

Q & A Answers

Question Details					
#	Question	Asker Name	Lori's answer	Answer	Question Time
1	Will we get a copy of this pdf?	Amy Fendley		Yes, the slides are posted on the Hub page now	06/17/2024 19:05:21
2	Can we get a run through of the colors and what they represent?	Taya	Circle colors were just to differentiate the characters. For clues, white boxes with blue outline was the collection of a new clue. Green box with white text was the first reevaluation of the clue. Grey boxes with white text was the second reevaluation of a clue. Black box with white text was third reevaluation of a clue.		06/17/2024 19:15:58
3	The publishing industry often feels daunting. What were your steps towards becoming an editor?	Andrea Jiménez	I started out getting certified as a Story Grid Editor. (I'm no longer certified by them.) As I worked with clients, I built up a repertoire of my own way of explaining things.		06/17/2024 19:19:37
4	I write what if jack the ripper was Vampire and start his crime again in this time. So some the clue and bodies started in history. How to club to blend the past and the present?	katharina	I think you may be telling a dual timeline story. If you're using clues in the distant past and showing scenes from the past (past timeline) and scenes in the present (present timeline) you want to make sure of 3 things #1) that there's active conflict within in both timelines #2) that what you show from the past relates to the conflict in the present timeline. #3) That you tie the two timelines together by the end. One very famous dual timeline mystery-thriller is Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl.		06/17/2024 19:21:24
5	Does it add too many suspects if the guilty party is a group, like a group of fraternity brothers, a bridge club foursome, or a crime boss's posse?	Susan	There is a very famous Golden Age mystery novel that has a group as a guilty party. (I won't name the mystery, so I don't spoil it for anyone who isn't familiar with it). The question for me is not, do you have *too many* suspects, but do you have too many *similar* suspects? If the group are your only suspects in the novel, I'd look for ways to differentiate the individuals and then make <i>figuring out the differences stages in the plot.</i>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:21:57

			<p>To come up with differences ask yourself questions like these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was everyone in the group an equal participant in the murder or was someone the instigator? • Did they all use the same method of inflicting harm? • Were they all present at the actual time of death? • Does everyone in the group have the same motive? <p>As an example of what you can do with the plot... in Act 2-Part 1, the sleuth may know one method of inflicting harm that's associated with a particular suspect. But that suspect wasn't there at the time of the actual death, and the suspect doesn't have a clear motive, so the sleuth can't figure out why there's a clue connected to the suspect. Maybe they're being framed? Maybe there's a motive the sleuth can't identify.</p> <p>Basically, confuse the sleuth about what's really going on, but make other explanations look plausible.</p>		
6	How does the finding and use of clues apply to an amateur sleuth?	Anonymous Attendee	<p>- An amateur sleuth isn't going to have access to lab equipment and law enforcement databases, but they will have access to the community that they live in and that can include regular folks, law enforcement, coroners, medical examiners, and crime scene techs.</p> <p>An amateur sleuth can be told things like the cause of death, what was found on the autopsy, or what clues a police investigation found at a crime scene by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A professional who has that information. • Through the community grapevine. • Through wily means, like pretending to be someone they're not. <p>A lot of clue processing for an amateur sleuth is going to be talking to regular community members and finding the backstory and significance of physical object clues, or figuring out hidden</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:34:23

