouraged because of the risk of death or dishonour at the time of publication.
- Answers that have only vulgar, offensive or derogatory meanings are not acceptable and setters should avoid using or referring to similar language in clues, especially in the surface reading.
- Setters should avoid themes of an extremely parochial nature.
- ‘Cult’ themes should also be avoided since they are often of interest to relatively few people and thematic information is thereby difficult to access.
- Care should be taken over any messages spelt out as the puzzle is solved; these are generally inflexible and so an inappropriate or erroneous wording may render the puzzle unusable.
- The editors will not accept puzzles that use Playfair encryption where the code word or phrase may be guessed from the theme: it is essential that it should be deduced from grid entries.

## Preamble and answer length requirements

Feedback suggests that the preamble, usually the first part of the puzzle encountered, plays a major role in whether a potential solver continues to attempt a solution; an unintelligible preamble is immediately off-putting to many of them. The following points elaborate this.

- Listener preambles are written in plain language and “crosswordese” terms are avoided; they are presented in a consistent way and kept as brief as possible.
- Preambles can assume general experience of cryptic clueing, but must mention any special clue types that can’t reasonably be deduced. In particular, Definition and Letter Mixture, Printer’s Devilry and Playfair must always be explained in full, the last two with an example – puzzles where the use of these has to be discovered during the course of solving are likely to be rejected.
- Except for purely numerical puzzles, all preambles contain the phrase “*The Chambers Dictionary* (2008) is the primary reference” and so it will be rare for any further reference to that dictionary to be required.
- There is no need to make specific reference if a non-thematic answer is in the ‘secondary’ reference, (*New Oxford Dictionary of English* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), which has a good stock of proper names.
- Unfamiliar answers not in either of these dictionaries are undesirable and a reference for each should be given. For example, “15 down is an obsolete spelling variant in *The Oxford English Dictionary*” could be added to the *Chambers* sentence.
- Familiar answers may not need such references, but should be drawn to the setters’ attention.
- If (contrary to our recommendation) answer lengths are not given for thematic reasons, but clue numbers still correlate with grid numbers, setters should add the lengths of the grid entries at the end of clues, warning that this has been done in the preamble.
- Single words and hyphenated words should be indicated simply by the number of letters. Where answers are of two or more words, this should be indicated after the total number of letters. For example, CUL-DE-SAC would be (8); SELL-BY DATE would be (10, *two words*). *The Chambers Dictionary* is the authority where dictionaries conflict over word division.
- For double (or multiple) clues run together, the lengths should be shown in this format: (m;n).
- Special clues should be signified by asterisks or the like (after the number), and not italics.

A collection of required, recommended and sample preamble wordings is presented in [Appendix B](#).

## Grid requirements

- Large clusters of connected bars and a low average entry length (less than 5.5) are symptomatic of grids with over-ambitious constraints: such grids are the most common cause of rejection.
- Setters should pay particular attention to the incidence of unchecked letters. Guidance on acceptable ‘unching’ is given in the book by Ximenes listed in the [Recommendations](#), but may be summarised as 0 (sometimes 1 may be justified) unches in a 3-letter word, 1 in 4 and 5, 2 in 6

and 7, 3 in 8 and 9 and no more than a ratio of one in three thereafter. Devices such as misprinted entries increase the effective uncluing and compensating adjustments would be expected from the setter.

- A large or poorly designed grid can lead to a large number of clues, and this usually results in a less successful puzzle. This can be a cause for automatic rejection, since there is a limit on the space available. It is impossible to give firm guidance, since the space available tends to fluctuate, but puzzles with a word count in excess of 650 are high risk (in Word, highlight the entire typed version and use Word Count, even though this counts clue numbers as words). A requirement for extra artwork, such as Playfair grids, reduces the available space even more.
- Shading should not be used in blank grids. Different areas of the grid can be delimited by dashed lines. Special cells can be signified by extra letters or symbols in their corners.
- The editors are responsible for producing the grid artwork, and circular puzzles (and other puzzle types that don't use a conventional grid of squares or rectangles) take considerably longer to process. Likewise, puzzles requiring artwork in the preamble (such as a Playfair square) create an extra administrative burden. Such puzzles have a lower probability of acceptance, because only outstanding examples of these types justify the extra effort required.

## Clueing requirements

Poor clues can be rewritten, but as this requires more vetting effort, preference is given to puzzles with clues that can be published with minimal editing.

