

Video 1: “7 Description Mistakes Every New Fantasy Writer Makes”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PmOhOXzBT0>

In this guide, we'll cover how to avoid these pitfalls while also teaching you principles for writing effective, immersive descriptions that captivate readers and make them say things like, “I really enjoyed this one. My only complaint is that it's too short. I want more—more of this world and these characters.”

1. Over Reliance on Sight

The first mistake is an over reliance on sight. If you're like most new fantasy writers, you're heavily leaning on sight to describe your story. You might sprinkle in a little bit of sound, but chances are, you're neglecting taste, touch, and smell. I've analyzed the fantasy books I've edited this year and found that, on average, 55% of descriptions involve sight, 23% involve sound, 17% use touch, 4% use taste, and only 3% use smell. Why is this a problem? There's a scientific reason why neglecting these other senses can ruin reader immersion in your fantasy story.

Research from a 2016 neuroscience paper shows that odors can trigger strong autobiographical memories and associations. Smell-evoked memories tend to be more emotional compared to memories evoked by other senses. This is because the olfactory center of the brain, responsible for processing smell, is located near the hippocampus, which is responsible for memory. Let's try a quick exercise to illustrate this: close your eyes and think of a smell that reminds you of your childhood. Maybe it's the scent of freshly baked cookies resting on the kitchen counter, the waxy, slightly sweet smell of crayons associated with creativity, or the fresh green scent of cut grass evoking warm summer days. Open your eyes—what did you feel? Nostalgia, perhaps? That's the power of sensory detail.

To make your fantasy novel immersive, you need to tap into these underutilized senses. Start by understanding your description tendencies. Tools like ProWritingAid can analyze your book and help you see which senses you're neglecting. For example, when editing my ocean-punk fantasy novel *The Thunder Heist*, I initially relied heavily on sight and sound. Through revision, I consciously added smell- and taste-based descriptions, which reviewers later praised for enhancing the world-building and immersion.

However, don't interpret this advice as needing to distribute all senses equally. It's fine for sight-based descriptions to dominate, as they often mirror how humans experience the world. Instead, focus on identifying sensory gaps and weaving in moments of taste, touch, and smell where appropriate.

2. Not Filtering Descriptions through Narrator or Character's Identity

The second mistake is not filtering descriptions through your narrator or character's identity. Whether you're writing in third-person limited or first-person perspective, your descriptions should

reveal abundant details about the character describing them. Settings should feel like characters themselves, with relationships to the people observing them. For instance, is your character overwhelmed by the noise and smells of a bustling city, or are they a seasoned local who knows the best shortcuts? This relationship shapes the tone and depth of your descriptions, creating a natural connection between your world-building and character development.

3. Using Your First Ideas

The third mistake is using your first ideas. Initial descriptions are often clichés—obvious or borrowed from other stories. The best descriptions approach familiar settings in unique ways, transforming castles, dragons, or battles into experiences readers have never encountered before.

4. Disconnected Descriptions

The fourth mistake is disconnected descriptions. The best fantasy novels feel cohesive, with characters, plot, and setting deeply intertwined. A character's actions are informed by the world they inhabit, and the setting influences their choices, creating a seamless triangle of interaction between plot, character, and world-building. For example, Frodo and Sam's journey in *The Lord of the Rings* is inextricably tied to Middle-earth's landscape.

5. Repetitive Sentence Lengths

The fifth mistake is repetitive sentence lengths. Monotonous sentences kill rhythm and reader engagement. Varying sentence lengths can create a dynamic flow that mirrors the tension or calmness of a scene.

6. Starting Sentences Same Words

The sixth mistake is starting sentences with the same words. Repetition grates on readers, particularly in audio formats. A simple fix is to read your work aloud—it's a powerful way to catch repetitive patterns and improve your writing's cadence.

7. Overly Abstract Descriptions

The seventh and final mistake is overly abstract descriptions. While abstract ideas like emotions and thoughts have their place, they should rest atop a foundation of concrete details that ground readers in your story. For example, describing a red apple with a brown bruise establishes a tangible base before introducing its symbolic or emotional resonance.

By addressing these common mistakes, you'll not only write better descriptions but also hook readers from the very first chapter. A strong opening ensures they're emotionally invested, curious about your world, and eager to finish your book.

Video 2: “6 Worldbuilding Mistakes Every New Writer Makes”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PmOhOXzBTo>

Let's discuss six fantasy world-building mistakes that almost every new writer makes.

1. Detached World-Building

The first mistake is detaching your world-building from your plot, characters, and themes. It's tempting to create the coolest fantasy world possible—adding amazing magic systems, unique plants and animals, fascinating political structures, or exotic geography like floating islands or lava oceans. While these elements can be captivating, they often detract from the story if they're not tied to the narrative.

World-building is a tool for storytelling. Ask yourself: does your world-building serve the story, or does it distract from it? Ideally, your world should feel so integral to your plot, characters, and themes that removing or transplanting it would be impossible. For instance, *The Gutter Prayer* by Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan features the city of Garden, a dark, alchemical, Victorian-inspired setting teeming with gods, monsters, and molten wax creatures called talos-men. The city itself is so entwined with the plot that the story begins with a chapter narrated from the perspective of a building.

To avoid detachment, consider how your world-building expresses the theme of your story. For example, if your theme revolves around deceit and uncovering truths, your world might feature shadowy alleys, unpredictable weather, and layers of hidden political intrigue. Your setting should also challenge your characters, forcing them to grow and evolve.

2. Starting Too Big

Many new writers feel the need to create an entire world from scratch—developing detailed histories, pantheons of gods, intricate maps, and even languages. This approach can be overwhelming and lead to “world-builder's disease,” where the focus on world-building prevents you from actually writing your story.

Instead, start small. Like our own lives, your characters only need to understand the parts of the world relevant to them. Confine your storytelling lens to their immediate surroundings and concerns. Avoid overwhelming readers with info dumps; rather than explaining every detail upfront, reveal aspects of the world organically as they become relevant to the story. Remember: you don't get points for the most elaborate world-building, but for writing the most compelling story.

3. Going Shallow Instead of Deep

Rather than skimming the surface of numerous world-building aspects, focus on one or two areas and explore them in depth. For instance, delve deeply into your magic system and geography, ensuring they feel unique, well-developed, and integral to your narrative.

When readers see that you've meticulously thought through one element, they'll assume you've done the same for others, even if you only mention them briefly. This approach builds credibility and immerses readers, much like a theme park's immersive design convinces visitors they've stepped into another world.

4. Ignoring Consequences

Every change you make to a world's rules has consequences. Failing to explore these can strain believability. For example, in one of my unpublished books, *Masks of Steel*, civilization exists atop rocky spires rising from a mist-filled sea. Fighter pilots engage in aerial dogfights, but I neglected to address where these cities sourced building materials or grew food. These omissions weakened the story's plausibility.

Whenever you introduce fantastical elements, consider their cascading effects on society, ecology, and logistics. For instance, if everyone in your world is a warrior, who tends the farms? Ask friends to critique your world-building and poke holes in your logic. While some elements can follow the "rule of cool," your world will feel more cohesive if its consequences are thoughtfully explored.

5. Anachronistic Dialogue

Anachronistic dialogue—language or slang that feels out of place—can jolt readers out of a story. For instance, phrases like "I gotta go" might clash with a medieval-inspired setting. While you don't need to mimic Shakespearean English, ensure your dialogue aligns with the tone and era of your world.

Be mindful of everyday concepts, like minutes or hours, that might not fit your setting. Time as we understand it became significant during industrialization, so a pre-industrial society might measure time differently, perhaps by the sun or seasons.

6. Failing to Find Something New

The final mistake is a lack of originality. Strive to create a one-of-a-kind book that advances the fantasy genre. Look to your unique interests and passions for inspiration. For example, if you're fascinated by fungi, consider how their ecosystems might influence your world's magic or societies.

In my current book, *Kingdom and Dragons*, my love of architecture inspired a floating mountain city with crystal doorways and magic-infused interiors. By infusing your personal passions into your work, you can create worlds that feel fresh and uniquely yours.

Video 3: “The Secret Formula to Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98pNh3LtV8c>

Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time. But in 1916, she wasn't even the most promising writer in her family. Her older sister, Madge, had already written several short stories, while Agatha hadn't published any. So when Agatha expressed her desire to write a mystery novel, Madge scoffed, betting that Agatha couldn't create a compelling mystery—certainly not one she couldn't solve.

Today, the novel that came from that bet stands alongside nearly 100 other mysteries penned by Christie, each one a cleverly constructed puzzle of clues, misdirection, and human drama. Let's investigate how she crafted these perfect crimes.