			relationships between victims and suspects and uncovering secrets.		
7	Sorry..., Hub Page? Where?	david	!	https://prowritingaid.com/crime-week/hub	06/17/2024 19:37:20
8	Got it! Thanks	david	!		06/17/2024 19:37:59
9	For Lori, it occurs to me this system would make a great computer app that would be a far greater plot outliner for mysteries than anything else out there. Igt remains to build you characters and write your story. This is just brilliant.	jimlewis	Thanks :) <3	live answered	06/17/2024 19:40:17
10	Would the structure be different for a missing person historical, family drama mystery?	Catherine Rittenhouse	<p>A missing person mystery would have a similar structure, but the details would be different. If the person has just gone missing and someone starts searching for them soon after, here's one possibility of how you could organize your plot.</p> <p>Act 1 - figure out that someone's missing and start trying to find them</p> <p>Act 2 Part 1 - Continue investigation down one thread. Your characters might suspect the missing person went somewhere with their romantic partner. So they might devote all their energy to trying to find this partner. But it turns out, that's not right, the partner had nothing to do with the disappearance. And the plot twist at the midpoint is a secret that clears the partner and turns the sleuth to a different investigatory thread.</p> <p>Act 2 Part 2 - Pursue new investigatory thread, uncovering more of the victim's secrets but find challenges at every turn.</p> <p>Act 3 - Solution and bring any guilty parties to justice</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:40:47
11	Do I have to introduce all of my suspects in the first act? Currently, I have it so we see things from my stalkers perspective without revealing and my suspects popping up in the start of act 2	sandra	<p>Nope, you don't need to introduce them all within Act 1. But I would have *some* of them show up on the page in Act 1. Then, you can bring more in, in Act 2.</p> <p>You want to have all of your characters on the page by the end of Act 2. If we've already met the character, they can be believed innocent until Act 3 and then become a suspect. But you don't want to have someone who's new and potentially guilty introduced in Act 3. It'll feel like cheating to the reader if you add suspects that late.</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:42:13

12	Do you use any type of tracking app such as a mindmap to track all your devious twists and turns? Not to mention all the characters	Patricia Browne	<p>I help writers create three things to keep track of clues and suspects.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Timeline of where the victim, culprit, and suspects are around the time of death and what they're each doing 2) Clues table that describes each clue (true ones and red herrings), says at what point in the story the clue is collected, any processing steps it needs, how it's understood (or misunderstood), and who looks guilty because of it. 3) Suspects table that names the suspect, their motive for the crime, clues that make them look guilty, what lets you know they're innocent (if they are) <p>You want to make these 3 things separate and not all together, because it's easier for us to process a page or two at a time rather than a 15 page monstrosity.</p> <p>When I work with writers 1:1, we use these tools to build/refine the puzzle and talk about how to integrate the puzzle into their specific plot. If you (or anyone else) are interested in getting that kind of feedback on your novel from me, schedule a time to talk with me about your story. (it's free and you don't need to have a full manuscript yet. I often work with writers when they're mid-draft)</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:47:21
13	How would a missing person fit into this, though murder is suspected?	Desiree	<p>'See answer to Catherine. You'd just want to have the investigation of the missing person split into sections so it feels like there's progress</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:48:13
14	How do you deal with clues that require specialist knowledge on the part of the investigator to interpret?	Harry Froklage	<p>If this clue is NOT essential to solving the mystery, then you can just tell the reader what it means when the investigator talks to an expert who has the necessary knowledge.</p> <p>If the clue is KEY to solving the mystery, then you'd want to make sure you give the readers enough knowledge to be able to understand this clue too. But you don't want to overwhelm your readers with information.</p> <p>A good practice is to split the background info up into pieces so you drip it out to readers, rather than flood them with it all at once.</p>		06/17/2024 19:49:12

			<p>You can have the sleuth google the topic (or read a book or pamphlet if it's a historical mystery).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to amateur enthusiasts. • Talk to credentialed professionals. • Visit places they can learn more about the topic (an interactive museum, an event in the field) • Run experiments. • Use analogies to try to convey the meaning of the clue <p>Basically, look for ways to put your sleuth in position where they can experience this specialty first-hand</p>		
15	How much would this translate to crime novels that don't focus on murder as the crime?	Maggie H.	<p>The spirit of the plot structure works great for novels where an investigator (or team of them) follow a trail of clues to find something or someone that is trying to hide: a murderer, a missing person, a stolen object, a person who's committed another type of crime.</p> <p>It can also work for casebook novels where multiple viewpoint characters are used and each POV character gives their version of events. Lucy Foley's <i>The Guest List</i> is a casebook novel. In casebook novels, the reader acts the sleuth and there's no formal investigation.</p> <p>I wouldn't use it to do a crime story where there's a bag of money (or other valuable object) that a bunch of shady characters are all chasing. Elmore Leonard's <i>Rum Punch</i> (the book the movie <i>Jackie Brown</i> is based on) and Chester Himes <i>A Rage in Harlem</i> are books like that. Those have more of a chase structure.</p> <p>I also wouldn't use it to do a heist novel. But if you're writing one of those, I wrote a blog post about do them</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:49:44
16	Murder on the Orient Express	Philip Bloch	'		06/17/2024 19:50:04
17	In a cozy mystery, the sleuth usually helps to save an innocent suspect from being found guilty. Would you consider this part of the challenge process in Act 2 stage?	nancywade	Absolutely! It can be part of Act 2. That kind of threat can also come before Act 2. In Agatha Christie's <i>A Body in the Library</i> , Miss Marple	live answered	06/17/2024 19:50:26

