Cryptic crosswords are the wordplay-packed relatives of regular crosswords. If you’re new to the game, you need to learn the difference between regular clues and their cryptic cousins. The important distinction is that every clue has two parts: a definition of the answer and another way of arriving at the answer through word play. These two parts are put next to one another: You must figure out where one part ends and the other begins. There are eight main types of word-play hints, each with its own special signals that indicate what to do to produce the answer a different way.

1. **Anagram:**
   Coldest cities rebuilt (6) In an anagram clue, the letters that make up the answer are given in scrambled form. Beside them is an anagram signal, a figurative word or phrase that indicates that you must anagram letters. (As well, as in any cryptic clue, there is a normal definition of the answer.) In the clue above, the answer ICIEST (“coldest”) is a rebuilt (i.e., anagrammed) version of CITIES. The digit 6 in parentheses tells you the answer is a six-letter word.

2. **Charade:**
   Churchill gains weight (7) In a charade, the answer is broken into pieces and clued piece by piece. WINSTON (“Churchill”) is a charade of WINS (“gains”) + TON (“weight”).

3. **Hidden Word:**
   State in Balkans assailed (6) Sometimes, the clue-writer gives the answer spelled out in its correct order right in the clue. No rearranging is necessary. What “state” is hidden in BALKANS ASSAILED? Look closely, and you’ll see KANSAS.

4. **Two Meanings:**
   Doesn’t take pages from a book (6) Some words have two meanings from different origins. For these words, the clue-writer may just give the two definitions side by side. LEAVES means both “doesn’t take” and “pages from a book.”

5. **Container:**
   Hot relatives caught in trap (6) In a container, the solution is formed by putting one part of the answer inside (or outside) another. BAKING (“hot”) is formed when KIN (“relatives”) is caught inside BAG (“trap”), like this: BA(KIN)G.

6. **Homophone:**
   Burn prophet, we hear (4) A homophone clue tells you that the answer has the same sound as another word or phrase. SEAR (“burn”) sounds like SEER (“prophet”) when “we hear” the word. Every homophone clue has a signal like “to the audience,” “by the sound of it” or “reportedly” that indicates that people hear or say the two words the same way. This homophone signal is always beside the definition of the homophone, not beside the definition of the actual answer word.

7. **Reversal:**
   Beloved animals pace back (4) A clue may hint that the answer word spells something when reversed. The answer PETS (“beloved animals”) is STEP (“pace”) reversed. A reversal clue always contains a signal (like “back,” “returned” or “from the east”) that suggests the reversal in a playful way. In down clues, which refer to vertical entries, look for indicators like “up,” “northward” and “rising.”

8. **Deletion:**
   Almost tan forehead (4) A clue may suggest that a word could lose its “head” (first letter), “heart” (central letter) or “tail” (last letter) to form a new word. Or the clue may tell you not to start the word, or not to finish it. BROW (“forehead”) is almost BROWN (“tan”). The word “almost” suggests that you need almost all of the word. That is, you drop the last letter.