

The Busy Writer's Tips on Mystery and Crime

Checklist 3 – Mystery, Clues and Red Herrings

Aspect of Mystery	Your Assessment		
	Works Well	Needs Work	Poor
When you have your story outline, have you run through the plot backwards as well as forwards to check viability? (By doing this you will see more clearly if the path leading to the villain is logical.)			
Have you introduced the villain in the first half of the book? (The earlier the better, especially if the villain turns out to be someone close to the sleuth - someone that 'nobody would suspect'.)			
Have you disguised the identity of the villain while still ensuring that you play fair by the reader?			
Have you introduced a range of clues (e.g. some forensic, some witness statements, some popping up in conversations, etc. - look back at the section on clues and red herrings)			
Have you provided a clear path for the sleuth to follow clues to find the perpetrator? Have you camouflaged this cleverly by misdirecting the reader, while playing fair?			
Have you created some red herrings that seem genuine clues, to draw the sleuth away?			
Have you created a clear timeline for your mystery?			
Have you ensured that your sleuth faces the usual obstacles for his situation? (This can range from tired or ineffective team members in a police detective story to a PI who is blocked by local police or refused cooperation by the public.)			
Have you included both internal and external conflict for your major characters?			
Do any subplots contribute to the main plot, while not affecting the outcome of the investigation?			
Have you read books by popular mystery and crime authors to see what readers like? (Don't forget indie authors with good sales figures.)			
<i>Other Aspects of Research:</i>			