

Chapter 1

Getting Set to Solve Picture Puzzles

In This Chapter

- ▶ Figuring out the puzzle types
 - ▶ Solving puzzles with specific strategies
 - ▶ Engaging your brain with picture puzzles
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Whether you've just become interested in pictures puzzles or you've tried some already and need tips on solving them, you can find all the information you need in this chapter. No matter what section you read in this chapter — whether you get familiar with puzzle types, solving strategies, or ways to boost your brain — each section gives you some info that can make you stronger at solving the picture puzzles in this book.

In this chapter, we explain how all the puzzle types differ and how breaking them down actually helps get you started on solving them. The more that you're familiar with the type of puzzle you're solving, the better you'll be at solving it. Of course, you probably want to try the solving strategies we describe in this chapter as well. We give you the best strategies that you can use to solve all types of picture puzzles. We even give you ideas on how to boost your brainpower to take your solving skills to the next level.

Getting a Feel for the Picture Puzzle Types

In the wide world of picture puzzles, you run across more than just one type to solve. Each type provides you with a different challenge, and before you dive into solving any puzzle, getting the lay of the land helps you become familiar with how the puzzle works. In the following sections, we describe the three types of puzzles you can solve in this book.

Checking out changes

Spot-the-changes puzzles tend to be the type of picture puzzle most people recognize. In a spot-the-changes puzzle, you're given two pictures that *look* identical at first glance. However, one of the pictures contains some differences — for example, the flower pot in one picture may be blue but green in the other picture. Although glancing through the puzzle can be an effective strategy while solving, you also need to look closely to pick out all the changes. (See the section later in this chapter, “Solving All Types of Picture Puzzles,” for more on solving spot-the-changes puzzles.)

In this book, we let you know how many changes you should be spotting, plus we give you checkboxes so that you can keep track of how many you uncover. (See Chapter 2 for more on how it helps to keep track of your work.) In each puzzle, one of the pictures also has numbers across the top and letters down the side so that you can work the puzzle like a grid, going from section A1 to A2, and so on.

Knowing which one is not like the other

Similar to spot-the-changes puzzles, a one-of-these-is-not-like-the-other puzzle — or a Not puzzle — contains several pictures that all seem to be the same. But unlike the spot-the-changes puzzle, a Not puzzle contains *six* pictures, only *one* of which is slightly different! You have to scour each picture to figure out which one contains a subtle change.



Most people think that Not puzzles must be more difficult than spot-the-changes puzzles, but depending on how easily you can spot a change, a Not puzzle may actually be easier because you're looking for just one change. For some people, finding just one change becomes more of a challenge.

Working a jigsaw puzzle . . . on paper

Regardless of whether you like jigsaw puzzles, you should try cut-up puzzles. Cut-up puzzles consist of two grids: One grid displays a picture divided into numbered pieces, which are scrambled, and the other grid is blank except for one piece, which is correctly placed as a hint to help get you started. You have to figure out where to place each of the other numbered pieces within the grid to make a complete picture.



Sketch or write the numbers of each piece in the empty grid. Sketching can help you as you solve, and writing in the numbers helps keep track of your work. (See the section later in this chapter, “Piecing the picture together,” for more on solving cut-up puzzles. See Chapter 2 for more on how keeping track of your work helps you solve the puzzle.)

Serving Up Solving Strategies

You can use several different strategies for solving picture puzzles, and we encourage you to try them all to see which ones work well for you. Not all strategies are puzzle-specific. What works for a spot-the-changes puzzle may also work for a cut-up puzzle. Which ones you decide to use depends largely on which strategies you feel most comfortable with.



Create a solving routine by using a pattern to go over the puzzle or by combining several solving techniques. (See the section “Move through the puzzle in a pattern,” later in this chapter, for more on using patterns.) Using a solving routine ensures that you exhaust every technique that works for you and that you scour every nook and cranny of the puzzle while you’re solving. For more on solving routines, see Chapter 2. Just remember: You won’t find an exact step-by-step routine in this book because whatever solving routine works for you may not work for someone else. So try all the techniques to find out which routines result in solving success for you.

You can use any of the strategies listed in the following sections for any puzzle type in this book. However, we break the puzzle-solving strategies down by puzzle type in the following sections. By searching the solving strategies by puzzle type, you can see which strategies work best for each type. Then it’s up to you to overlap strategies and experiment with any of them to find the best solving routine for you.