- Clueing is assessed on the basis that a normal cryptic clue consists of a definition of the answer, and a grammatically and consistently worded description of how the answer is constructed – no more and no less. Other less common clue types are judged by analogy with this. Clues breaching the spirit of this rule are considered by many to be unfair, particularly in the context of the Listener Crossword, where a large vocabulary is available to the setter.
- In their clues, setters should avoid using words, meanings and abbreviations that are not in *The Chambers Dictionary*, with the exception of familiar proper names.
- Homophones are particularly contentious and setters should recognise that the solving community is now worldwide. Veters will check that any homophones used are supported by the primary reference, *The Chambers Dictionary*.
- The surface sense of clues should read well as English, regardless of their cryptic construction. This adds considerably to the aesthetic appeal of a puzzle and could be a determinant of whether your puzzle is published or not.

Examples of common clueing errors are given in [Appendix A](#).

## Envoi

Finally, The Listener Crossword has always been at the forefront of innovation in the art. No set of instructions and advice can hope to cover every eventuality or cater for original touches in submissions, so this can never be an exhaustive listing. The co-editors may at times appear to make alterations for reasons that are not explained here and which may not be shared by the setter, possibly even on occasion transgressing for artistic effect their own promulgated rules. This is a prerogative of editors through the years and the current Listener co-editors are no different in this respect.

## Recommended Guides

*Chambers Crossword Manual* by Don Manley  
Chambers, 2006. ISBN 0-550-10220-5

*The Random House Guide to Cryptic Crosswords* by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon  
Times Books, 2003. ISBN 0-8129-3545-4

*Ximenes on the Art of the Crossword* by D S Macnutt  
Swallowtail Books, 2001. ISBN 1-9034-0004-X

## **Mathematical puzzles**

Further information related to mathematical puzzles is set out in supplementary *Notes*, available from the first vetter on request.

Roger Phillips & Shane Shabankareh  
Co-editors, The Listener Crossword  
December 2011

## Appendix A. Clueing Errors

As a guide to setters, common reasons for rewriting clues are given below, with examples.

<i>Redundant words</i>	Poet mixed <u>a</u> drink See publicity <u>in</u> the middle of field and depart	[TOPE as a verb] [VADE]
<i>Words doing double duty</i>	Short measures found <u>in</u> Chester Part of <u>church</u> to which river flows back	[INCHES] [CHOIR]
<i>Ungrammatical wording</i>	<u>Leading</u> sailor had fish <u>Last Post</u> request is a lot of work <u>I'm</u> in factory plastic Dish <u>soaks return</u>	[SHAD; eg, "What leads sailor" required] [TASK; eg, "Last of Post" required] [PLIANT; eg, "I is" required] [STEW; eg, "soaks returns" required]
<i>Inconsistent wording</i>	<u>In</u> satin one's dressed <u>for</u> a thrill Grandchild <u>grabs</u> goddess's talon <u>Break</u> time <u>is</u> a very small amount Brother's <u>cook</u> has a slight attack of illness	[SENSATION] [OGEE; "grabbing" would be better] [MITE] [BRASH]
<i>Inaccurate indication</i>	<u>Paul</u> leapt so clumsily Swell <u>shirt</u> no longer available See fur <u>can be mislaid</u>	[APOSTLE; eg, "Paul perhaps" required] [TOFF; eg, T = "shape of shirt" required] [LOSABLE; eg, "that can be mislaid" required]
<i>Unobvious indirectness</i>	Measure of <u>broken tree</u> <u>Return</u> morning letters	[ACRE (acer), MILE (lime) etc] [OGAM; "go back" intended]
<i>Uncalled-for past tense</i>	Dicky Green <u>was</u> kind Susan <u>took</u> left turn	[GENRE; "is" would be better] [SLUE; "taking" or "takes" would be better]
<i>Two definitions with same meaning</i>	Cut chop	[DICE, FELL, HACK, etc]
<i>Ambiguous answer</i>	Animal <u>turned up</u> grass (Many solvers dislike clues of the form "A <operator> B", when they lead to two possible answers.)	[DEER, REED are both possible] "Grass animal turned up" leads unambiguously to REED; "This animal turns up grass" gives DEER.

Some other idioms require a caveat such as "Punctuation may mislead" or "Word spacing may mislead", as appropriate, in the preamble (but preference is given to puzzles not requiring these, unless the difficulties of producing thematic clues justify an extra relaxation):

<i>Misleading punctuation</i>	Break cook's pans Large new day_boy	[SNAP; "cooks pans" intended] [GERALD]
<i>Misleading word spacing</i>	Chinese shorthand Penniless poet's lovestruck	[HAN; "short hand"] [BROKE; "[Brooke has] love struck"]

Further examples may be found in the [recommended books](#) listed above.

