THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
to Writing Modern Cozy Murder Mysteries

HOW TO WRITE A
COZY MYSTERY

FOUR-ACT COZY MYSTERY STORY STRUCTURE

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My Combined Story Plan for a Four-Act Cozy Mystery with 16 Sequences of Scenes

ACT ONE

At this stage in developing the story, I want to build a plot outline for the opening scenes of Act One of my novel.

ACT ONE is made up of 4 Sequences of Scenes

Sequence 1. Characters and world building.
Sequence 2. Conflict and the Inciting Incident
Sequence 3. Reaction to the crime or incident
Sequence 4. Commitment to Finding out who is responsible for the crime

This sequence of scenes has to do a lot of heavy lifting. Since this is my first draft, I am not worried about making each word perfect. This is getting the story down and the characters onto the page, acting and reacting and revealing more about themselves. By the end of Act One, I should have clear signposts about where this story is going and how I am going to get there.

Sequence 1. Characters and World Building.

Introduce the main characters in their story worlds and situations.

The opening pages establishes who the main character is and what the main character’s internal and external problems are. It also establishes the setting, period, tone, style and point of view of the story.

#In most cases I would recommend introducing your sleuth to the reader as soon as possible since they are the main character the reader will be following in this story.

They have to understand who this character is and what her world looks like.

Let the reader know in the first scene/first chapter who the main character is and why they should care what happens to them.

Show that she is skilled and has talents and strengths and can handle herself.

#This is the Start of the Personal line for the detective as well as an Action line in this story.
Introducing the internal conflict of the sleuth at this point builds to a double resolution for both the personal line of the character and the plot line at the end.

Perfect people living perfect lives are not only boring but not credible as living and breathing people.

- Who is the sleuth?
- What is the sleuth ultimately looking for?
- What is missing in the sleuth’s own life?
- Is the sleuth likeable? Do you want to spend time reading about this person and sharing their life for the hours it takes to enjoy the book?
- Can the reader recognise themselves in this character and relate to them?

Everyone is facing challenges in their ordinary lives and your sleuth should be no different. The problem could be physical, emotional or psychological or any combination of the three, but there has to be something that they need rather than want, even if they don’t realise it.

Perhaps they are dealing with loss, illness, money problems or it could be that one or both parents, or parent figures, are absent in their life or critical of their decisions?

This is the person the reader wants to be with the whole way through the story so there has to be some empathy/sympathy for them at the start - the audience care about them.

**TOP TIP.** **Let the sleuth show some compassion, generosity and kindness** for another person or animal or the natural world. That compassion and understanding will shine through as a strength.

You need this type of strength to balance out their stubborn resolve and determination to walk into dangerous situations on their own later in the book.

Don’t feel that you don’t need to cram all of his or her special talents into the opening chapters, together with a full biography since the day they started nursery school.

Far from it. It is better to reveal these strengths and weave in the backstory as the sleuth reacts to the actions of the killer and the ups and downs of the murder investigation.

**Hook. What makes this person cool, interesting and different?**

This is linked to the theme of your cozy mystery.

Culinary, hobbies and crafts, animals or paranormal. What makes this character different?

**Hook the reader in the first paragraph by hinting at a turning point or crisis in her life.**
Give the reader some reason to root for this character.

**Who are the levels of detective?**

- Who are her friends and family and the people she would rather avoid if she could?
- Who is the sidekick or sidekicks our sleuth is going to talk to and hash things out with?
- Are there enforcement authorities and family members?

They should have the skills that the sleuth does not have, plus humour and quirky characteristics or even add a bit of conflict into the investigation.

**TOP TIP. Don’t introduce a huge cast of characters in the opening scenes of the first chapter.**

The sleuth, plus selected friends and family will become the sidekicks for our sleuth during the investigation all need to be on stage during Act One – but not in the opening pages unless it is essential.

Too many characters will confuse the reader and they lose track of who is who and has to keep flicking back to work out the relationships. This is annoying.

If you want to increase the pace of a fast read, my suggestion is to have the sleuth and at most two other people in a scene. This gives you the space to really bring on those extra characters and reveal their personality as they interact with your sleuth. One to one is better.

**Quickly establish the setting, period, tone, style and point of view of the story.**

By the end of the first scene the reader should know precisely where they are and can visualise the setting. This locks them into the world stage on which your story will be played.