Setting

Christie designed her stories with great care, starting with the setting. From a remote island to a snow-stalled train car, she favored locations isolated from society. This restriction of scope limited possible suspects and heightened tension by forcing characters to remain in close proximity—even with a killer among them.

To intensify the drama, Christie often made her characters strangers, unsure of who they could trust. While her settings were eerie and extraordinary, her characters were deliberately the opposite.

Casting

One of the biggest criticisms of Christie's novels is that they feature two-dimensional characters. However, Christie simplified her characters for a purpose: predictability. By reducing individuals to a handful of traits, she provided readers with clear suspects—until she subverted their expectations.

Christie also exploited audience assumptions, but this occasionally relied on harmful stereotypes, caricaturing occupations and ethnic groups for comic effect. These elements reflect the prejudices of her time and are not worth emulating. Modern mystery writers have found more thoughtful ways to deploy misdirection and typecasting without perpetuating bias.

Even with these flaws, Christie strove to make her characters feel authentic. She closely observed people around her, constantly jotting down details from overheard conversations. Rearranging these observations, she pieced together her mysteries, often switching the murderer's identity mid-process. This kept readers disoriented and engaged, but never so confused as to alienate them.

Clues

Christie's balance between clarity and complexity was key. She kept her language simple, using short sentences and snappy dialogue to ensure readers could follow along. This clarity was essential because her mysteries depended on carefully laid trails of clues.

A good Christie clue is memorable yet often misunderstood. For example, when a character complains, "Everything tastes foul today," just before dying, readers might fixate on who poisoned his drink. However, the real clue is that everything tasted foul—indicating the poison had been administered long before.

Christie also loved misdirection. A clue pointing to one suspect might be revealed as part of a framing effort. Sometimes, the misdirection was structural, as in cases where the narrator describing the crime turns out to be the killer.

The Detective

Outside of clues and crimes, one essential ingredient in Christie's formula was the detective. Her most enduring sleuths, Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple, are unconventional heroes. Poirot, a petit Belgian refugee, and Marple, an elderly amateur detective, used their outsider status to disarm suspects and slip past social barriers.

The Legacy

As you might have guessed, Agatha won her sister's bet. Her eccentric detectives, clever clues, and simplified suspects have become a blueprint that has stumped countless readers. Now that you've uncovered her strategies, the only mystery left is what stories you can craft using these timeless techniques.

Video 4: “The Art of the Murder Mystery Twist”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwxFM0oHhfA>

If you're thinking about writing a murder mystery, start with this simple formula: $A + B = C$. A is one person, B is another person, and C is the reason A murders B. This formula is your foundation—a compelling motive that is original, interesting, and surprising enough to intrigue your audience. From there, you can build outwards: who are A and B? What are their worlds, how did they meet, and who knows them? This process is like a blossoming flower, with each layer adding complexity and depth to your story.

On Twists and Surprises

To write an effective twist, it's essential to understand what a twist is: the reversal of expectations. A great twist leads the audience to believe one thing, only to reveal that the reality is entirely different. For example, in the 1968 film *Planet of the Apes*, Charlton Heston believes he has crash-landed on a foreign planet controlled by apes. The climactic reveal of the broken Statue of Liberty shows he has been on Earth all along, flipping the narrative and his assumptions on their heads.

The key to a great twist is that it feels both surprising and inevitable. The clues must be present throughout the story, even if readers fail to piece them together. A twist should emerge naturally from the plot rather than being forced or overly clever for its own sake. While critics and readers may love twists, they are only one element of a great story. The focus should always be on crafting a compelling narrative as a whole.

Influences and Fair Play

Agatha Christie serves as a masterful influence in this regard. Her endings often leave readers bamboozled, thinking, “I never saw that coming,” while simultaneously realizing that all the clues were in plain sight. This balance of surprise and fairness is crucial. As a writer, your responsibility is to play fair with readers, offering them the chance to guess while still delivering a satisfying revelation.

When crafting twists, think about your characters and their roles. If, for instance, you want the butler to be the murderer, consider subverting expectations. Perhaps the butler and the master have swapped places, turning the statement “the butler did it” into a surprising revelation.

Planning and Writing Process

For many writers, including myself, planning is an integral part of the process. Take my novel *Magpie Murders* as an example—it took ten years to plan and two years to write. I create extensive notes, sketch character details, and map out the structure before I begin. By the time I sit down to write, I have a clear direction, though there's still room for surprises. If I can surprise myself, I can surprise my readers.

That said, every writer is different. Don Winslow, for example, doesn't plan or structure his work, preferring to discover the story as he writes. The lesson here is that there are no rules—find what works best for you.

Living Inside the Book

Writing isn't about routine or strict rules; it's about immersion. When I write, I live inside the book. I see what my characters see, feel what they feel, and experience the world as they do. This approach helps me write authentically and keeps me connected to the story.

During the writing process, don't overthink or worry about external opinions. Focus on enjoying the act of writing. Your characters' voices should guide you—listen to them as if you're a court stenographer, capturing their dialogue as it unfolds.

On the Unexpected

The unexpected is the essence of a great story. Whether it's a twist that changes the narrative or a completely original concept, surprise and originality are what make a book stand out. To create something unique, draw from your passions and interests. For example, I've infused my fascination with architecture and other hobbies into my writing, crafting settings and ideas that feel distinctly mine.

Final Advice

Start with an original idea and believe in it fully. Writing a murder mystery might take one or two years of your life, so commit to the journey. Don't overthink or over-discuss it—just sit down and write. The path to a great story begins with action, and the twists, surprises, and unforgettable moments will follow.

Video 5: “How to Write Your First Mystery Book”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQYLGdZBRPg>

1. Lack of Clues

A mystery without well-placed clues can feel unsatisfying. Stories where things fall into place due to sloppy mistakes, random confessions, or literal smoking guns lack the intellectual engagement readers expect. Mystery fans want to solve the puzzle alongside the characters, particularly the investigator. Even if they can't piece everything together, they crave the challenge of trying. Cleverly hidden clues give readers a reason to revisit your book, rewarding them with new discoveries on subsequent readings.

2. Lack of Motivation

Your protagonist needs a clear motivation beyond simply solving the crime. A detective or investigator should be driven by a personal or emotional reason—something that adds depth to their pursuit. This could be restoring a friend's credibility, answering a broader societal question, or even achieving a quirky personal goal like completing a Pez dispenser collection.

The detective doesn't have to be the protagonist, but if they are, their motivation should be compelling enough to make readers emotionally invested in their journey.

3. No Twists

A mystery can become dull if it coasts from the initial crime setup to the eventual solution without surprises. Twists are essential to maintaining momentum. They don't have to be outlandish—like revealing the murderer is an alien—but they should escalate the stakes or complicate the case.

Perhaps solving the crime has unexpected societal implications, or the case turns out to be part of a larger series of murders. Twists keep the story dynamic and ensure that the middle doesn't stagnate. Typically, a well-placed twist or escalation about halfway through the narrative keeps readers hooked.

4. Too Convenient an Ending

Even a meticulously crafted mystery can falter with a lackluster resolution. The solution isn't just about revealing the truth—it's a dramatic moment. Avoid having the detective casually explain the crime with little fanfare.

Instead, create suspenseful stakes. Maybe the criminal makes a last-ditch effort to escape or turns the tables on the protagonist. While the trope of gathering everyone in a room for the big reveal is somewhat tired, it's popular for a reason: it delivers drama. You don't need to replicate this exact scenario but find ways to build tension while delivering the solution to the mystery.

5. Sloppy Research Mistakes

Inaccuracies can ruin a reader's immersion. If you include technical details—like how a gun operates or how a body decomposes—ensure your facts are correct. A clue that hinges on an impossible scenario will break the reader's suspension of disbelief.

Take the time to research or consult experts in relevant fields. While Googling phrases like “how long does it take a body to decompose in a hot tub” might raise eyebrows, solid research elevates your story's credibility and keeps readers engaged.

Conclusion

Writing a mystery is challenging but incredibly rewarding. If you'd like more guidance, consider joining the AutoCrit community. With tools like a fully functional writer's desk, an inspiration studio for plotting, and a mystery writing course, AutoCrit provides resources to help you plan and craft compelling mystery stories. Connect with other mystery authors and refine your craft in a supportive online environment!

Video 6: “Writing a Murder Mystery Inspired by Agatha Christie”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Wq1Ds3gQ80>

Key Takeaways: Writing a Murder Mystery Inspired by Agatha Christie and ‘Glass Onion’

Foundation: The Crime

1. The Core Crime

- A mystery begins with a compelling crime.
- Two ways to make a crime interesting:
 - Impossible Crime: No one seems capable of committing it (e.g., *“And Then There Were None”*).
 - Everyone’s a Suspect: The crime is so plausible it could be anyone (e.g., *turning off the lights when a weapon is available*).
- This distinction sets the tone for your mystery, creating intrigue and urgency.

