

Plot Your Perfect Mystery

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A teal-colored decorative graphic at the bottom of the page, consisting of a solid teal bar with a small, upward-pointing triangular shape in the center.

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<https://suzybussell.com/blandford>

Who am I?

- Author of 9 mystery novels
- Two cosy mystery series:
 - Exeter Mysteries (Contemporary)
 - Jane Austen Tearoom Mysteries (Paranormal)



What Will We Cover Today?

Introduction to Mystery Genres

Crafting the Perfect Sleuth

Settings

Main Crime

Suspects

Plotting Your Mystery

Subplots

Side characters

Important note:

- What we cover today is a framework, you don't have to stick to it 100% - but use it to give you a starting point
- Plot framework will work for any mystery sub-genre
- But play around with it...make it unique to you
- Suitable for novels, novellas and scripts



Task: Which will you choose?

Exploring Mystery Genres

- Cosy
- CSI
- Historical
- Noir/hard-boiled
- Police Procedural
- Legal Thriller
- Medical
- Paranormal
- Spy
- Techno
- True Crime
- Private Detective
- Children/Young Adult
- Or a mix?

Crafting the Perfect Sleuth – get this right because it's what readers keep coming back for

Diversity in Sleuths

Sleuths come in all genders, ages, ethnicities, and nationalities, each bringing unique physical traits and perspectives to investigations.



Personality Traits

A sleuth's personality may be shy, brave, passionate, impetuous, or highly driven, shaping how they solve mysteries.

Creative Problem Solving

Amateur sleuths overcome limited resources with keen observation, resourcefulness, and unconventional methods to solve cases.

Building Complex Characters

Balanced Backstory

A meaningful backstory helps define a character, but too much slows the plot. Balance between detail and pacing is important.

Relatable Flaws

Character flaws create relatability and provide opportunities for growth, making the journey compelling for readers.

Defining Motivations

A character's wants, fears, and obstacles enrich their motivation and add depth to the narrative.

Flexible Character Roles

Any character, regardless of gender, can lead or follow. Their role should fit the story's needs.

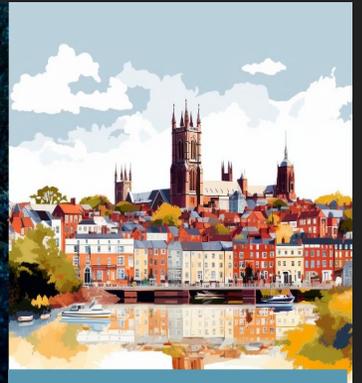


Task: Pick your sleuth and fill in the details

- Name:
- Gender:
- Age:
- Ethnicity:
- Nationality:
- Physical Characteristics
- Personality Traits: – shy, brave, passionate, impetuous, driven
- Flaw:
- Background:
- What three things does the character want?
- What three things does the character fear?
- What three things are stopping them from getting what they want?
- In what three ways is the character unreliable?

Settings

- Have a base – police station/house (safe place?)
- Era/time setting/time of year
- If historical/political – any ties to real events?
- Time frame – one day, one year, several years etc.
- Geographical location
- Town/Country/City etc
- Inside or outside – architecture (say a school or castle, monastery)
- Is it real or fictional or a mixture?



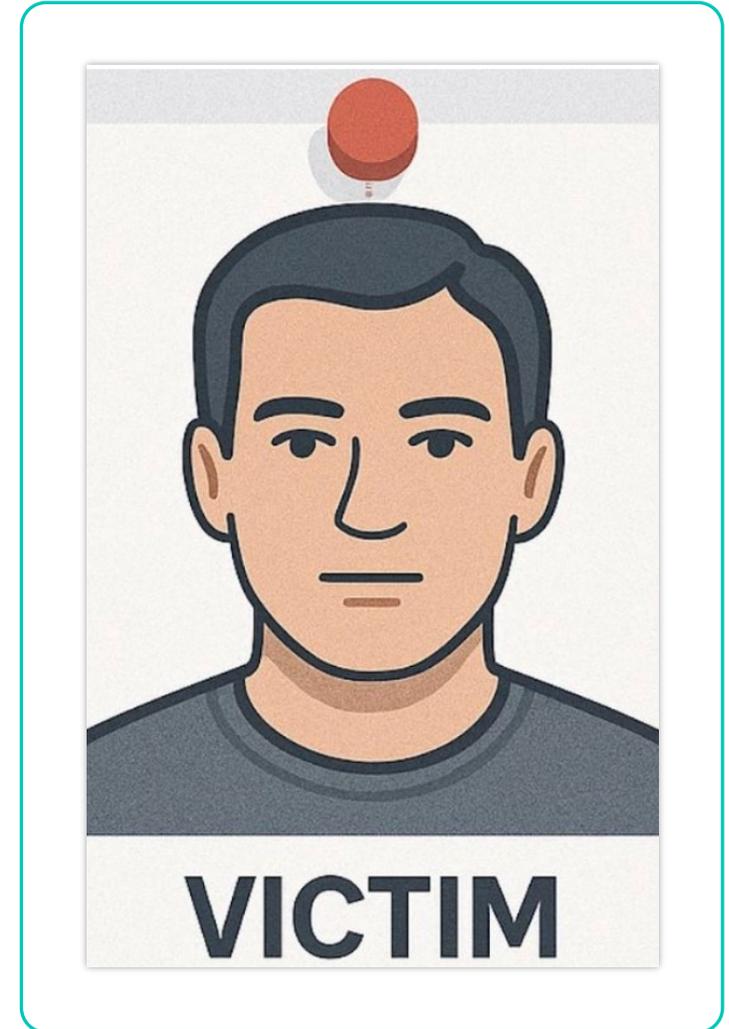
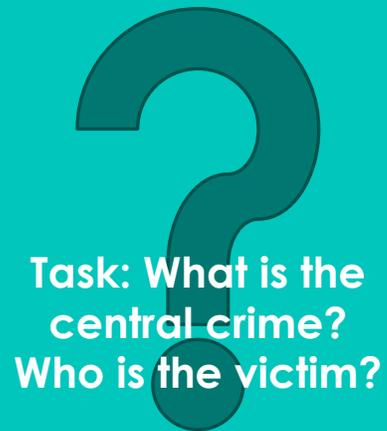
Task: Pick Your Settings

