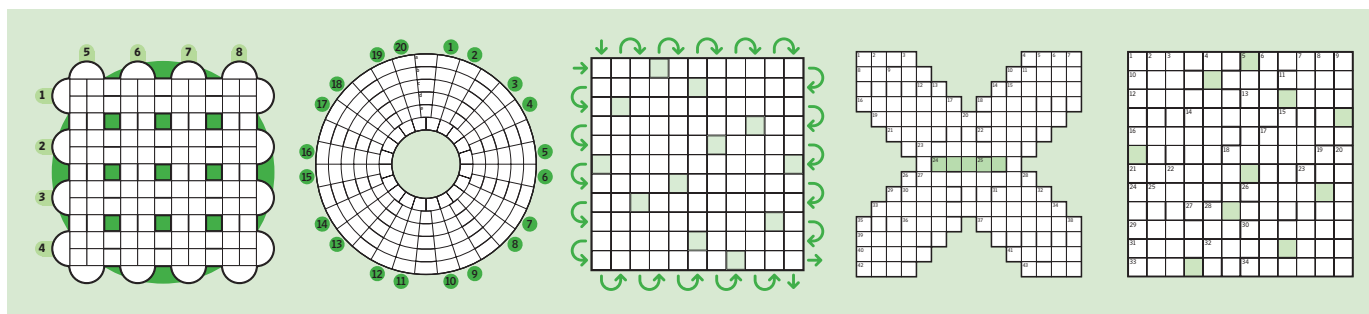# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL CRYPTIC CROSSWORD SPECIFICATIONS.

The Wall Street Journal publishes a variety cryptic puzzle every fourth week, alternating with other variety puzzles.

WSJ cryptic puzzles generally have unaltered cryptic clues (no clue misprints, no extraneous words in the clues to be used later, no indexing to get messages, etc.) Usually the intro paragraph tells solvers what they'll need to do, and the added challenge that makes it a variety cryptic is in the grid (with possibly some deductions about its nature made by solvers as they solve). Examples of things that might go on in the grid are:

- ▶ moving letters from word to word
- ▶ altering words before entry
- ▶ across & down letters don't match in some squares
- ▶ boxes are skipped and filled by the other direction
- ▶ answers in some rows or columns rotate
- ▶ answers are entered in a flow
- ▶ some grid words are unclued and must be deduced

Or other similar things. The puzzle should have a payoff of a message related to the theme, using letters in the grid identified somehow (as opposed to using letters in the clues.)

A puzzle should have about 40 clues, which means a grid size of around 12-by-12 for rectangular puzzles (12-by-12, 12-by-13, 13-by-13). Other shapes of grids are certainly okay if you're inspired to do something fancy. If you have an idea for a seasonal/holiday puzzle, that's encouraged, but please check with us first to make sure no one else has already staked out that month.

Filler words should be common, familiar, and lively. Avoid obscure words and crosswordese. Avoid words of less than four letters.

These are general guidelines. There may be exceptions to the above.

Unlike in a block-style grid, a bar grid has more letters checked. Here's the traditional list of lengths and number of unchecked letters:

Word length	Number of unchecked letters
4 or 5	1
6 or 7	1 or 2
8 or 9	2 or 3
10, 11, or 12	3 or 4

This means (for example) that a 5-letter word cannot have 2 unchecked letters, and a 7-letter word cannot have 3 unchecked letters. The ideal is that every entry follow this chart. In other words, say, every 5-letter word should have exactly one checked letter. But it's okay to have some entries having fewer unchecked letters than the number specified (like a completely checked 5-letter word), especially if there are unusual things going on in the grid and the extra checked letters will help the solver. But there cannot be more unchecked letters than in this chart, as an assist to the solver.

Please suggest a title for your puzzle. (Feel free to suggest multiple titles.)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL CRYPTIC CROSSWORD SPECIFICATIONS.

What should you submit?

If you have a completed puzzle, make a one-page PDF layout with your name and email address, the title, intro paragraph (i.e., instructions), blank grid, and clues. Send it to <wsjcryptics@mikeshenk.com>. Please be patient in awaiting a response.

If your puzzle is accepted for publication, you would next send all of the following (to that same email address):

Instructions/Clues: A Word or text file with clues in the following format:

    <tab>1<tab>Clue
    <tab>2<tab>Clue

Answers explanations: A Word or text file, with one paragraph for Across answers and one paragraph for Down answers (or the equivalent if the puzzle doesn't use Acrosses and Downs). Example: ACROSS 1. EXPLANATION 6. EXPLANATION etc. Letters of answer words are in all caps. Unlike the clues, answer numbers use periods, with single spaces around the numbers.

Sample formatting for some common types of clues:

Type	Format	Note
Anagram	1. ASSET (anag.)	[If only a part is anagrammed, spell it out: 1. DEMON + STRATE ("treats" anag.)]
Charade	1. CHART + REUSE	
Container	1. CA(BARE)T	
Reversal	1. SPOOL (rev.)	[If only a part is reversed, spell it out: 1. R(OG)UE ("go" rev.)]
Homophone	1. BARE ("bear" hom.)	
Hidden	1. MEANT (hid.)	
Two meanings	1. BEAR (2 defs.)	
Deletion	1. tREASON	[The lowercase deleted letter(s) get changed to small caps when the puzzle answer is formatted.]

Grid: Any readable image file, such as PDF, JPEG, EPS.

Answer Grid: Any readable image file, such as PDF, JPEG, EPS.

If you have questions, or want to discuss a puzzle idea before making the entire puzzle, write to <fraser@mikeshenk.com>.

WSJ pays $600 US for a published variety cryptic. Payment is made on or shortly after publication. The rights are shared: WSJ has perpetual rights to use the puzzle, and the puzzle author gets the right to reuse the puzzle after six months.