



## Sam Buchbinder (SSDS '00)

**How did you become interested in writing and constructing crossword puzzles?**

In high school, I started to do the daily crossword puzzle from the newspaper. After college, when I was living in New York, I started to think about constructing crosswords. My wife Kim bought me tickets to go hear Will Shortz speak at a Times Talk about constructing crossword puzzles. After that, I gave it a shot - first on some graph paper (which did not go well!), and then eventually I found out that people use special software to help construct a crossword puzzle. After many (many!) submissions, I finally got a crossword accepted by the New York Times in 2014.



**Based on your expertise, what is the trick to a really good crossword puzzle?**

A really good crossword puzzle is one that challenges people, but also makes them smile upon completion. A good crossword should have a theme, which is accessible to many groups of people, and the other entries filling the puzzle must be lively. There should be as little archaic language and abbreviations, etc. as possible throughout the puzzle.

**Can you walk us through your creative process from start to finish when writing a crossword puzzle?**

I am always on the lookout for themes in my everyday interactions with people and the world. I keep an ongoing notes file on my phone where I add ideas that pop into my head, along with cool words and phrases that I'd like to add to my wordlist. For example, I was at the optometrist last week and realized that many parts of the eyes also have other meanings (Rod, Cone, Lens, Pupil, Iris...) and so I jotted that down in my notes file. Later, I realized that the phrase THE AYES HAVE IT could be reworked as THE EYES HAVE IT, as a revealing entry. When I have time to construct, I'll take a look back at those notes and see if I can turn my notes into a puzzle. I then decide on what possible themes exist, and if they are symmetrical, and will workshop some options there. From that point, I then move to construct the grid - inserting the theme entries - and then working on filling the other words in around them. Finally, I work on making clues for the puzzle, before casting a submission.



**What is it like to have your name on a NYT crossword puzzle?**

It is pretty awesome! My wife ordered a framed version of my first ever puzzle - signed by Will Shortz - and it is hanging in our living room.