- Base:
- Era/time setting/time of year:
- If historical/political – any ties to real events?
- Time frame;
- Geographical location:
- Inside or outside – architecture (say a school or castle, monastery):
- Real or fictional or a mixture?:



Plotting: The central crime

- What is the central crime? (Murder, kidnap, missing person, theft, assault, cyber-crime)
- Who is the victim?



Plotting: Answer these questions

- Why is the sleuth the only one who can do it?
- Why must the sleuth solve the crime?
- Work out the time-frame? Why is the deadline important?



Task Answer these questions

Plotting –
Suspects

Pick 4/5
suspects



Task: For each suspect answer these questions:



- 1) What is the secret that the sleuth uncovers?
- 2) What is their motive?
- 3) What was their opportunity and means?



Overall Plan:

1. Crime is committed/discovered
 2. Sleuth is asked/drawn in to solve the mystery
 3. Sleuth uncovers 4 or 5 suspects
 4. Sleuth interviews each suspect in turn
 5. **Midpoint - Another murder....often one of the suspects: TASK PICK A SECOND MURDER VICTIM**
 6. Sleuth uncovers a secret for each suspect (false alibi, lied, didn't tell sleuth everything about their relationship with victim)
 7. That leads the sleuth to interview each suspect again
 8. Final suspect's secret is they are the murderer
- NOTE: the crime must be solved even if the culprit escapes

Clues and Red Herrings

1

Every chapter must have a point to it. It should forward the plot/subplot OR highlight a suspect

2

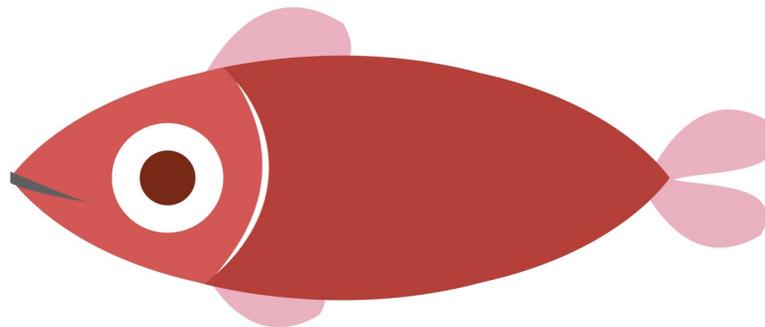
Each interaction must result in information or misinformation

3

Red herrings must be plausible. You can add these after the first draft is written

4

Clues need to be spread out – at the end the reader maybe surprised but must be able to trace back for clues.



Sub-plots



**Task: Pick a sub-plot idea
for your sleuth**

Optional but often useful

May depend on the length of book

Can lighten/change the mood, potentially
– bring in some humour/romance etc

Can be minor but getting in the way.
(Family, personal, work issues, illness)

Doesn't need to be very detailed but it can
be a blocker & way



Plotting – Partners, Sidekicks, Minor (but important) characters

Partners - Supporting or equal?

What is their relationship with the protagonist?

Sidekicks - What differentiates them from being a partner?

What role do they play?

Minor (but important) characters If your sleuth is an amateur these could be professionals who can get information for them

What is your sleuth's relationship with them?

Could they be suspects as well as supporters?

Other characters

Questions?

