



Writing the Whodunit

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What is a WHODUNIT?

A classic whodunit presents a puzzle that challenges the main character to find a solution; the traditional mystery contains no explicit sex nor violence. Murder or another serious crime is the basis for the story, but the focus is the solution rather than crime scene details. The story centers on individuals, not on large, impersonal institutions, such as the government, the FBI, or drug cartels.

The Main Character:

Very often the traditional mystery employs an amateur sleuth, such as my protagonist, Mallie Monroe. She is an average person caught up in events that are beyond the ordinary.

Can you think of a sleuth who might fit this type of mystery?

When you write a Traditional Mystery, you need to include the following elements:

- Create a sleuth, including a background setting where he/she is in contact with many people—on the job or in her social setting.
- Create subplots that involve secondary characters; these can be friends, family, or colleagues. Some of them may be victims in future novels or change the sleuth's life down the road.
- Weave a web of suspects with people who are good, bad, and/or just cranky.
- Determine how the victim is murdered with any details about how the death occurred.
- Add a when, where, and why aspect to the mystery.
- Create a plot that unfolds like a puzzle; each suspect should have a secret that makes him or her a possible killer. Some characters lie, and some may be involved in another type of illegal activity.
- Try and create a series; readers like to have continuity between books.

How to keep yourself on track:

I used the Phyllis Whitney Notebook Method of Writing with a separate chapter for

- Characters
- Plot
- Synopsis
- Timelines
- Sequels
- Research