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**Case Study Worked Example Three. Spite Pairs with White by Sophie Brent**

**Story Beat. The ordinary working and daily life of the character.**

Deli owner Erin Kelly is discussing the menu for the Hampshire Growers Wine Festival with local winemaker and personal friend Margot Fraser, who has asked Erin to provide the catering for the Festival. Erin has worked hard to match the white wine being served with a selection of savoury and sweet canapes and Margot is delighted with the results.
Story Beat. The internal conflict of the character [The personal conflict C plot]

Erin’s mother and extended family cannot understand why a talented chef and sommelier like Erin wants to stay and run her late father’s Italian deli. She is still mourning the loss of her father 18 months earlier. They are nagging her to leave and move to London or Florida where the Rossi family have restaurants and hotel contracts.

Story Beat. Needs and desires [The personal conflict C plot]

Erin wants to build up her catering business, specialising in matching food and wine, and open her own bistro next to the deli. She would love to expand but needs to generate the finance to pay for expansion and refurbishment.

The Wine Festival is now a major event in the Hampshire food and wine calendar and the perfect chance for her to demonstrate what Kelly’s Deli can deliver.

Story Beat. Continuity plot with friends and members of the local community. [ The continuity D plot]

Erin grew up in Bottom Wallop and has three great female friends who still live close by. Her best friend, Prisha Patel, is a lecturer at the local collage and they meet up several times a week.

Sequence 2. Catalyst/Inciting Incident/Problem or New Opportunity

This is the first major spark of conflict in the story.

This is also the starting point for the A plot, the murder mystery, even if the incident is only linked to the murder.

The INCITING INCIDENT is the first significant event that completely disrupts and alters the characters life.

It could be a new opportunity but in a cozy murder mystery it is more likely to be the discovery of the first murder victim or a challenge or problem linked to the central murder investigation.

- Scene where future victim interacts with suspect – or show the body.
- Something happens which throws the sleuth’s world into turmoil. It could be a murder/attack or some shocking crime.
- Why is she involved in this murder investigation? Is she a suspect or is a relative or friend a suspect? Did she discover the body?

Foreshadowing, Introduction of Stakes and Threat, Intertwined with Setup and crime to come.
This Opportunity/Problem steers the story in a new direction and hints at bigger obstacles to come as the hero struggles to deal with the new disruption to his life.

The most common technique for grabbing the attention of a reader is through the use of curiosity.

Most successful mysteries begin by posing a puzzle to the audience, raising questions in their minds, and promising an answer.

That first question is triggered by what happens in the Inciting Incident.

Case Study Worked Example Three. Spite Pairs with White by Sophie Brent

The Inciting Incident. [The main murder investigation A plot]

Erin is serving canapes at the Wine Festival and everything is going well. She has just met her pal Amy whose father Roger is a local winemaker. His sparkling wines have taken the best wine award for the past seven years.

Suddenly Margot’s husband James Fraser walks in with a new winemaker and Amy and her father are stunned. James has hired a top French wine maker and he is personal friend of the main judge.

Erin serves James a selection of gluten-free canapes and he gobbles them down.

When the judge awards the best wine prize to James Fraser, Roger accuses him of cheating and bribing the judge and storms out.

Only minutes later, James Fraser collapses to floor, fighting to breathe. He is severely allergic to peanuts and the ambulance crew cannot save him.

Sequence 3. Reaction to the Crime or Incident

Refusal of the call to action.

The sleuth has to try and deal with the problem of the inciting incident and is struggling to know what best to do and how to react to this disruption in her normal life.

- Sleuth debates what to do with her sidekicks/pals or family. She might resist the call at first—she is not the person to get involved.
- **3 BUMPS AND A PUSH** to persuade the sleuth to get involved. What are the 3 bumps?
The Three Bumps and a Push technique is a useful story structure tool from screenwriter David Siegel.

At first, the sleuth does not want to get anywhere near this sudden death. She will refuse to get involved at the start and may need three gentle, or not so gently, nudges to convince her to change her mind before there is one larger trigger event, the push, that makes her agree to investigate this murder.

Use the Three Bumps and a Push to quickly sketch out why the sleuth does not want to get involved and what will make her change her mind.

In a cozy they should be linked to the character relationships between the sleuth and at least one "stakes character" they care about. Link the crime to the personal backstory and internal needs of the sleuth so that it is personal.

Does the hero have a mentor or sidekick or friend? Mentor encourages the sleuth and reassures them that they can cope and be strong. Introduce everyone who is in the B subplot story.