The Three Rules of Mystery Writing

Rule #1: Withhold Information

- Selective Detail:
 - Include seemingly innocuous details that reveal hidden truths when revisited.
 - *Example:* In *And Then There Were None*, Mr. Justice Wargrave’s introductory description subtly hints at his personality and role.
 - *Glass Onion:* Helen smashing Miles’ box appears efficient but later reveals her lack of knowledge about the puzzle mechanism.
- Gaslighting & Misdirection:
 - Present details to guide the audience’s assumptions.
 - *Example:* Duke’s death is framed as an accident, with Miles misleading everyone about the glass-switching incident.
 - Visual distractions, like Birdie’s spinning dress, can further mislead.
- Fair Play:
 - The solution must be visible to the audience, even if they don’t piece it together initially.
 - Avoid twists that introduce entirely new, un-foreshadowed elements (e.g., *Pretty Little Liars’ evil twin trope*).

Rule #2: Chekhov’s Gun

- Every element introduced must have a purpose—no fluff.
 - *Chekhov’s Principle:* “If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired.”
- *Examples:*

- In *Glass Onion*, Duke's speargun, initially a joke, plays a pivotal role later.
- Pineapple allergy clues in dialogue foreshadow Duke's poisoning.
- Tip for Writers: Challenge yourself by cutting 10% of your story to identify unnecessary elements.

Rule #3: The Red Herring

- Purpose: Mislead or distract the audience, leading them toward false conclusions.
- *Examples*:
 - In *And Then There Were None*, the nursery rhyme explicitly references a “red herring,” signaling misdirection within the story.
 - Daryl in *Glass Onion* distracts viewers by appearing to be a mysterious, pivotal character but serves only comedic relief.
- Effective red herrings play on audience expectations while subtly pointing back to the true narrative.

Additional Writing Tips

1. Twists as Strategic Escalations
 - Reveal twists at appropriate intervals (midpoint, climax) rather than reserving everything for the end.
 - *Examples*: Helen's twin reveal in *Glass Onion* comes at the midpoint, keeping the final twist impactful.
2. Colorful Casts
 - Populate your mystery with distinct characters.
 - Each character should feel integral, even if they're a red herring or comedic relief.
3. Efficiency in Storytelling
 - Ensure every detail serves either the plot or character development, minimizing filler content.
 - Use motifs (e.g., glass sculptures) as recurring symbols that reinforce narrative depth and theme.

Conclusion: The Three Core Rules Recap

1. Withhold Information: Use selective detail to misdirect without frustrating your audience.
2. Chekhov's Gun: Every element must matter—remove what doesn't serve the story.
3. Red Herrings: Distract and mislead, but tie everything back to the main narrative.

Mystery writing is a delicate balance between guiding and deceiving your audience. Following these rules ensures a satisfying, layered story that invites readers to engage actively.

As Rian Johnson describes: “A Glass Onion has layers, but layers you can see through.”

Final Recommendation

- Read *“And Then There Were None”*: A masterclass in concise, layered mystery storytelling that inspired generations of writers, including Johnson.

Video 7: “5 Clue Types – And How to Easily Plan Them!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNR0g60m0EI>

Key Insights: Planning Clues for Your Mystery

Five Types of Clues

1. Tangible Clues

- **Definition:** Physical objects or substances that tie a suspect to a location, person, or specific time.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Connection to Location:** A matchbook from a bar, mosquito bites from a swamp.
 - **Connection Between People:** Lipstick on a collar.
 - **Two-Part Clues:** Discovering blood under a victim’s nails (Part 1) and scratches on a suspect’s skin (Part 2).
 - **Purpose:** Tangible clues provide direct evidence, often anchoring timelines or relationships.
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2. Emotional Clues

- **Definition:** Behavioral ticks or emotional responses revealing a suspect’s thoughts, knowledge, or relationships.
 - **Examples:**
 - A butler smirking at a question, later revealed to indicate knowledge of the host’s identity.
 - A character’s anger flaring when another shares sensitive information.
 - Sudden behavior changes, like a drug addict deciding to quit after blacking out during the crime.
 - **Purpose:** Emotional clues reveal internal conflicts and motives, making characters more dynamic.
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3. Revealing Knowledge

- **Definition:** When a suspect knows something they shouldn’t, exposing connections or guilt.
- **Examples:**
 - A suspect mentioning details about a murder weapon that weren’t made public.

- Knowledge of a culturally specific detail, like an English character using American colloquialisms.
 - *Clue*: Mrs. Peacock knowing about a rare dish (monkey brain soup), indicating familiarity with the cook.
 - **Purpose**: Revealing knowledge ties characters to specific events, locations, or people, often through accidental slips.
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4. Testimony

- **Definition**: Statements from characters that provide clues, intentionally or accidentally.
 - **Examples**:
 - A suspect mentioning a car seen at a crime scene (tangible clue).
 - A witness describing relationships or tensions in the victim's life.
 - **Consideration**: Testimonies can be truthful or deceptive, adding complexity to the sleuth's investigation.
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5. Artifacts

- **Definition**: Items or intangible pieces of information tied to the past that reveal motives or backstory.
 - **Examples**:
 - Physical: Old letters, bank ledgers, artworks.
 - Intangible: Local folk legends or historical records.
 - **Uses**:
 - Artifacts may require the sleuth to hunt for them (*e.g., tracking down a victim's destroyed painting*).
 - They often need interpretation to uncover their hidden meaning (*e.g., decoding a distorted legend*).
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Bonus: Absent Clues

- **Definition**: The absence of an expected element becomes the clue itself.
- **Examples**:
 - *Sherlock Holmes*: A dog that didn't bark indicates the intruder was familiar to it.
 - *People v. O.J. Simpson*: Simpson's lack of disbelief when informed of his ex-wife's death is suspicious.

- A suspect unable to recall a unique detail of an alibi (e.g., a polka-themed sermon).
 - **Purpose:** Absent clues often challenge assumptions, leading to critical deductions.
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Clue Planning with a Spreadsheet

Clue Spreadsheet Setup

- **Columns:**
 - **Clue:** The item, behavior, or detail.
 - **Information Contributed:** What the clue reveals (e.g., relationships, motives, alibis).
- **Process:**
 - Start with either a clue idea or the information needed, filling in the opposite column later.
 - Use clues to connect characters, events, or details creatively.

Examples:

- *Clue:* Victim's song lyrics.
 - *Info:* Song reveals a secret relationship, prompting the murder.
 - *Clue:* Dog's friendliness toward a suspect.
 - *Info:* Suspect has a pre-existing relationship with the dog's owner.
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How Many Clues Does a Mystery Need?

- **Essentials:**
 - At least one clue revealing the killer's motive.
 - One clue tying the killer to the crime scene or victim.
 - **Optional Additions:**
 - Clues exposing fake alibis or linking accomplices.
 - Subplot-related clues for fake suspects.
 - **Advice:** Focus on quality, not quantity—a few strong clues suffice.
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Drafting the Last Scene First

- Write a rough version of the sleuth's summation (e.g., the drawing-room scene).
- Use this to:

- Identify weak spots or missing connections in your story.
 - Spot areas where additional clues are needed.
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Final Tip: Stay Flexible

- Planning clues doesn't mean being rigid. Leave space for organic integration of clues while writing.
 - Trust your creativity to connect the dots naturally as the story unfolds.
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Conclusion

Planning clues requires balancing creativity with strategy. By understanding the different types of clues and maintaining a clear structure, you can craft a compelling and layered mystery that keeps readers engaged until the very last page.

Video 8: “How to Make Your Writing Suspenseful”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKruwAfZWk>

Key Insights: Making Your Writing Suspenseful

What is Suspense?

- Suspense is the art of keeping the audience in anticipation by setting up questions and delaying their answers.
 - It hinges on the audience’s curiosity and emotional investment in discovering the outcome.
 - Example questions:
 - *What’s inside the haunted mansion?*
 - *Will the hero save the day?*
 - *What secret torments the protagonist?*
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Techniques for Building Suspense

1. Limit the Point of View

- **Why:** Creates shared uncertainty between the audience and the characters.
- **How:**
 - Use first-person or limited third-person narration.
 - Characters discover information gradually, allowing the audience to experience revelations alongside them.
 - Example: *Dracula* unfolds through letters and diary entries, revealing fragmented knowledge and future fears.