Spotting the differences

In spot-the-changes puzzles, your job is to, well, spot the changes. Sounds easy enough until you find all of them except two, which results in chaos. Why chaos? First, you discover that you can’t put the book down until you find the two changes that you’re missing. Then, supper begins burning in the oven and boiling over on the stove. Your boss calls you about work, and you can’t take your mind off of the puzzle to answer the phone. Your kids need a bath because they’ve been playing in the mud while you’ve been trying to solve a picture puzzle. The FedEx guy keeps ringing your doorbell to have you sign for a package, but you don’t answer. You want to call out for help from your partner, but you can’t do anything until you find those two changes! Chaos.

But if you have a plan — a strategy — before you begin, your searching can easily result in success, and you can avoid the chaos and calamity that fruitless searching brings. Just try using the ideas listed in the following sections to find all the differences in spot-the-changes puzzles.

Look for the obvious

You may think that we've given you an obvious idea. However, in your anxiety to find changes, you may skip over some obvious differences. Follow these two basic strategies to make sure that you don't miss a thing:

- ✔ **Glance through the puzzle.** Sounds a bit casual, we know. But when you first begin the puzzle, you can often glance through it and find some pretty obvious differences. A teeny tiny moon that becomes twice its size in the second picture can be pretty obvious, even at a glance.

Although this technique is most effective when beginning a puzzle, it sure does help when you're stuck, too. Often, when you're stuck, just glancing through the puzzle may help you spot a section, detail, or change that you glossed over earlier.

- ✔ **Distinguish the details.** When solving a picture puzzle, a flower isn't a flower. A flower may be a long-stemmed red rose. A tree isn't just a tree. A tree may be a short white birch. If you look at a puzzle and think, "There's a fence," instead of, "There's a wire fence with three posts," you may miss that one of the fence posts has been shortened or is altogether missing.

Move through the puzzle in a pattern

When you use a pattern to search through a puzzle, you discipline yourself to scan the puzzle systematically. Using a systematic approach, you can be sure of the following:

- ✔ **You search each space.** A pattern helps you search through each grid space (such as, A1, B1, and so on) with the comfort of knowing you're tackling each piece of the puzzle and not glossing over anything.
- ✔ **You search each space thoroughly.** When you search through the puzzle in a pattern, you have a better chance of leaving no stone unturned. By breaking the puzzle up into smaller pieces, you have an easier time looking for minute details.
- ✔ **You search each space thoroughly while also looking for the obvious.** When you use patterns in conjunction with techniques for finding obvious changes (see the earlier section, "Look for the obvious," for more about searching for the obvious), you tackle both the obvious changes and details in a systematic approach. Although you may glance over the puzzle and then tackle it using a pattern, you still need to distinguish the details and be on the lookout for obvious things you may have missed earlier.

Using a pattern with spot-the-changes puzzles is easy. You study each grid space, comparing it to the other picture's same grid space, and you really have two options:

- ✓ **Scan from top to bottom.** Because you have a grid to work with, you begin with A1, then B1, then C1, and so on until you get to the bottom of the puzzle. Then you go back to the top and scour A2, then B2, and so on.
- ✓ **Look from left to right.** Using the grid, you work through the puzzle like reading — left to right. Start with A1, then A2, then A3 and so on until you reach the end of the row. Then you begin with B1, then B2, and so on.

Eyeing the oddball

The one-of-these-is-not-like-the-other puzzles — or Not puzzles — don't have grids or other helpers to get you started. You have your peepers and a pencil, perhaps, but that's about it. Such a predicament may scare some people away, but oddly enough, although Not puzzles can pose a challenge, even beginners can solve them.

For some people, having several pictures to compare poses an easier mental challenge than just having two pictures to compare. Of course, more pictures also means more chances that you may miss something. But in the sections that follow, we provide you with some great ideas on solving Not puzzles so that you don't overlook any details.

Keep comparisons focused with a pattern

Using a pattern — a systematic approach — helps you move through the puzzle without missing any details. Not puzzles don't have grids like spot-the-changes puzzles, so you can't use the grid to break down each picture for comparison. However, you can make your own breakdown and still use a pattern. Use these ideas to get you thinking about how you can establish a pattern for solving different Not puzzles:

- ✓ **If people are in the picture:** Compare each person from head to toe. You won't get very far if you compare the eyes in one picture to the eyes in another and then skip to comparing the color of the stripes in that person's shirt. Even if you think the detail is the same in all the pictures, still check. After you're sure that you've compared where a person's hair is parted, move on to the color of the hair, and then on to the color of the eyes, and so on.
- ✓ **If several objects are in the picture:** Pick specific objects to compare in each picture. The easiest way to compare objects is to move through the photo from left to right, top to bottom.

