



# If Writing a Mystery Is a Case...

## ...How Close Are You to Solving it?

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**1. How would you describe your sleuth's motivation for solving the mystery?**

- They don't have anything else to do.
- They've got reasons, but they could choose not to do so if they wished.
- If they don't do it they'll face consequences.

**2. How would you describe your villain's motive for committing the inciting crime (the first one in the book)?**

- The crime is committed on a whim.
- It helps the criminal meet a need or desire such as excitement, wealth, or revenge, but the choice of victim was random.
- It helps the criminal meet a need or desire such as excitement, wealth, or revenge, but the choice of victim was critical.

**3. How many suspects (the innocent ones + the true villain) are in your story?**

- 1
- 2 or 3
- 4-7

**4. How truthful are the suspects?**

- They rarely lie.
- They lie, but they don't have strong reasons for doing so.
- They lie a lot because they have secrets to hide.

**5. How would you describe the clues in your novel? Consider the following categories of clues:**

- Physical objects (bloody shirt, knife distinctive jewelry, syringe, etc.),*
- Alibis*

*3. Witness testimony*

*4. Video or audio recordings*

*5. paper or digital records(texts, letters, medical records, bank statements, etc.)*

*6. forensics*

- The clues are mostly of one category.
- The clues are a mix of different categories, but none of the clues are unexpected or unusual.
- The clues are a mix of different categories AND one or more clues are unusual and may take advantage of specialty knowledge.

**6. How would you describe the process of investigating the mystery?**

- The sleuth discovers and understands clues easily.
- The sleuth sometimes has a hard time finding clues and sometimes doesn't understand clues immediately, but generally one thing leads to another.
- Some clues are easy for the sleuth to understand, others are more challenging. Also, the meaning of at least one clue changes upon further reflection or analysis.

**7. How many words are in your manuscript right now?**

- < 20,000
- 20,000- < 60,000
- 60,000+

**8. How do you feel about the discovery of the first crime in your story?**

- a. I'm not sure how it's discovered yet.
- b. I've got a general idea about the discovery, but the details are murky.
- c. I've got it written and I love it!

- a. I have no idea how to end it.
- b. I know what clues lead the sleuth to the real culprit, but not how the sleuth confronts the criminal.
- c. I know what clues lead the sleuth to the real culprit, how the sleuth confronts the criminal, and I've got it written.

**9. How do you feel about the climax of your story?**

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## Scoring and Results

Count up how many times you answered a, b, and c to each of the questions above. If you chose mostly...

A, you're Gathering Evidence

B, you're Working the Case

C, you're Exposing the Criminal



**Hi, I'm Lori Puma.** I help authors write novels that inspire readers to skip bathroom breaks and survive on chips and salsa consumed while reading. *Want more advice on writing page-turning fiction?* Enter your email address and click subscribe on this page to **join my [email list](#).**

# Gathering Evidence



Whodunit? Your sleuth will be following a series of leads to find the culprit behind the crime. You might know why the crime was committed, what clues will help your sleuth crack the case, or you might be debating which of your suspects is the guilty party. But we know your protagonist is going to be a major force in the investigation to come.

Your future will be filled with brainstorming juicy secrets to make innocent suspects look guilty and devising creative ways to make clues point in the wrong direction. Enjoy what you've created so far and practice your mischievous grin. You're creating a fiendishly difficult puzzle for your readers to solve!

This can be a good time to learn about writing craft. I recommend these blog posts.

[Keeping Readers Hooked in Crime Novels](#)

[The One Question Your Novel Must Answer](#)

[The Writing Books You Should Read \(And Which Ones You Can Skip\)](#)

# Working the Case



The middle of a mystery is when the sleuth pursues leads, makes sense of clues, and tests out different theories of how the crime took place. This is also the time that you're laying false trails to mislead your readers. You might have a diabolical collection of true and false clues, a gang of guilty looking suspects, or a general outline of how the investigation will proceed.

This can be a disquieting time. Just like it's difficult for your sleuth to solve the case without having all the pieces, it's hard for a writer to know how to fit pieces together to make an electrifying puzzle plot. No one enjoys uncertainty. But working through the discomfort can make the resolution feel even more rewarding.

A lot of writers hit roadblocks at this point. It can be helpful to have an ally – a knowledgeable writing buddy or a developmental editor – to give reassurance you're on the right path and help you build your mystery. Send me an email at [lori@loripuma.com](mailto:lori@loripuma.com) about your #1 struggle right now, I'll reply with one writing tip to help you move forward.. Put "Give Me a Working the Case tip" in the subject line.

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# Exposing the Criminal



You understand what mystery readers want in a novel - a puzzle plot that requires your sleuth to suss out secrets, make sense of a myriad of clues and bring the criminal to justice. You might have a detailed outline, a discovery draft, or a manuscript with a wickedly difficult puzzle. Wherever you're at, celebrate the effort you've put in so far.

Now is a great time to get individual feedback on your global story - the stuff that goes beyond a single scene or chapter like fooling your readers into believing an innocent suspect is guilty, or reviving a plodding middle with unexpected twists. Getting feedback now can save you from spending a lot of time on details that will change in revision. We want you to be lulling readers into a false sense of understanding, pronto!

If you're interested in getting professional feedback to help you craft a mystery that keeps readers guessing, check out [Novel Ignition](#) and [schedule a time to talk](#) so we can chat about what specifically you'd like to improve in your novel.

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