2. Choose the Right Setting and Imagery

- **Why:** Atmosphere sets the stage for suspense.
- **How:**
 - Use locations that suggest secrets (e.g., old mansions, castles with hidden passageways).
 - Employ limiting conditions: nighttime, fog, or storms to obscure visibility and restrict movement.
 - Example: *Rebecca* uses blood-red flowers to imbue an ordinary scene with unease.

3. Play with Style and Form

- **Why:** How events are conveyed can heighten emotional tension.
- **How:**
 - Use fragmented, short sentences for speed and pauses to create unease (e.g., *Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe).
 - Experiment with pacing and structure to reflect the mental states of characters.
 - Example: Alfred Hitchcock uses extended silences and visual motifs like staircases to evoke discomfort.

4. Use Dramatic Irony

- **Why:** Sharing secrets with the audience that characters don't know creates anticipation.
- **How:**
 - Reveal key information to the audience while withholding it from characters.
 - Shift suspense to *when* and *how* the characters will uncover the truth.
 - Example: In *Oedipus Rex*, the audience knows Oedipus has killed his father and married his mother, but the suspense lies in his journey to the revelation.

5. Utilize Cliffhangers

- **Why:** Forces the audience to imagine possibilities and builds suspense for what comes next.
- **How:**
 - End chapters, episodes, or seasons abruptly during critical moments (e.g., before a reveal or in a perilous situation).
 - Example: A story cutting off as the protagonist faces danger with only a slim chance of hope.
- **Caution:** Avoid overuse, as it can feel manipulative or lose impact.

Suspense Across Genres

- While suspense is often associated with horror and mystery, it's effective in any genre.
 - Examples:
 - *Will the couple get together?* in romance.
 - *Will the hero save the day?* in action or fantasy.
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The Payoff of Suspense

- The audience craves resolution.

- Effective suspense delivers emotional release by resolving questions while keeping the audience invested in the next challenge.

By employing these techniques, you can masterfully craft suspense that keeps readers on the edge of their seats, regardless of genre.

Video 9: “Write a Bestselling Murder Mystery”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OIBCckLSow>

Key Insights: Writing a Gripping Murder Mystery

Understanding the Genre

- Murder mysteries engage readers by keeping them guessing until the very end.
 - Examples of successful mysteries:
 - *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie (*cozy mystery*).
 - *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (*hard-boiled mystery*).
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Sub-Genres of Mystery

1. Cozy or Soft-Boiled Mysteries:

- Features likable, middle or upper-class detectives who integrate well into their communities.
- Example: Agatha Christie’s works.

2. Hard-Boiled Mysteries:

- Focus on outcast, working-class protagonists.
 - Example: *The Girl on the Train*.
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Tips for Crafting a Murder Mystery

1. Start at the End

- **Why:** Mysteries rely on carefully constructed plots, so planning is essential.
 - **How:**
 - Know your ending before writing to avoid plot holes.
 - Tools like Miller Note or a visual plot timeline can help.
 - **Example:** Begin with a scene like “a man’s body washes up on a beach with no ID” and work backward to develop the story.
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2. Add Twists and Misdirection

- **Why:** Twists keep readers engaged and surprised.
 - **How:**
 - Use techniques like unreliable narrators, split perspectives, or character reveals.
 - Example: *The Sixth Sense* and *Gone Girl* showcase major twists that redefine the narrative.
 - **Red Herrings:**
 - Introduce misleading clues or “false flags” to distract readers.
 - Example: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* misleads readers into suspecting the butler.
 - **Caution:** Ensure red herrings don’t overshadow the main plot or lack a satisfying payoff.
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3. Begin with a Hook

- **Why:** Immediate conflict grabs readers’ attention.
 - **How:**
 - Start with the murder or an event that sets the tone for the story.
 - Example: A gripping opening described as “page-turning” often revolves around the murder itself.
 - **Tip:** Open with tension or action to compel readers to keep going.
-

4. Develop a Unique Detective

- **Why:** A compelling protagonist distinguishes your mystery.
 - **How:**
 - Classic detectives often have traits like isolation or unconventional methods (e.g., *Sherlock Holmes*).
 - Modern detectives can break stereotypes (e.g., *misunderstood women in works by Sally Hepworth*).
 - **Considerations:**
 - What makes your protagonist uniquely suited to solve the mystery?
 - How do they differ from others who have failed?
-

Key Takeaways

- **Plan meticulously** to avoid plot holes and ensure all elements tie together.
- **Use twists and red herrings** strategically to mislead readers without frustrating them.
- **Hook readers early** with a strong opening and maintain momentum throughout.
- **Craft a standout detective** who brings a fresh perspective to solving the crime.

By blending careful plotting, clever twists, and an engaging protagonist, your murder mystery can captivate readers and keep them guessing until the final page.

Video 10: “A Better Way to Write Mystery Stories”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eec0iooEyLo>

Key Insights: The Discovery Arc vs. Mystery in Writing

Two Distinct Story Types

1. Discovery Arc

- Focuses on the **character’s journey to uncover the truth**.
- The story revolves around what the character doesn’t know and their process of discovery.
- The audience’s knowledge can vary:
 - **Example 1:** The audience knows what the character will discover (*The Invention of Lying*).
 - **Example 2:** The audience discovers alongside the character (*Detective Stories*).

2. Mystery

- A broader term that can describe **either the audience or the character (or both)** being unaware of the truth.
 - Mystery exists when there’s something unknown that will later be revealed.
-

Complex Discovery Arcs

- Involve **multiple truths** and layers of exploration.
 - Characters uncover several smaller pieces of the puzzle before arriving at the **final discovery**.
 - **Analogy:** Like climbing a building, where each floor reveals new information leading to the top (final truth).
-

Examples of Discovery Arcs

1. Character Knows, Audience Doesn’t

- The character is narrating their life. They already know the events, but the audience uncovers the story over time.

- Example: Autobiographical narratives.
 - 2. **Audience Knows, Character Doesn't**
 - The audience understands the concept or outcome, but the character must discover it.
 - Example: *The Invention of Lying* (audience knows lying exists, character doesn't).
 - 3. **Neither Knows**
 - Both the audience and the character are in the dark and uncover the truth together.
 - Example: Detective stories like *Sherlock Holmes*.
-

Clarifying the Terms

- **Discovery Arc:** Refers specifically to the character's journey of uncovering one or more truths.
 - **Mystery:** Describes the unknowns in the story, whether they're unknown to the character, the audience, or both.
-

Key Takeaways

- **Discovery Arc:** Focus on the character's experience of finding the truth.
 - **Mystery:** Encompasses both character and audience perspectives, addressing what is unknown and to whom.
 - Writers should decide early whether their story will rely on discovery arcs, mysteries, or both.
 - The distinction between these terms provides clarity in planning and crafting stories that engage audiences effectively.
-

Final Thought

The shift from using “mystery story arc” to “discovery arc” better defines the character's role in uncovering truths, while “mystery” becomes a versatile term for describing what's unknown to whom. How you use these terms depends on the story you want to tell—and the surprises you wish to deliver.

Video 11: “How To Plot Mystery Clues”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LMAILAWjBQ>

How to Plot a Mystery: The Puzzle Piece Method

Overview: The Three Stages of Plotting a Mystery

Mystery stories are like assembling a puzzle, where the pieces represent the clues and the final picture is the solved mystery. The process is divided into **three stages**:

Stage 1: Suggesting the Puzzle

The first step is to introduce the audience and character to the mystery.

Key Question: How does the character find the first clue?

- The **discovery** should feel **spontaneous and unexpected**, creating a sense of magic and curiosity.
 - Example: A character spills a drink and, while cleaning up, finds a hidden note or key.
- The clue reveals the existence of a puzzle that needs solving, setting the stage for the mystery.

Tips for Stage 1

- The character should stumble upon the clue accidentally, while engaged in an unrelated activity.
 - This discovery ignites the desire to uncover the full puzzle.
-

Stage 2: Searching for Clues

The character begins actively seeking out other puzzle pieces (clues) to build a clearer picture of the mystery.

The Puzzle Box

- The **"puzzle box"** represents the **obvious place or person** where the character expects to find answers.
 - Example: A library, a suspect's home, or a mentor figure.
- The box will appear promising but turn out to be **empty or unhelpful**, forcing the character to expand their search.

Three Key Questions for Stage 2

1. How does the character stumble across the first piece?

2. What is the puzzle box in your story?
3. Where does the character search for the remaining clues?

The Process

- As the character finds clues, they form **theories** about the mystery's resolution.
- **Early Clues:** Easy to find, leading to initial but incorrect conclusions.
- **Later Clues:** Harder to find, more significant to the final resolution.
- **Final Clue:** The most elusive and important, often requiring help to locate.