## Appendix B. Preamble Wording

### Background

The preamble is a critical part of a Listener crossword and must be carefully integrated with the rest of the puzzle. The editors generally prefer not to interfere with the overall wording of individual preambles if they are satisfactory, but there are two aspects where some degree of consistency across puzzles is preferred: the use of technical terms, which can be baffling for new solvers, and the explanation of standard clue and entry types, where submitted puzzles occasionally contain errors. This appendix principally aims to provide suitable versions for these. Phrases [in square brackets] indicate possible extra text.

Having said that, there are still, we hope, plenty of ideas that revolve around words and the pleasure they can give which might require none of the distortions mentioned here. Puzzles requiring only *The Chambers Dictionary* and a measure of persistence have possibly been under-represented in recent years and new variants would be most welcome.

### Technical Terms

The following are *mandatory* usages:

- grid (not *diagram*)
- answer (not *solution*)
- entry (not *light*)
- wordplay (not *subsidiary indication* or *cryptic part*)
- must (for compulsory actions such as highlighting, not *should*)

The following are *preferred* usages:

- extra (words/letters; not *surplus*, *superfluous*, *extraneous*, *redundant*)
- jumble (if not producing words, else *anagram*)
- 90/180-degree symmetrical (not *symmetrical 90/180-degree*)
- highlighted (unless there is a definite requirement for *shaded*, eg, to avoid colour; “shaded” should imply leaving the contents visible, in contradistinction to “blacked out”)
- numbers in brackets (after clues; not *figures/parentheses*)
- radials, rings (for circular grids)

### Clue Types

The vetters live in hope of receiving puzzles with viable new clue types to enrich the variety of The Listener series, but for the more established types these are the recommended descriptions.

#### *Misprints in clues*

Clues contain a misprint of one letter [in the definition].

#### *Letters Latent*

For each clue, a letter must be omitted from the answer, wherever it occurs, before entry in the grid; the definition refers to the full answer while the wordplay and number in brackets refer to the grid entry.

#### *Extra letters in wordplay*

The wordplay indicates the answer with an extra letter that is not entered in the grid.

The wordplay indicates the answer with one letter omitted.



*Extra letters in clues*

Each clue contains an extra letter. [Such a clue deprived of that letter does not necessarily make literal sense.]

*Extra words in clues*

Each clue contains an extra word.

Each clue consists of two clues side by side separated by an extra word.

This device is nowadays overused by setters. Puzzles featuring it stand a higher chance of rejection unless the extra words make some other relevant contribution to the theme.

*DLM (Definition and Letter Mixture)*

Clues contain a definition [in one or more words] of the answer and a consecutive mixture of its letters [starting at the beginning and/or ending at the end of a word]. [The definition and the letter mixture do not overlap.]

“Jumble” would be a better term but it would clash with the M of DLM. A whole puzzle using this device tends to be rather mechanical to solve and it is best used in combination with other types.

*Others*

Clues are presented in symmetrical pairs; either numbered clue may appear first and the clues in each pair do not overlap.

Clues must be treated thematically before solution.

**Entry Methods***Omitted/added letters (answers)*

One letter must be omitted from the answer to each clue before entry in the grid.

One letter must be added, at any point [but never unchecked], to the answer to each clue before entry in the grid.

*Wrong number*

Each clue contains a one-word definition of the entry to be made at that number (to which the number in brackets refers), but belongs as a whole to an answer [of the same length] to be entered elsewhere.

*Playfair*

Answers must be encoded using a Playfair code square [based on a [two-word] code phrase] before entry in the grid.

*Jumbles/Anagrams*

Grid entries are anagrams/jumbles of corresponding clue answers.

*Misprints*

Wordplay refers to the misprinted form to be entered in the grid.

*Others*

Clues are normal, but the answers must be treated thematically before entry.

Wordplay refers to the treated forms entered in the grid.

**Messages from Clues**

Letters omitted from answers spell out ...

Extra letters from wordplay spell out ...

The initial letters of which, taken in clue order, spell out ...

The correct letters spell out ...

Unclued letters in ... may be arranged as ...

Barred-off letters give ...

## **Clue Lengths**

Numbers in brackets refer to lengths of grid entries

## **Carte Blanche**

Clues are presented in conventional order.

Addition of bars and/or cell numbers is optional.

Bars must be added, but there is no need to include cell numbers.