

Method to the Madness

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Answer: **DEFLASHING**

Take some deep breaths, then realize it's not so bad. It's all about alphabetical order.

The puzzle starts as nine sets of nine questions, plus one extra. In each set, the questions regard a word pair that are near-anagrams of one another, plus a "new" letter. Using the information provided about the alphabetic order of the constituent letters, one can either use a site like Qat (which you might've learned earlier!) or their own programming to find the pairs.

- 1st Pair: MORALIST & HAILSTORM (H)
- 2nd Pair: COMPLAIN & POLICEMAN (E)
- 3rd Pair: UNCOVERS & CAVERNOUS (A)
- 4th Pair: NEUROTIC & INTRODUCE (D)
- 5th Pair: DEBONAIR & BANDOLIER (L)
- 6th Pair: YEARLONG & LEGIONARY (I)
- 7th Pair: PRIMATES & SPEARMINT (N)
- 8th Pair: OUTLINED & LONGITUDE (G)
- 9th Pair: MANCHEGO & CHEONGSAM (S)

Helpfully, the questions were given ordered alphabetically by their answers.

The numbering of the questions helps provide a check-step message, or possibly aid in solving:

IGNORE THIS COINCIDENTAL CORROBORATION
CHANNEL YOUR SOLVE ENERGIES
AMALGAMATED MID SLUMP PUN

With that settled, only one unused question remains. Based on its placement between Question 51 and Question 64 (which gave E and G) and the fact that all letters are unique within each word, it stands to reason this new letter must be an F. The question itself also tells us where the F lands. This means we need an anagram of "HEADLINGS" that adds an F in position 3; the only valid English word is the answer, **DEFLASHING**.

Author's Notes

Adam: I just wanted one puzzle that would really put the fear in people at first blush; just something absolutely hideous-looking. But then you knock it around for a few minutes, really understand what it's asking, and realize it's not that bad at all. Any skills in using Qat you might have picked up earlier in the hunt would definitely help here!

Scott, being the premier comics lore resource on the team, insisted this answer be worked into a joke about The Flash, and I was happy to oblige him without dipping too far into any other superhero's villain roster. This was also a chance to let the story do some of the lifting, as setting the puzzle in a foundry helped justify the answer, which is the process of removing excess source material from molded or casted objects! Originally, the check-step message mentioned Central City, too, but it proved to be too much of a red herring to be worth it.

Was it a wise choice to make such a wordplay-heavy puzzle resolve to such an obscure word? No. Was it a bold choice? Probably not that either, but at least you could make a case!