Shifting Focus

- Toward the end, the character typically **seeks help** from a person or place that can point them toward the final piece.
 - This adds tension and stakes to the story, as finding this resource becomes another challenge.
-

Stage 3: Finding the Final Clue

This stage involves solving the mystery and leads to the **climax** of the story.

Two Ways to Reveal a Mystery

1. Anticipated Reveal

- The final clue's location is known, but getting to it is a challenging, suspenseful journey.
- Readers feel tension from the uncertainty of whether the character will succeed.
- The reveal offers a **moment of clarity**: "This is exactly what we needed!"

2. Plot Twist

- The character and audience **think they have solved the mystery** with the second-to-last clue.
- The actual final clue is found **by mistake**, revealing the true solution and flipping the audience's expectations.
- The twist changes the entire picture: "This changes everything!"
- The previous clue is reframed as **misleading evidence**, creating a powerful surprise.

Tips for a Plot Twist

- Treat the second-to-last clue as if it's the final one, leaving no room for suspicion of an additional discovery.
 - The actual final piece must alter the entire understanding of the mystery.
-

Conclusion: The Puzzle Piece Framework

1. **Stage 1:** Introduce the mystery through an unexpected, spontaneous discovery.
2. **Stage 2:** Build suspense as the character searches for clues, forming and testing theories.
3. **Stage 3:** Deliver the climax with either an anticipated reveal or a plot twist.

This approach ensures your mystery story is both engaging and satisfying, keeping the audience invested until the very end.

Video 12: “Red Herrings Tips & Tricks”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL5bFdEjSfg>

Understanding Red Herrings: Crafting Suspense and Misdirection

What Are Red Herrings?

A **red herring** is a device used in mystery, thriller, and suspense stories to deliberately mislead or distract characters and readers from the true solution of the mystery. It's a sleight of hand, designed to:

- Add complexity and depth to the story.
- Create a “magic trick” moment when the real solution is revealed.
- Keep readers guessing and engaged.

Readers **expect** red herrings in mystery genres, so including at least one major, plausible red herring is essential.

Crafting a Good Red Herring

A successful red herring must be:

1. **Plausible:** The false solution should be logically sound and believable until it's disproven.
 2. **Well-Built:** Significant effort should go into creating the red herring so that readers can follow and invest in it.
 3. **False but Grounded:** It should have a logical reason for being ruled out once the real solution is uncovered.
-

How Many Red Herrings?

- **Rule of Threes:** Aim for at least three red herrings to create sufficient complexity.
 - Vary their depth:
 - Some red herrings may be eliminated early.
 - Others can remain in play longer to keep readers intrigued.
 - Avoid overcrowding the narrative with too many red herrings, as this can confuse readers and dilute the main plot.
-

The Purpose of Red Herrings

- **Engagement:** Readers enjoy guessing the mystery and trying to outsmart the narrative.
 - **Distraction:** Direct attention away from the true solution, creating a moment of surprise when the truth is revealed.
 - **Challenge:** Provide readers with clues to analyze and ponder, enhancing their reading experience.
-

How to Build Red Herrings

1. Give Characters Secrets

- Create characters with significant secrets unrelated to the primary mystery.
- These secrets make them act suspiciously, drawing attention to them as suspects.
 - Example: A character sneaking around might be hiding evidence of being blackmailed, unrelated to the murder.

2. Parallel Motives

- Link the red herring's behavior to a **parallel motive** that could also tie into the real mystery.
 - Example: A character's evasive actions could be interpreted as hiding evidence of a crime, but they're actually covering up an unrelated scandal.

3. Layer Suspicion

- Allow the investigator and readers to make assumptions about suspicious behaviors that later turn out to be unrelated.
 - Tie their actions to small, logical motives, such as:
 - Fear of becoming a suspect.
 - Concealing personal vulnerabilities.
-

The Benefits of Multiple Red Herrings

- Adds complexity to the **plot**.
 - Creates depth in the **cast of characters**, making the story richer and more dynamic.
 - Keeps readers guessing and enhances the **game-like experience** of solving the mystery.
-

Examples of Effective Red Herrings

1. Suspicious Characters:

- A character sneaking around turns out to be hiding an affair rather than evidence of a crime.

2. Misleading Evidence:

- An object found at the crime scene belongs to someone innocent but with a suspicious backstory.

3. Behavioral Red Herrings:

- A character's nervousness is due to unrelated guilt, such as fraud or blackmail, rather than involvement in the murder.

Final Thoughts

Red herrings are the playful distractions that make mysteries, thrillers, and suspense stories thrilling. They challenge readers to piece together the truth while sowing seeds of doubt and intrigue. Mastering the use of red herrings ensures your story is engaging, dynamic, and full of surprises.

Video 13: “How to Write Mystery (Revealing Clues)”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqU3cFSGPNc>

How to Reveal a Mystery or Unknown Truth in a Story

Core Principle: The Controlled Release of Information

- A mystery or truth is best revealed through **gradual hints and clues**, allowing the audience to **piece it together themselves**.
 - The audience becomes engaged when they feel like they’re actively uncovering the truth, rather than being handed the solution.
-

Defining the Mystery or Truth

- The "mystery" can be:
 - **An event**: Something that happened in the past, is happening now, or will happen in the future.
 - **A fact**: A specific truth about a person, place, or situation.
 - Think of the mystery as a **puzzle**, with the full picture broken into **tiny scattered pieces**. These pieces will be revealed throughout the story.
-

Step 1: Reveal Clues (The Puzzle Pieces)

1. **Subtle Introduction of Clues**:
 - Introduce small, seemingly irrelevant details (the puzzle pieces).
 - Show these details without drawing attention to their importance.
 - Example: A character notices a peculiar object but doesn’t investigate further.
 2. **No Explicit Explanations**:
 - Do not tell the audience what the clues mean.
 - Let them notice the clues and start wondering if they connect.
 3. **Build Curiosity**:
 - As more clues are shown, the audience starts to notice patterns.
 - They begin asking: “Do these details connect somehow? What is the bigger picture?”
-

Step 2: Connect the Dots

1. Save Big Clues for Later:

- Reserve the most revealing and significant puzzle pieces for the climax or resolution.
- These pieces should make the connections between the earlier scattered clues.

2. Show Bigger Clues Gradually:

- As the story progresses, introduce larger, more significant puzzle pieces.
- These new clues should confirm or reshape the audience's developing theories.

3. The Audience Joins the Dots:

- By this stage, the audience has most of the pieces and starts actively connecting them.
 - They see the **emerging bigger picture**, making the final reveal satisfying.
-

Summary: Gradual Revelation

- **Step 1:** Scatter small, seemingly irrelevant clues early in the story.
 - **Step 2:** Gradually reveal more significant clues, allowing the audience to connect the dots.
 - **Climactic Reveal:** Deliver the final pieces of the puzzle, allowing the audience to fully understand the mystery.
-

This method keeps the audience engaged, intrigued, and invested, as they feel they're part of solving the mystery. Instead of telling them the answer, you've guided them on a journey of discovery.

Video 14: “How to Write (game-changer) Clues”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUjqmVcRavE>

How to Use Opaque, Translucent, and Transparent Clues in Mystery Writing

1. Opaque, Translucent, and Transparent Clues

- **Opaque Clues:**
 - **Clearly seen and understood** by the reader.
 - These clues provide **explicit information** necessary to understand the case.
 - Example: "A shot was heard at 6:57 PM, the victim was killed with a .45 caliber weapon, and the body was found in the study."
 - **Transparent Clues:**
 - **Hidden in plain sight**, the reader doesn't recognize them as clues until the sleuth explains their significance.
 - Example: The villain's emerald earrings hint she was born in May and is the victim's abandoned daughter—but the reader doesn't connect these dots until the reveal.
 - **Translucent Clues:**
 - The **sweet spot** where the reader knows there's a clue but doesn't understand its meaning.
 - Encourages the audience to **puzzle alongside the sleuth**.
 - Example: A victim's dying message appears garbled or incomplete, requiring further interpretation.
-

2. Using Translucent Clues for Maximum Effect

- **Why They're the Best:**
 - They engage the reader by balancing **visibility** and **mystery**.
 - They create a collaborative experience, as readers attempt to solve the mystery themselves.
-

3. Examples of Translucent Clues

- **Episode from *Frasier* (“Retirement is Murder”):**
 - **Clue:** A victim scratched the word "HELP" into the dirt.
 - **Solution:** The message was incomplete. The victim was trying to write "SHELBY," the name of the killer, but died before finishing.
 - **Episode from *Monk* (“Mr. Monk Goes to a Ballgame”):**
 - **Clue:** The victim’s last words were "Girls can’t eat 15 pizzas."
 - **Solution:** This was a mnemonic device for a license plate: GCE15P.
 - **Novel Example from *The Seventh Sinner* by Elizabeth Peters:**
 - **Clue:** The victim wrote "7" before dying.
 - **Layers of Distortion:**
 1. The "7" was written in Roman numerals (VII), but the witness misreported it.
 2. The name referred to a suspect’s real name (Virginia), not the nickname most characters knew.
 3. The victim named the wrong person (mistaken identity).
 4. The killer disguised themselves to impersonate another suspect.
-

4. Strategies for Effective Translucent Clues

- **Distort the Clue:**
 - Introduce **misinterpretations, hidden meanings, or coded messages** to complicate the clue.
 - Example: A partial name, an anagram, or an obscure reference.
- **Require a Decoder:**
 - The sleuth (and reader) needs a **key** or breakthrough to unlock the meaning of the clue.
 - Example: A notebook explaining the victim’s habit of using mnemonics reveals the true meaning of a cryptic statement.
- **Introduce Multiple Layers:**
 - Stack distortions or meanings on top of each other for added complexity.
 - Example: A misheard phrase leads to a misunderstood reference, which eventually uncovers a hidden identity.