			<p>gets involved in the case because she wants to help keep her friends, the Bantry's, out of trouble.</p> <p>The later in the story that your innocent character becomes a suspect, the more you'll want to advance the legal process. So, early in the story your sleuth may get involved to help a character save their social reputation, or avoid questioning by the police. If this kind of problem is introduced in Act 2, you might help your innocent character when they're about to be arrested, to get them out of jail, or to prevent them from going to trial.</p>		
18	Does any of this change, if the real crime comes later in the story and the inciting incident is another crime?	Linda Vick	<p>I'm assuming that the two crimes are connected in some way so that if you solve one, you'll be able to solve the later crime as well. In that case, the plot structure might be something like:</p> <p>Act 1 - initial crime investigation (Plot twist at the end here might be the real crime)</p> <p>Act 2 - Part 1 - real crime investigation starts</p> <p>Act 2 - Part 2 -real crime investigation expands and your sleuth comes to a false conclusion</p> <p>Act 3 - The ties between the initial crime and the real one become clear, both are solved and culprit faces justice.</p> <p>Basically, all the same elements, but you can switch them around. However you arrange the elements, you just want to keep raising the stakes as the story progresses.</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:51:02
19	Could the story end with the real culprit not known to anyone but the reader?	Will Bashor	You can if you want to write a dark story.	live answered	06/17/2024 19:51:09
20	I've been told that 'crime thriller' is not a specific enough genre to use in a query letter. Do you agree?	allison	<p>Query letters aren't my area of expertise. But my guess is that what agents are looking for is information about subgenre you're writing in (e.g. psychological thriller, police procedural, domestic thriller, medical thriller) and the tropes your books uses which could be thinks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Undercover/ Disguise ● Locked room ● Closed circle ● Vigilante justice ● Repressed memory/ unreliable memory ● Rookie investigator ● Last case before retirement ● Master detective 		06/17/2024 19:51:16

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battling jurisdictions • Enemies/rivals must investigate together • Organized crime • Master criminal • The monster hidden amongst us • Case within a case • Trapped with a killer • Back from the dead 		
21	What if you have two culprits - the second one kills the first one but the first one deserved it?	Myløe Wilson	It depends on the specifics of who kills whom in what order and who is investigating the murders.	live answered	06/17/2024 19:51:18
22	Can we get a copy of the transcript?	Anonymous Attendee			06/17/2024 19:53:06
23	does the same system apply to a cold case	Jo	<p>I'm guessing your asking about the plot.</p> <p>If the cold case is the primary case being investigated, then it can work without adjustment.</p> <p>If the cold case is part of a "Case within a case" story where an old case is related to a new case, then you'll probably need to make additional adjustments. Most case within a case stories are dual timeline so see my answers about that above.</p>		06/17/2024 19:53:23
24	If you can't think of a plausible explanation for the mystery that you want to include, does it mean that this particular idea is dead and it's time to move on? Or will readers let you get away with an explanation that is a stretch?	Anonymous Attendee	Find help generating a plausible explanation or move on..	live answered	06/17/2024 19:53:57
25	How do you deal with clues that require specialist knowledge on the part of the investigator to interpret? How much explanation is manageable?	Harry Froklage	I answered this above. As for how much, you want to give the readers just what they need.	live answered	06/17/2024 19:54:12
26	What are the recommended word counts for various subgenres?	Anonymous Attendee	https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/community/discussions/genre-word-count-guidelines		06/17/2024 19:54:24
27	open verdict on a uk based case means if more evidence comes forward the case can be reopened. so a cold case	Jo	'Oh, ok. So this is a follow-up to the questions about cold case above. You've got new evidence in a reopened case. Then the plot system should work for your story.		06/17/2024 19:54:53
28	Progress doesn't necessarily mean solving the crime, correct? It could mean going out and getting more info about the victim, about a clue etc	Anonymous Attendee	<p>Correct. Progress can mean lots of things. For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting clues that clear a suspect from suspicion • Uncovering secrets about the victim (or a suspect) • Solving mini mysteries such as how an unusual 		06/17/2024 19:55:16