The sleuth tries to resolve the situation but is blocked.

Establish the stakes. What happens if the sleuth doesn’t reach react to this incident? Who would care?

In a cozy should be linked to the character relationships between the sleuth and at least one “stakes character” they care about. This is usually a friend or family member who they know to be innocent.

Link the crime to the personal backstory and internal needs of the sleuth so that it is personal.

Case Study Worked Example. Spite Pairs with White by Sophie Brent

Erin knows that none of her food contained peanuts and Margot tasted them all personally, but she is immediately under suspicion since the victim collapsed immediately after eating her food.

Bump 1. Marcel, the French wine judge accuses her of poisoning the victim.

Bump 2. James Fraser, Margot son, accuses Erin of killing his father.

Bump 3. One of her regular clients cancelled her catering order for the coming week.
Sequence 4. First Turning Point, Core Story Launch. Break into Act Two.

Some major new event forces the sleuth to act which will directly impact their life.

This is an unexpected moment where something shifts and it becomes imperative for the sleuth to commit to investigating this death.

#At this point the sleuth has to commit to solving the crime/story question.

There is no going back now. They are fully on board. The sleuth has no choice. They have to get involved. They must be strongly motivated and have personal stakes in the investigation.

This turning point is often called the First Plot Point since the main A story begins here.

The murderer has shattered the balanced and ordered life of the sleuth and the local community.

- The stakes have been set high. The sleuth commits to the investigation.
- The crime/murder and the cast of characters have all been introduced.
- Give the sleuth the tools she needs to talk to suspects and investigate the crime.
- How does she find out who the likely suspects are?
- Let the readers know that these people are all harbouring secrets.
- Put those likeable characters at risk. Make the stakes real for the sleuth – what does she stand to lose if she does not find the killer? Make her DRIVE the action, not just respond to it.

#The Main Dramatic Question is posed.

This is the point at which we "see" what will happen in the rest of the story, and we know the story will be over when the sleuth discovers the identity of the killer.

Will the detective find out the truth about the murder of X?

#Foreshadowing.

The detective sets out to get to the truth and the reader knows that the sleuth will meet the killer face to face by the end of the story.
ACT TWO

Act Two, sequences 5 to 8

The sleuth interviews the suspects and delves deeper into their motives/psyche. Everyone is a suspect as potential motives are unveiled.

- Meetings. Casual encounters or unexpected contacts.
- Informant who wants to get paid or get even with one of the other suspects.
- Trick someone by bluffing or emotional blackmail or provocation/argument.
- Characters confide in her and offer news about other suspects.
- Sleuth has a friend who can supply technical data.

Tracing a paper trail is another way of discovering buried details.

- Set up the reason why the sleuth is involved. Then interviewing the suspects. Suspects show alibis, lies and truth and red herrings.
- Another murder or huge event linked to the backstory of the victim and suspects.
- Reveal motives of the suspects and the subplots
- How does she get away with interviewing the suspects? Chatting with people?
- There is often a small pinch point that leads to a change of direction, a new set of witnesses and a second suspect. At the end of Act Two, that suspect is ruled out.
- TIME bombs raise suspense – a ticking clock with a deadline.
- ISOLATE the sleuth – alone and out of range makes things scarier.

SHOW the reader how the sleuth identifies suspects and solves the puzzle.

At the end of Act Two there will be a major event which causes the story to pivot in a new direction. At this point the sleuth has to recommit finding the truth. No going back from this point.

This can be another murder or attack etc as the criminal’s plan gets the upper hand and the sleuth’s task becomes much harder.

Act Two also introduces a B plot, such as a romance subplot.

Let’s break this down into more detail.
Sequence 5. The Investigation Begins

The sleuth has to negotiate this strange new world she has agreed to be part of. These scenes introduce the allies, friends, sidekicks and team that she will be working with, as well as potential enemies and suspects.

How does she find out who the likely suspects are?

**Motives>> fear that secrets could be revealed, hatred for someone or something, thwarted desire for something, desire for justice/fight against injustice.**

The obvious suspect seems to have a great alibi, but then that alibi is ruled out. Suspects acting out their external facades, but who are they under the surface?

Let the readers know that these people are all harbouring secrets.

Put those likeable characters at risk. Make the stakes real for the sleuth – what does she stand to lose if she does not find the killer? Make her DRIVE the action, not just respond to it.

Why is this crime personal for the protagonist? She has to move forward. This is a commitment and there is no going back. She has to have flaws.