5. Tips for Crafting Clues

- **Balance Your Clue Types:**
 - Use a mix of opaque, translucent, and transparent clues to keep the mystery dynamic.
- **Build Suspense:**
 - Gradually reveal the meaning of translucent clues as the sleuth (and reader) gains new insights.
- **Focus on Presentation:**
 - Introduce clues in a way that intrigues the reader but doesn't reveal too much.
 - Example: A character casually mentions an object, like a pair of earrings, without emphasizing their importance.

Conclusion

Opaque clues provide clarity. Transparent clues deliver surprise. But translucent clues are where the magic happens, as they allow readers to **feel like detectives**, solving the mystery step by step. Use them to craft a story that's engaging, layered, and deeply satisfying.

Video 15: “How to Write Crime Fiction: Story Structure”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtSR_cYxGOQ

Comprehensive Guide to Three-Act Story Structure

Overview

The **Three-Act Structure** is a classic framework for storytelling, dividing the narrative into three distinct parts:

1. **Act 1: Setup** (0-25% of the story)
2. **Act 2: Confrontation** (25-75% of the story)
3. **Act 3: Resolution** (75-100% of the story)

It balances **external conflict** (what the character *wants*) and **internal conflict** (what the character *needs*). Writers can prioritize either conflict depending on the story type:

- **External conflict** prioritized in **genre fiction** (e.g., crime, thriller).
 - **Internal conflict** prioritized in **literary fiction**.
-

Act 1: Setup

Purpose: Establish the protagonist's world and the initial conflicts.

Key Stages:

1. **Status Quo:**
 - Introduce the character's current life and circumstances.
 - The **external conflict** remains dormant.
 - The **internal conflict** introduces the **starting identity**—who the character is before the story's transformative journey.
 2. **Inciting Incident** (10-15% mark):
 - A disruptive event that destabilizes the status quo.
 - Sparks the **external conflict** and offers a glimpse of the protagonist's **desired identity** or future self.
 - Example: A crime occurs, or the character learns life-changing information.
 3. **Decision Point** (25% mark):
 - The protagonist actively chooses to engage in the journey sparked by the inciting incident.
 - Often mirrors the "refusal of the call" stage in the Hero's Journey, followed by acceptance.
 - **Outcome:** Transition to Act 2 with a change of plans and a commitment to action.
-

Act 2: Confrontation

Purpose: The heart of the story where the protagonist pursues goals amidst escalating challenges.

Key Stages:

1. **Making Progress** (25-50% mark):
 - The protagonist works toward external goals but still clings to their starting identity.
 - Introduce **complications** and subplots to enrich the narrative (e.g., romance, alliances, secondary conflicts).
 - **Avoid linear progression:** Add layers and obstacles to deepen engagement.
 2. **Midpoint Twist** (50% mark):
 - A major revelation or event reshapes the story.
 - Often involves a **crisis** or a surprising turn in the external conflict.
 - Example: Betrayal, uncovering a false assumption, or a drastic escalation in stakes.
 3. **Commitment to Change** (50-75% mark):
 - The protagonist begins letting go of their starting identity and commits to transformation.
 - Introduce **higher stakes** in both external and internal conflicts.
 - Fear emerges as the protagonist faces greater obstacles.
 4. **Major Setback** (Climax of Act 2, ~75% mark):
 - A crisis moment where everything appears lost.
 - The protagonist reckons with their **identity** and confronts their fears.
 - Example: A villain's victory, a personal failure, or a loss that threatens both goals and transformation.
-

Act 3: Resolution

Purpose: Deliver the climax, resolve conflicts, and conclude the character's arc.

Key Stages:

1. **Final Push** (75-90% mark):
 - The protagonist embraces their new identity and faces the story's ultimate challenge.
 - The stakes are at their highest, with **everything to lose** in both external and internal realms.
 - Example: A climactic showdown with the antagonist or a decisive action requiring full commitment.
2. **Climax:**
 - The protagonist's transformation enables them to overcome the primary conflict.
 - This moment resolves the external conflict and finalizes the internal journey.
3. **Resolution** (90-100% mark):
 - Tie up loose ends and provide closure.
 - Decide between:
 - **Closed Ending** (genre fiction): Resolves all plot threads neatly.

- **Open Ending** (literary fiction): Leaves lingering questions or moral ambiguity for readers to ponder.
-

Tips for Implementation

1. **Use as a Template:**
 - Plan the beginning, middle, and end before drafting.
 - Revisit the structure during **reverse outlining** to assess and refine your story.
 2. **Focus on Complications:**
 - Add depth and richness by introducing complications and subplots in Act 2.
 - Avoid overly linear progression; aim for surprises and escalating tension.
 3. **Emphasize the “All to Lose” Moment:**
 - Highlight the stakes at the climax for maximum emotional and narrative payoff.
 - Ensure both external and internal conflicts converge meaningfully.
 4. **Adapt to Your Style:**
 - Adjust the framework to suit your story’s needs. Use it as a guide, not a rigid formula.
-

This structure helps ensure a balanced, engaging narrative that resonates with readers, blending compelling external action with meaningful internal transformation.

Video 16: “10 Elements of Murder Mystery Genre”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8ycLo8aXzQ>

10 Essential Elements of a Murder Mystery

Here’s a comprehensive breakdown of the key elements necessary for crafting a compelling murder mystery, inspired by the video:

1. The Murder

- **Why It’s Important:** The murder must stand out and capture the reader's intrigue immediately. It should provoke questions like *why* and *who* right from the start.
 - **Tips:**
 - Make the method unusual or symbolic (e.g., a dagger with a note pinned through the heart).
 - Create an air of shock or mystery around the victim (e.g., a well-loved old lady versus someone with many enemies).
-

2. The Detective

- **Why It’s Important:** The detective is the reader’s lens, leading the investigation and piecing together the mystery. They must be compelling and unique.
 - **Tips:**
 - Give them distinctive quirks or traits (e.g., Sherlock Holmes’ deduction, Miss Marple’s unassuming nature, Columbo’s feigned simplicity).
 - Develop their backstory to add depth and relatability.
-

3. The Murderer & Suspects

- **Why It’s Important:** The murderer must be believable, with a motive and a connection to the victim. The suspects enrich the narrative by keeping readers guessing.
 - **Tips:**
 - Provide each suspect with a plausible motive and backstory.
 - Interconnect suspects to create layers of intrigue.
-

4. Clues

- **Why It's Important:** Clues are the breadcrumbs that lead to solving the mystery. They engage readers in the puzzle.
 - **Tips:**
 - Scatter clues subtly, ensuring they're visible but not obvious.
 - Avoid "unfair" clues—everything the detective knows must be available to the reader.
-

5. Deception & Misdirection

- **Why It's Important:** Red herrings keep the reader (and sometimes the detective) guessing, maintaining suspense.
 - **Tips:**
 - Create false trails (e.g., misplaced fingerprints, misleading alibis).
 - Use character lies or misrepresented evidence to divert attention.
-

6. Mystery

- **Why It's Important:** The unresolved connections between clues, suspects, and the murder build suspense and intrigue.
 - **Tips:**
 - Ensure some elements remain ambiguous until the resolution.
 - Develop a sense of the *sublime*, where the mystery feels larger than life and unsettling.
-

7. The Victim

- **Why It's Important:** The victim's backstory often holds the key to the mystery. They connect the suspects and the crime.
 - **Tips:**
 - Make the victim relatable to evoke empathy or compelling enough to drive curiosity.
 - Provide details about their life to ground the investigation.
-