			<p>object ended up at the scene</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figuring out what the murder method is (if it's difficult) • Identifying the victim (if it's not obvious) • Identifying the likely motive <p>Basically, if a reader would have a question about the case, progress means answering it.</p>		
29	I think they mean - If the sleuth is an amateur they don't have access to a lot of clues that law enforcement does. So the unwrapping of many clues is not available to them - But they can apply the ability to "understand" the clues in more depth than the police detectives processing a crime scene. ala Sherlock Holmes with brilliant deductive reasoning.	Janet Doucette	'Exactly. Amateurs also have access to things law enforcement not have, like the trust of community members and a reason to be in places where they can overhear things.		06/17/2024 19:55:36
30	I'm looking at your website right now... Does your calendar have openings for a new client?	Anonymous Attendee	Yes! If you want to work with me, schedule a time to talk about your story . We'll talk about exactly what we'd work on based on where you're at in the writing process and what I think would help based on the info you give me.		06/17/2024 19:55:48
31	retired cop here..a misper case stays on file till info comes in that its a murder case then goes to a homicide unit, if you find the body then the case changes...we had a case her and no body was found but it went from misper unit to homicide	Randy Kotchon	'Thanks for the tip about how personnel is handled for a missing person case.		06/17/2024 19:56:42
32	I'm doing a cozy mystery in which there are certain rules. how many rules can you break and still be within the genre?	Terry	<p>If you want to stay within the cozy subgenre, I would make sure your story keeps these elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighthearted tone • Not graphic (violence can take place off the page or just be portrayed in a way that deemphasizes the gory details) • Amateur sleuth solves the crime • Mystery is solved with mostly psychological clues rather than forensic ones • Set in a small town or small community within a larger area. Setting would be a nice place to visit if the murder rate wasn't EXCEPTIONALLY <p>If your story doesn't keep these conventions then it's time to look at other subgenres as a potential home for your novel</p>	live answered	06/17/2024 19:56:56

33	Will there be a transcript of this presentation available?	Elizabeth Pinder			06/17/2024 19:58:27
34	On Harry's ?, how do you deal with clues from the past when there was no DNA or the police force was limited in size and ability.	Linda Vick	For crimes that happened before modern forensics were available, you'll need to rely on non-forensic clues to solve the mystery.		06/17/2024 19:59:05
35	What do you think of a character that's in the beginning of the book by name but later she assumes a different name after she commits the crime? Is that breaking a rule or is it acceptable because they will know who she really is in the end.	Michele Howell	<p>If you've got a contemporary professional detective they'll likely have access to databases that can tell them about someone's name change, so a legal name change wouldn't be enough to hide their identity. Especially if the person has a previous criminal record. They'd need to have a false identity.</p> <p>For an amateur sleuth, or a historical sleuth, a person who's changed their name could be pretty difficult to find. In the US, the documents you file when you change your name are public record so you just need to know to look for them. But if your story is set in an area or time period that doesn't have those kinds of records, they'll be a lot more difficult to track, especially if the character has also moved a great distance.</p>		06/17/2024 19:59:09