

Are you writing a  
Crime story?

# Grappling with:

- Story structure?
- Scattered scenes that don't hang together?
- What exactly constitutes a Crime story?

You're in the  
right place.

What are Crime  
stories *for*?



# What are Crime Stories *for*?

- Remind us that where humans are, there's crime.
- Reinforce cultural norms of justice & injustice.
- Give a sense of order and security.
- Provide the feeling of being clever, intrigued, and satisfied.

# How do Crime stories differ?

- Protagonist's profession
- Type of crime and criminal
- Setting

# Crime Subtypes

- Protagonist is a private citizen.
- Works alone or with a sidekick.
- Story is focused on the puzzle.
- Usually takes place in a small crucible.
- Goal is restoration of community order.

# Murder Mystery



# Courtroom

- Protagonist is a lawyer or intern.
- Story is focused on criminal conviction.
- May be defending the wrongly accused.
- Criminal may be a corporate entity.
- Goal is social justice.

# Journalism

- Protagonist is a journalist.
- Story is focused on large questions of justice.
- Goal is to expose crime *and* rise in status.
- Crime is often scandalous (corruption, sex offenses).
- Many true crime stories in this category.

- Protagonist is a law enforcement official.
- Driven by desire to get wrongdoers off the street.
- Usually part of a team with public resources.
- Crime is usually a violent felony.

# Police Procedural

# Caper & Heist

- Protagonist is or becomes a criminal.
- Seeks justice outside the law, against another criminal.
- Forms a team with private resources.
- Crime is nonviolent white-collar.

# Crime Thriller

- Protagonist may be LEO, lawyer, other.
- Criminal has “monster” characteristics.
- Criminal targets the protagonist.
- Crime is usually a violent felony.
- Goal is to save future victims.

- Protagonist's goal is to uncover a hidden truth.
- Investigative skills and situations come into play.
- Antagonist is not an actual criminal.
- Solution restores "order" to protagonist's mind.

# Crime-like supporting story

# Know your subtypes.

- Know the trends.
- Read widely & deeply.
- Know what readers expect.
- Do your research.

They have a  
structure in  
common



# Crime Essentials

# Desire (Want & Need):

- The protagonist **wants** to restore Justice and Order.
- Their **need** will vary.

# Stakes Continuum:

Justice→Injustice

Order→Chaos

# Change:

- Result of the pressures faced in the story.
- Different from the beginning to the end.
- Determined by your supporting Story Type.

# Premise:

- The central idea of your story in a cause/effect sentence.

# Crime Premise ideas:

- Clever investigators restore order by outwitting the criminal.
- Good police work results in justice.
- The rule of law moves society toward justice.
- Crime pays when people team up to cheat the system but not each other.

## Premise statement for *Widows*:

Cheating other criminals with a clever heist restores justice and order.

# Emotion:

- What the reader wants to feel, the reason they choose your type of story.
- Crime readers want to feel the security of seeing justice done and safety restored; **OR**
- The intrigue of solving a puzzle and feeling more intelligent than the protagonist.



# Essential Characters & Moments

## *Essential Characters:*

- Characters required for the dynamics of the Crime story.
- Roles or archetypes.
- Roles may be carried by multiple characters.
- Single character may play multiple roles.

## *Protagonist:*

- Primary character facing justice and injustice.
- Actively trying to solve a puzzle and restore order.
- Has characteristics the audience can identify with such as deductive brilliance, sophistication, flaws.
- Less powerful than antagonist.
- In caper & heist, becomes the criminal.

## *Antagonist:*

- The protagonist's opposition, generally the criminal.
- A step ahead of the protagonist, has information the protagonist wants.
- Motives must be complex & believable.
- If a force or group, must be embodied in a character.

## *Victim:*

- At least one victim of injustice.
- Requires justice.
- Dependent on protagonist for justice.
- In heist & caper, victim is the antagonist.

*Essential Moments:*

## *Crime Essential Moment 1: Setup*

The protagonist is involved in their normal activities, usually either solving or planning crime.

## *Crime Essential Moment 2: Inciting Incident*

Protagonist is alerted to a crime or crime opportunity, changing their state from business-as-usual to inspired to restore justice.



## *Crime Essential Moment 3: Act One Peak*

The Investigator sees objections to investigating the crime; mastermind may see flaws in the proposed caper.

## *Crime Essential Moment 4: Act Two Complications*

The investigator begins their investigation. The mastermind starts forming a team and planning the heist.

## *Crime Essential Moment 5: Midpoint Shift*

The protagonist realizes they must change their approach to solving the mystery or completing a crime.

## *Crime Essential Moment 6: Global Peak*

Investigator confronts the criminal directly; **OR**

Mastermind faces the antagonist alone to protect the team.

## *Crime Essential Moment 7: Resolution*

Resolution: The investigator brings the criminal to justice, restoring the legal social order; **OR**

The mastermind and the team get away with the loot for poetic justice.

Putting the elements  
together.

80%

ACT 1

ACT 2

ACT 3

ACT 4

MIDPOINT SHIFT

# Beginning Hook (Act 1):

- Introduce the protagonist's ordinary world.
- Demonstrate their fear or flaw.
- Demonstrate the injustice, the inciting crime or opportunity to commit a crime.
- Introduce interesting supporting characters.
- Demonstrate what the protagonist wants and needs.
- Make the stakes clear.



# Middle Build A (Act 2):

- Put clues, red herrings, and obstacles between the protagonist and their goal.
- Make sure the obstacles escalate.
- Create a midpoint shift: protagonist goes from reactive to proactive, changes tactics.

# Middle Build B (Act 3):

- Continue to escalate the complications and raise the stakes.
- Remove the protagonist's hope of restoring justice in an all-is-lost moment.

# Ending Payoff (Act 4):

- Write a climax: protagonist confronts antagonist.
- Show the protagonist facing their fear or flaw.
- Show the protagonist outwitting the antagonist (+)  
OR the antagonist outwitting the protagonist (-).
- Create a resolution showing justice restored, or continued injustice or chaos.

And that is the  
Crime story  
structure.