

CRIMES & CLUES

The Essential Parts To Writing A Mystery

By Maggie Casteen

Every reader knows that there are certain things we expect to see in a mystery. These essential elements are what keep the reader glued to every page, wondering what will happen next. As a mystery writer, it is important to keep these essential parts in mind as we craft our stories. So, what are they, you might be asking? In my opinion, there are five essential parts to writing a mystery: momentum, character depth, research, plotting the crime, and keep reading. 1. Momentum

Momentum, or the pace of your story, is essential when writing a mystery. This is the time element that drives your story forward and gives it suspense and drama. As a mystery writer, you want to keep the story moving and the reader engaged. Be careful not to get bogged down with unnecessary descriptions and details; make sure what you're writing has a purpose. Do not let frivolous details distract your reader from the story. As a reader, I can vouch for the fact that nothing stops the momentum you have built quicker than pointless words that do not contribute to the mystery. The momentum of your story will also come from multiple character points-of view. By letting your reader move through the story by seeing the thoughts and actions of different characters, will keep the reader from being stuck in one setting and one set of thoughts. Knowing the story from the viewpoint of different characters is an excellent way of keeping the story moving and increasing the suspense. Doing these things will keep the reader engaged and the momentum of your story on the move.

2. Character depth

Another essential part of a mystery is character depth. Granted this could apply to multiple genres; however, it is crucial to mysteries because of the misdirection and suspense you are trying to build within your story. The three characters I pay the most attention to are the main character, the suspects and the killer, and the victim. Your main character is the eyes and ears of the reader, so make sure they are relatable but flawed; create a character your reader will care about. The flaws of your main character are what make

them personable and will help create a connection between your character and the reader. The suspects and killer are grouped together because, most of the time, your killer will come from your suspects. These characters are important to keep suspicion high and the reader continually guessing. Creating a pool of suspects for your detective or investigator to work through gives your story a depth that your reader will appreciate. Also, the backstory you create for them will give you room to weave the reader in a variety of directions or misdirections, that will ultimately lead to the crime being solved. Lastly, the victim is another character that deserves attention. Creating a victim with untold secrets or an unknown past will add to the drama of your story and will make the ending much more satisfying.

3. Research

This third point happens to be my favorite, do your research. Doing your research is particularly important when it comes to the method of death you have chosen for your victim. From guns to knives to poison, and everything in between, it is important to research the method of your crime so, it is believable and as accurate as possible. Also, I tend to focus on making my stories believable rather than nailing down every detail perfectly. I find that as long as I make my crime believable, then the reader's imagination will take it from there. Now, with all that being said, there are different types of mysteries that require different levels of research. If you are writing a medical mystery or a police procedural, then you will probably need to do some extra digging to get the important aspects down correctly. However, if an investigator sleuth is more your style, then you will have more breathing room when it comes to research; either way, research will give your story credibility and support.

4. Plotting the crime

Another essential part of writing a mystery is, plotting out the crime. Knowing your crime inside and out is essential to being a mystery writer. In your story, there should be surprises for the reader when it comes to the crime, but as

the writer, you should know exactly where the story leads. Plotting the story out before you start writing helps spread the clues like breadcrumbs throughout the story to keep the reader guessing and trying to puzzle it out. This will also help guard against information dumping and leaving out a clue or piece of evidence needed for the story. There is nothing more frustrating than having to go back and fit in a key detail that was left out because the story got away from you. Plotting the crime out before you write will assist you in making sure the trail of clues, you're leaving for the reader will end up the way you intended. 5. Keep reading

I know this last point may not seem important, but I promise you that it is essential. It doesn't matter if you've written one book or ten; keep reading those wonderful mystery stories. By doing this, you are keeping the ideas flowing and your writing skills sharp. Within every writer is a reader always wanting more...more suspense, more excitement, and more crimes to solve. Reading, in general, is what helps make us

writers. As we read these stories, it creates within us a desire to write our own.

There is nothing more satisfying than writing a mystery that keeps the reader on the edge of their seat, never knowing what will happen. If this is your goal, then make sure you include these five essential parts when writing your mysteries. Whether you are a mystery writer of cozy mysteries,

medical mysteries, police procedurals, or classic detective novels, these are the essential parts you need to craft a story that your readers will not forget. Follow the clues....Solve the crime.