- ✓ **If just one main object is in the picture:** You may feel overwhelmed to see just a single object in a Not puzzle, but just take a deep breath and start at the beginning with the details, literally. Every object, no matter how simple it looks at first, contains multiple elements. For example, if the image is a staircase, compare the details from the top of the staircase to the bottom. Or begin with railing, move on to the steps, and so on. If the image doesn't have an obvious beginning or end (like a wheel or flower), try comparing specific details, such as color, size of things within the image, and so on, moving in a patterned fashion over the image, such as right to left, top to bottom.

Pick out differences in the details

Although you may get lucky and see an obvious difference right at the start, chances are you have to pick through the details to find the one change amongst all of the pictures. But with six pictures to go through, whether you use a pattern or not, you can go a little crazy comparing them all. So use the following ideas to help make sifting through the details less painful:

- ✓ **Use one picture as a “base.”** Use the first picture in the Not puzzle as your base — the picture you compare all other pictures against. Use a pattern, and then compare the details of the base picture against each of the other pictures. (See the earlier section, “Keep comparisons focused with a pattern,” for more on patterns.)
- ✓ **Compare details individually.** You may think that you've noticed a particular detail, such as the color of a person's eyes, while comparing another detail, but don't fool yourself. You need to look and compare each detail individually; don't dismiss any detail if you haven't purposefully searched for it and compared it to all the pictures.

Piecing the picture together

Think of cut-up puzzles like a jigsaw puzzle — you have to piece it together with just your eyes . . . unless, of course, you cut the picture out of the book and piece it together on the table, but what's the fun in that? Of course, with no corner pieces let alone a box lid to start with, you may be wondering how you're supposed to begin — let alone solve — this kind of puzzle. Well, we start you off with one piece correctly placed, but the rest is up to you. So check out the following sections to get some ideas on how to finish solving a Not puzzle.

Get a quick take on what the picture is

First, try giving the pieces a quick scan and see whether you can figure out what the picture is. Is it a flower? Is it a beach scene? Is it a garden? You get the idea.

However, you may have a difficult time figuring out what in the world you've been staring at for the past ten minutes. If you find yourself in that predicament, try figuring out what the picture is composed of. Does it look like it has a clump of trees? Can you see the makings of a dirt road?

After you begin to discover what parts make up the entire picture, you can get a better idea on what the picture is as a whole. And after you know what you're looking at, you can begin putting the pieces together.



Especially with some of the more difficult puzzles, you may never figure out what the entire picture is, and that's okay. Even if you're truly stumped, if you can find just one obvious part, you can begin to piece the picture together.

Plug in the obvious parts

Use the process of elimination to piece together obvious parts, leaving the other — often more difficult — pieces for last. For example, if you find the side of a building, try plugging all the pieces together to complete the side of the building and then see what pieces you have leftover. You'll be amazed at how quickly some of the more difficult details fall into place. If you're still stuck on some difficult details, check out the following section, "Leave the difficult details for last."



Even if you don't know exactly where in the grid you should place the obvious parts, still piece it together — in your head, at least. By eliminating the pieces that make up the obvious part you've discovered, you may have an easier time both figuring out where in the grid to place part, as well as where to plug in the finishing details.

Leave the difficult details for last

After you've plugged in some obvious parts, even just a couple of details can still stump you, but you can still solve the cut-up puzzle if you try the following ideas:

- ✓ **Look for similarities.** After you put together some obvious parts, look for similarities in those parts that can connect them to your leftover pieces. Check to see whether your leftover pieces share a similar color, background, or setting.
- ✓ **Compare empty spots and their borders in the grid.** Find empty spots on the grid and then check out what borders those empty spaces. Check to see whether any lines, colors, or forms on the borders of empty spaces can possibly connect to one of your leftover pieces.
- ✓ **Sketch your heart out.** Although you may not be an award-winning artist, you can probably connect some lines or dots. So remember: You don't have to replicate a piece perfectly to figure out where it fits. If you can't figure out by eye what empty spots the leftover pieces can fit into, try sketching it out a bit.

Pumping Mental Iron with Picture Puzzles

Just by carrying this book around, you may find yourself being asked to help solve a neighbor's crossword puzzle or a friend's brainteaser. Because it takes a detail-oriented individual with impeccable focus to solve picture puzzles, people just assume that you've got those skills if they catch you fiddling with picture puzzles.