8. Atmosphere

- **Why It's Important:** The tone and setting amplify the suspense and unease.
 - **Tips:**
 - Use Gothic elements (e.g., stormy weather, eerie mansions) or contrasts (e.g., a sunny field as a murder scene).
 - Incorporate sensory details (e.g., creaking doors, flickering lights) to create tension.
-

9. Momentum

- **Why It's Important:** The plot's pacing should mirror the detective's progress, with increasing intensity toward the climax.
 - **Tips:**
 - Open with a strong hook (e.g., the murder or its immediate aftermath).
 - Alternate periods of discovery and setbacks to maintain engagement.
 - Build to a rapid, exhilarating conclusion.
-

10. Resolution

- **Why It's Important:** Readers need closure. The satisfaction of a solved mystery is central to the genre.
 - **Tips:**
 - Connect all the dots clearly, explaining every clue and misdirection.
 - Avoid ambiguity unless absolutely intentional and executed flawlessly.
 - Deliver a cathartic payoff—justice served or the mystery untangled.
-

Key Takeaways

- **Balance is Crucial:** Use the elements cohesively to craft an engaging mystery.
 - **Reader Engagement:** Leave enough room for readers to solve the puzzle alongside (or before) the detective.
 - **Atmosphere and Pacing:** These drive emotional engagement, making the reader feel the tension and excitement of the hunt for the truth.
-

The video also demonstrated these elements in action with an **example opening chapter** of a murder mystery. While not perfect, it effectively showcased:

- **Atmosphere:** Contrasting lively London with the ominous scene.
- **Clues:** Shoes, brush marks, ash, and a glass hint at foul play.
- **Deception:** Misleading initial assumptions about suicide.
- **The Detective:** A quirky, compelling figure with a nervous tic and sharp intellect.

This layered setup hints at how writers can incorporate these essential elements to craft a compelling murder mystery. Let me know if you'd like help developing your own!

Video 17: “3 Ways to Instantly Elevate Your Writing”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvVpnht54nQ>

Strategies to Elevate Your Writing to a Bestselling Level

Here are the key strategies from the video to improve your writing, with explanations and actionable steps:

1. Make Every Word Matter

- **Why It's Important:** Readers trust authors who are intentional and authoritative, ensuring every sentence has purpose and impact.
- **Key Principles:**
 - **Avoid Fluff:** Every scene and sentence should meaningfully contribute to the plot or character development.
 - **Conciseness:** Trim redundancy and focus on delivering maximum impact with minimal words.
 - **Intentionality:** Each word and sentence should serve a clear purpose, adding depth or advancing the story.

- **Example:**

From *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig:

"19 years before she decided to die, Nora Seed sat in the warmth of the small library at Hazel School in the town of Bedford."

This opening sets the stage without unnecessary fluff, immediately establishing setting and emotional weight.

- **Action Steps:**
 - Challenge yourself to convey a thought in five words instead of 20.
 - Revise scenes to ensure every detail either advances the plot or develops a character.
-

2. Show Small, Authentic Experiences

- **Why It's Important:** Readers connect deeply with characters through relatable, authentic moments that feel universal.
- **Key Principles:**
 - **Human Truths:** Capture small, truthful moments that resonate with readers.

- **Mundane Realism:** Highlight everyday experiences to ground the story and make it relatable.
 - **Subtle Emotion:** Use understated actions or comments to reveal characters' true selves.
 - **Example:**

From *Such a Fun Age* by Kylie Reid:

"Zara bent in her heels and held her dress down to retrieve a box of yogurt-covered raisins...\$8. She quickly placed them back on the shelf and stood up."

This mundane moment highlights a relatable experience, building connection with the character.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Include small, relatable actions or thoughts that reveal your character's personality.
 - Focus on subtle, meaningful moments instead of grand gestures to convey emotions.
-

3. Use Figurative Language Strategically

- **Why It's Important:** Figurative language can make writing more striking and memorable by offering depth and nuance.
 - **Key Principles:**
 - **Make It Fresh:** Avoid clichés like "eyes shone like the sun."
 - **Enhance Understanding:** Use similes, metaphors, and personification to deepen the reader's grasp of a scene or emotion.
 - **Juxtapose for Effect:** Contrast figurative language with the setting or context for greater impact.
 - **Example:**

From *Apples Never Fall* by Liane Moriarty:

"They spoke in low intense voices as if their conversation involved International Espionage, which was incongruous in this small suburban Cafe."

This simile contrasts the intensity of the conversation with the idyllic setting, adding intrigue.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Identify opportunities to use figurative language to clarify or heighten an image.
 - Test similes and metaphors for originality and relevance to your narrative.
-

Takeaways for Immediate Improvement

1. **Edit Ruthlessly:** Revisit your manuscript to cut unnecessary details and tighten prose.
2. **Focus on Relatability:** Sprinkle small, authentic moments throughout your narrative.
3. **Use Figurative Language Sparingly:** Incorporate it strategically to emphasize key emotions or themes without overloading your text.

These strategies will not only strengthen your writing but also enhance your readers' engagement and trust in your storytelling. Let me know if you'd like help applying these to your own work!

Video 18: “10 Weak Words You Should Cut from Your Novel”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-fTxyPFRU>

The 10 Weak Words You Should (Mostly) Delete From Your Novel

Here’s a breakdown of the weak words discussed in the video, with guidance on when to cut them and when they can stay:

1. Suddenly

- **Why It’s Weak:** Overuse dilutes its impact—everything technically happens suddenly.
 - **Cut It:** If the sentence conveys the action’s abruptness without needing "suddenly."
 - Example: *"I turn away suddenly, heading for my bike."* → *"I turn away, heading for my bike."*
 - **Keep It:** When emphasizing a moment that genuinely feels abrupt or surprising.
 - Example: *"Suddenly, every muscle in my body is on fire."*
-

2. Then

- **Why It’s Weak:** It’s often redundant; readers assume chronological order.
 - **Cut It:** If removing "then" doesn’t alter the flow or clarity of the sentence.
 - Example: *"He stares at me, then pulls off his headphones."* → *"He stares at me and pulls off his headphones."*
 - **Keep It:** When bridging two distinct actions or highlighting a transition.
 - Example: *"Trees blur around me, then give way to a clearing."*
-

3. Very/Really

- **Why It’s Weak:** Adding these to weak adjectives doesn’t make them stronger.
 - **Cut It:** Replace the weak adjective with a stronger one.
 - Example: *"It’s actually very cute."* → *"It’s adorable."*
 - **Keep It:** For phrases like "the very next day" or to emphasize realism.
 - Example: *"It’s really happening."*
-

4. Is/Was

- **Why It's Weak:** Passive voice and lack of action can make sentences flat.
 - **Cut It:** When you can replace it with active descriptions.
 - Example: *"She was small and curvy."* → *"A lacy dress hugged her small, curvy figure."*
 - **Keep It:** When delivering quick, factual information.
 - Example: *"The closest mall is 50 miles away."*
-

5. Started

- **Why It's Weak:** Often unnecessary—characters don't need to "start" doing something; they can just do it.
 - **Cut It:** If removing "started" doesn't change the sentence's meaning.
 - Example: *"An old Christmas album started playing."* → *"An old Christmas album played."*
 - **Keep It:** When describing an action that is interrupted or incomplete.
 - Example: *"It started to rain."*
-

6. Just

- **Why It's Weak:** Common filler that rarely adds meaning.
 - **Cut It:** If the sentence works without it.
 - Example: *"Chances are I'm just overreacting."* → *"Chances are I'm overreacting."*
 - **Keep It:** To indicate limitation or time.
 - Example: *"It's just me and Mom tonight."*
-

7. Slightly/Somewhat

- **Why It's Weak:** These qualifiers dilute action and description.
 - **Cut It:** When they're unnecessary or replaceable with more specific descriptions.
 - Example: *"He leaned back slightly."* → *"He leaned back."*
 - **Keep It:** When they precisely convey a nuanced state.
 - Example: *"I feel somewhat responsible for this conflict."*
-

8. Somehow

- **Why It's Weak:** Often signals missing or lazy information.

