

3 Ways to Make Your Mystery Stand Out in the Crowd

by: Evan Marshall

The mystery novel has never been more popular than it is today. People love reading them . . . and writers love writing them. Editors are swamped with manuscripts and can afford to be extremely fussy as to what they take on. How can you make your mystery rise above the others and make an editor want to buy? Keep the following three vital points in mind.

Look for the Hook

In fiction, a hook is a way to promote a book through some aspect that has commercial appeal or provides publishers with a gimmick or 'handle' that lends itself to publicity.

Your detective might have an occupation that is of high interest in the current culture, is especially timely, is interesting for its very obscurity, or is the same as that of the author. For instance, Patricia Cornwell's series of mysteries featuring Dr. Kay Scarpetta first became popular at a time when public interest in the world of medical examiners had been heightened by such nonfiction books as *Coroner* by Dr. Thomas Noguchi, L.A.'s coroner to the stars, not to mention the tremendous public fascination with true crime. That's Ms. Cornwell's hook.

For my first mystery series, I gave my amateur sleuth my own occupation - that of literary agent. This was my hook, something I could talk about in interviews. It was also something reviewers of my books often commented upon.

Hooks in fiction give publishers, booksellers, and the authors themselves a better chance to grab the attention of browsing book buyers.

Dig Into Your Characters

Today's readers want richly textured characters, especially in the series detective. A clever puzzle for your mystery is important but not enough. We must know all of your major characters as people, just as we would know the characters in any well-written novel. For purposes of characterization, think of your book as a novel with mystery, not a mystery novel. Tell us about your characters' pasts, their psychologies, their faults and weaknesses, their relationships to one another. Remember, it's your characters who will bring your readers back for more.

Devise a Clever, Stunning Plot

Don't settle for a plot device if you can recall seeing it in another book, in a movie, or on TV. Work hard to come up with something different. Granted, there are only so many ways to kill someone, but the canny mystery writer will give one of those ways a new twist. The same goes for motive. There's no excuse for stale clichés; your plotting is truly your own and should bear your distinctive fingerprint.

Keep these three points in mind as you craft your next mystery and you'll have a decided edge in this highly competitive marketplace.

About The Author

Evan Marshall, president of The Evan Marshall Agency, is a former book editor and packager. Recently he and co-author Martha Jewett released The Marshall Plan® Novel Writing Software, based on his bestselling The Marshall Plan® writers' guides. Evan is also the author a number of popular mystery novels; recently released are Death is Disposable and Evil Justice. Visit <http://www.writeanovelfast.com> and download Evan's 77-page Fiction Makeover Guide with tips and ideas on writing a great novel.

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Further reading.



“Write It Now!” Story writing Software.

Here's a piece of software that I came across and a very comprehensive and useful program it is too. There's an impressive list of features such as: 150,000 word thesaurus, spell-checker and word count.

Each character in your story can have their own profile, each location and even objects that are pertinent to the story can have theirs too which you can edit and enlarge as the plot develops and are always handy when you want to check details. (Does she have blue eyes or grey?)

It will produce charts showing relationships between characters plus a timeline of events. You can generate links within the story between characters and events. Imagine you're describing the heroine of your story and mention her childhood home. A link between the two can be set up. You can then link to her husband and any other character to show how they relate to one another.

Version 4 (2009)

Ravenshead, the publishers, have now brought out Version 4 with lots of added goodies. Here's a brief look at three of them:

Storyboard and Scenes - Each chapter can now be broken down into 'scenes' or sections. These can be displayed on a 'storyboard' which helps you to see at a glance the construction of the chapter. Chapters are displayed one beneath another with their scenes alongside. You can move the scenes around within a chapter via the storyboard and the text is moved within the story at the same time. You can even move a scene from one chapter to another.

Web Links - This is great if you are writing a non-fiction book and draw some of your research from the web because Web Links does what it says and enables you to embed a link in the text that, when clicked, takes you to the website you drew the information from. If you're writing, for instance, an historical novel this would be a boon as well.

The new version also enables you to set Writing Targets to check how many words you have written or how long you have been writing each day. Then there's Writing Prompts which help build characters, plots, locations and much else besides, by presenting you with questions which you answer to build up a profile of who or what you are dealing with.

You've seriously got to take a look. It's fabulous. [Click here](#)