Regardless where you fall on the mental fitness meter, you not only can solve picture puzzles, but you can also boost your brain power at the same time. Anyone can do pictures puzzles, and everyone can benefit from solving them. Think of solving picture puzzles as a way to maintain as well as increase your mental activity.

The following sections show you how you can get a brain boost from solving picture puzzles, and you can also discover how to take your solving skills to the next level.

Breaking a sweat with your brain

If you don't think you fit the big-brain category — despite what your friends and family believe — start solving picture puzzles and see what differences you discover in your mind, attention, and stress level. In case you can't wait to find out, here's how solving picture puzzles can benefit your brain and body:

✔ **Muscling up your mind:** Simply put, use it or lose it! Stop staring at the back of headrests on airplanes and work a picture puzzle instead. Take this book with you to your porch and give your mind a mental workout rather than veg out watching the flowers grow.

Using your mind helps retain mental acuity — the stuff you want when you're older so that you can remember that your keys are on the hook and your glasses aren't misplaced, they're just on your head. Even just a few picture puzzles a day can help you keep your wits about you.

✔ **Training your attention:** You may think, or have been told by your mother, your teacher, or your spouse, that you don't pay attention. Perhaps that's keeping you from trying picture puzzles, but that complaint should be the reason you work them! Working picture puzzles helps to increase your attention span because you have to remain focused.

Solving a picture puzzle, no matter what type, requires strong focus. You have to be able to block out distractions and keep track of what you've done all while life's distractions attempt to interrupt your focus. Of course, as you learn to be better focused, it may result in your being able to block out your mother, teacher, or spouse more effectively, too. You have to decide whether that's an added bonus or not.

- ✓ **Reducing tension:** Just like working out your body can relieve stress, working out your mind can have the same result. Solving some picture puzzles gives you a feeling of success and helps you see the problems that are stressing you from a different perspective.

Working puzzles give you a simple break as well. Even if you don't solve a puzzle completely, just immersing yourself in something different gives you a break from dwelling on a stressful situation.

Taking it to the next level

Perhaps you understand that picture puzzles give your brain a workout for the better (if you don't understand that, you should check out the earlier section, "Breaking a sweat with your brain"), but you want to boost your solving as well as brain building efforts. You can uncover some ways to take your skills to the next level:

- ✓ **Keep your brain challenged.** If you keep your brain challenged, you can better solve puzzles, boost your brainpower, and solve even bigger puzzles. But you have to know when you need to be challenged. Your first clue should be when you breeze through a certain level of picture puzzles. When you burn through solving several puzzles at one sitting, you need to turn up the heat rather than revel in how bright you are.

To keep your brain challenged:

- Try a different type of picture puzzle.
- Move on to a higher level of difficulty.
- Switch gears to a brain teaser, crossword, or other type of puzzle.

- ✓ **Turn off the tube.** Just like your mother told you, television rots your brain. Okay, maybe TV isn't really that bad, but it certainly doesn't help you take your solving skills to the next level. Television increases the chance that you'll eat more and exercise less. And if that wasn't enough, all those commercials are enough to convince you that you don't have it all but that you *do* need it all, which is enough to stress you out (and then make you eat more, exercise less, you get the picture). So do yourself a favor and turn your brain on by turning your TV off!

✔ **Work out your body to boost brain power.** Although we don't plan on putting you on a strict exercise regimen to increase your ability to solve picture puzzles, we do want to point out that physical activity results in a positive push for brain power. While we'd love to have you sit and work every puzzle in this book (and we hope you do solve every puzzle), you do have to get up and get moving each day. Physical exercise protects the brain and gets your blood flowing and pumping to your brain.

Go for a walk or give or whatever physical activity you enjoy a try. You can build a better memory and increase your problem-solving skills in the process. And those problem-solving skills come in handy for solving picture puzzles!

Use your brain before you buy

Amidst parental complaints that electronic devices, such as computers and video games, are wasting their kids' time, the industry has answered by touting new — and often expensive — alternatives. Okay, perhaps we're using the word "alternatives" loosely. Basically, the "new alternatives" consist of the exact same products they were selling before: computer

and video games, except these games are supposed to help increase brainpower. In fact, you can find ads all over the place that claim their new-fangled electronic games are the best way to build your brain. Of course, you have to turn over more than a few bucks to build your brain with these new toys.