- **Cut It:** If more specific details can replace it.
 - Example: *"She somehow heard his footsteps."* → *"She heard his footsteps over the noise."*
 - **Keep It:** When the character lacks complete understanding or senses something intuitively.
 - Example: *"I can somehow sense that it's Grandma."*
-

9. Seem

- **Why It's Weak:** It's telling rather than showing, which can feel vague.
 - **Cut It:** Replace with specific actions or behaviors that convey the perception.
 - Example: *"She seems apprehensive."* → *"She hesitates, rubbing her neck."*
 - **Keep It:** When intuition or subjective interpretation is central.
 - Example: *"Her friendliness seems insincere."*
-

10. Definitely

- **Why It's Weak:** Adds little value and can feel redundant.
 - **Cut It:** When removing it doesn't affect the sentence's clarity.
 - Example: *"I definitely don't want to cry."* → *"I don't want to cry."*
 - **Keep It:** When contrasting with prior uncertainty.
 - Example: *"There is most definitely no premiere happening tonight."*
-

Bonus: Adverbs (Words Ending in -ly)

- **Why They're Weak:** Overuse signals lazy writing and dilutes impact.
 - **Cut Them:** Replace adverbs with stronger verbs.
 - Example: *"She smiled sympathetically."* → *"She gave a sympathetic smile."*
 - **Keep Them:** When they provide necessary context or nuance without better alternatives.
-

Final Tips for Editing

1. **Dialogue Exemption:** Weak words can stay in dialogue for realism.
2. **Use Tools:** Apps like Hemingway can help highlight weak words and adverbs.
3. **Edit Smart:** Don't cut words mindlessly; consider whether they add or detract from the story.

These principles can strengthen your prose and enhance your storytelling clarity. Would you like to apply these edits to a specific piece of writing?

Video 19: “If You Can't Answer These 6 Questions, You Don't Have A Story”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8ycLo8aXzQ>

Key Takeaways from Glenn Gers on Writing Process and Storytelling

Understanding Storytelling:

1. Core of a Story:

- Every story revolves around a character trying to accomplish something and encountering obstacles—external or internal.
- Action and reaction form the essence of the story, often driven by the interaction with others.
- Example: A character trying to board a train may face physical obstacles (e.g., suitcase stolen) or internal ones (e.g., fear of loud noises).

2. Multiple Characters:

- A story can focus on multiple characters, but this demands meticulous tracking of each arc.
- Every character perceives themselves as the main character, creating layers of motivation and conflict.

3. Dramatic Action:

- Stories are built on dramatic actions—characters striving to achieve goals and how they navigate challenges.

Questions and Choices in Writing:

1. Story-Crafting as Question-Driven:

- Writing begins with asking foundational questions:
 - Who is it about?
 - What do they want?
 - Why can't they get it?
 - What do they do about it?
 - Why doesn't that work?
 - How does it end?
- These questions guide the structure of a story, whether it's a movie, game, or novel.

2. Every Detail is a Choice:

- Decisions about perspective, tone, and character backstory are shaped by continual questioning.

3. Developing Scenes:

- Transform outline notes into detailed scenes by iteratively answering questions like *"How do we show this?"* and *"What happens next?"*

Finding Your Writing Process:

1. **Personalization:**
 - Writing processes vary widely—short bursts, long sessions, mornings, nights. Identify what works best for you through trial and self-awareness.
2. **Avoiding Creative Burnout:**
 - Write in bursts to maintain quality. Forcing productivity beyond your natural rhythm can undo good work.
3. **Practical Setup:**
 - Develop a consistent workspace and tools (e.g., outline, notes, drafts). A clear system minimizes distractions and keeps focus on content.

Overcoming Writer's Block:

1. **Iterative Development:**
 - Start with simple placeholders or descriptions for scenes, then build on them.
 - Example: From *"This is the scene where he comes home and is miserable"* to *"He opens the fridge, grabs his dinner, and throws it against the wall."*
2. **Creative Momentum:**
 - Each small addition provides a foothold for the next creative step, allowing the story to evolve.

Tips for Screenwriters:

1. **Avoid Over-direction:**
 - Avoid writing camera directions like "CUT TO" or "DISSOLVE TO" unless essential to the story's flow. Let the filmmakers decide.
2. **Showcase Creative Magic:**
 - Use vivid, engaging scenes to convey the thrill of the creative process within the narrative.

Practical Wisdom:

1. Writing isn't about perfect conditions (e.g., "ideal music" or "perfect iced tea"). It's about creating consistently, even when conditions aren't ideal.
2. Trust the iterative process and embrace setbacks as part of growth.

Video 20: “How To Become A Master Storyteller”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Z-Q1bg1tU>

Key Writing Techniques for Engaging Stories

1. The Dance: Context and Conflict

- **Concept:** Alternate between context (what characters want, their situation) and conflict (what stands in their way).
 - **Why it Works:** Conflict creates open loops (unanswered questions) that engage the reader; context resolves them, maintaining a balanced narrative.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Ensure every narrative beat is linked with "**therefore**" or "**but**" (not just "and then").
 - Example:
 - **Context:** A detective discovers a critical clue.
 - **Conflict:** The clue is stolen or destroyed.
-

2. Rhythm: Sentence Variety

- **Concept:** Use varied sentence lengths and structures to create a natural, pleasing rhythm.
 - **Why it Works:** Monotonous writing (e.g., all short or all long sentences) bores readers.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Alternate between short, punchy sentences and longer, descriptive ones.
 - Create a sense of "music" in the prose.
 - Example:
 - Short: "Blood stained the floor."
 - Medium: "The detective knelt down, inspecting the crimson trail."
 - Long: "He realized with a sinking feeling that the pattern wasn't random—it formed the initials of the next victim."
-

3. Tone: Conversational and Immersive

- **Concept:** Write as though you're speaking directly to the reader—inviting them into the story.

- **Why it Works:** A conversational tone lowers barriers between the audience and the narrative, making the story feel personal.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Write narration or dialogue as if you're telling the story to a close friend.
 - Example:
 - Conversational: "You wouldn't believe what she found in that safe."
 - Detached: "The safe contained documents of a sensitive nature."
-

4. Direction: Know the Ending

- **Concept:** Start with the ending in mind and work backward.
 - **Why it Works:** A clear destination ensures a cohesive plot and prevents tangents.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Identify the last scene or resolution first.
 - Build conflicts and subplots that logically lead to that conclusion.
 - Example:
 - Ending: The killer is caught trying to flee the country.
 - Build-up: Add clues that lead the detective to the airport.
-

5. Story Lenses: Unique Perspectives

- **Concept:** View your story through a unique "lens" that differentiates it from others.
 - **Why it Works:** A fresh angle captivates readers and sets your narrative apart.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Find a less obvious approach to common tropes or topics.
 - Example:
 - Typical: Detective solving a murder.
 - Unique Lens: Murder mystery told through the perspective of a key suspect trying to prove their innocence.
-

6. The Hook: Grab Attention Immediately

- **Concept:** Start with a vivid, compelling opening that sets the tone and raises questions.
 - **Why it Works:** Readers decide quickly whether to stay engaged.
- **Implementation:**
 - Use striking visuals, bold statements, or intriguing setups.

- Complement hooks with "visual" descriptions in prose.
 - Example:
 - Weak: "Detective Callaway entered the room."
 - Strong: "The crime scene smelled like rotting peaches, and the blood trail spelled out a name—her name."
-

7. Questions and Choices: Keep Readers Guessing

- **Concept:** Frame each plot development around a character's choices and questions.
 - **Why it Works:** Keeps the reader engaged by making them curious about outcomes.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Continuously ask and answer key storytelling questions:
 - **Who is this about?**
 - **What do they want?**
 - **What's stopping them?**
 - **What do they do about it?**
 - **Why doesn't it work?**
 - **How does it end?**
-

8. Show, Don't Tell: Active Prose

- **Concept:** Convey information through action, dialogue, and sensory details rather than exposition.
 - **Why it Works:** Creates a more immersive and engaging reading experience.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Replace weak verbs (e.g., "was") with active ones.
 - Show emotional states through body language or environment.
 - Example:
 - Telling: "She was nervous."
 - Showing: "Her hands trembled as she fumbled with the lock."
-

9. Editing: Cut Weak Words

- **Concept:** Avoid filler or unnecessary words that dilute your prose.
 - **Why it Works:** Concise writing is more impactful.
- **Implementation:**

- Identify and reduce overuse of words like "suddenly," "then," "just," and "very."
 - Replace adverbs (e.g., "walked quickly") with strong verbs (e.g., "rushed").
-

10. Create Open Loops: Build Anticipation

- **Concept:** Introduce unresolved questions or conflicts that keep readers hooked.
 - **Why it Works:** Humans crave resolution, so unanswered questions create tension.
 - **Implementation:**
 - Drop clues or foreshadowing that hint at later reveals.
 - Example:
 - Open Loop: "Detective Callaway froze as she spotted the initials carved into the wall—initials she hadn't seen in decades."
 - Payoff: Reveal the initials belonged to her estranged brother, now a suspect.
-

This framework offers a practical guide for applying storytelling techniques to any genre, with particular focus on crafting compelling murder mysteries.