Pro athletes for example are well known for being obsessive. They do not give up no matter what the psychological price.

Keep to the rules of the game between you and the reader so that they can work through the clues with the sleuth to find the murderer. The crime must be credible. Facts must be correct. Putting together all of the pieces of the puzzle when you don’t have the picture on the box.

Tension increases and plot begins to form as the sleuth starts to understand the conflict and the motivation of the antagonist.

Use contrasts between sleuth and the sidekick who interprets the clues and also distracts the reader from the real clue by taking you in the wrong direction.

- The sleuth has now made a commitment to solving the mystery and tracking down the killer/attacker responsible for the crime.
- All of the allies and sidekicks are brought in. The sleuth assembles the investigation team, all with different quirks and characters.
- They interview key suspects and start to compile a picture of what really happened with the first crime.
- All of the possible suspects have to be identified, who appear to have had motive, means and opportunity to commit the crime.
- Then the sleuth questions them, and they seem to be making real progress.
• One of these suspects will turn out to be the actual killer.
• The suspects have alibis, tell lies or reveal clues that point to another real killer. There will be real evidence which turns out to be distraction clues, but also real revelations which indicate that the solution goes a lot deeper than they had expected.
• It soon becomes clear that a number of people wanted the victim dead, and several could have done it, but did not have the means or opportunity.

Sequence 6. Balancing Sub-Plot

• To balance out the mystery A plot, a second B plot can be introduced. This can be a romance or secondary plot, linked to the main plot in some way.
• As part of the B plot, the sleuth’s background is revealed as the sub-plot is developed. Tell the reader what missing in the sleuth’s life and their internal conflict and needs.
• Show how skilled the sleuth is in her ordinary world and as she talks to people. She is gaining some respect in the community and perhaps begrudging acceptance from people who did not take her seriously or remembered her from past experiences.

Minor Pinch Point.
At the end of this step, there is often a ramp up in conflict where the real killer shows the sleuth that they are very much still in charge. She is going to have to step up and show that she can handle the challenge. This is often a character development scene where the sleuth has to shake off her former life and step more fully into the new role of being a sleuth.

Sequence 7. Motives and Secrets revealed.

• Reveal motives of the suspects and the subplots. Everyone is a suspect as potential motives are unveiled.
• Make the suspects as clever and as devious as the sleuth so that they are worthy opponents.
• Characters confide in her and offer news about other suspects as they realise that the sleuth is serious.
• Sleuth has a friend or a sidekick who can supply technical data.
• Tracing a paper trail is another way of discovering buried details. Additional problems and information emerge that have to be dealt with.
Sequence 8. Midpoint of No Return.

About halfway through the book there could be another murder or serious attack or other event around end of Act Two.

The victim is often one of the main suspects all of the clues and information had been pointing towards.

- Something unexpected occurs, such as the appearance of a second body, the death of a major suspect, or discovery of evidence which clears the most likely suspect. The story must take a new direction.
- This is a major new development, huge revelation and a serious new threat from the killer and his or her accomplices if they have them. This drives the next section of the book and provides new clues.
- Disappearance of one or more suspects/major new information emerges.
- New motives and suspects.
- In many cases, this second murder or crime was not planned by the murderer but was a spontaneous event caused by the investigation turning up a new witness or unexpected revelation.
- Because this second crime was not planned, this can lead to careless evidence left at the crime scene or additional clues for the sleuth that can be linked to the first murder.
- Sleuth has to make major decision. This is the point of no return and there is no going back. But it is increasingly dangerous.
  The stakes have increased, and more people are being hurt. Do they carry on?

Up to now our sleuth may have been reacting to the clues and revelations about the first crime in Act One and feeling that things are spinning out of their control.

Now they have to do something that it totally outside of their comfort zone before more people are hurt.

They might not know how to achieve this, but they are fired up and determined to find this killer-no matter what the personal cost it. No going back. Bridges burnt.
ACT THREE

Sequences 9 to 12

- Bad Boys Close In. The Killer’s “Evil Plan” is put in motion.
- More evidence is revealed as the stakes increase.
- Conclusions and reactions to the evidence – possible suspects at this point – shift as more info comes in. Some suspects eliminated.

Sequence 9. The Killer is Blocking the Investigation

After the shock of the Major Turning point at the Mid-Point end of Act Two, the characters will have to regroup and come up with a new plan in response to this new attack /new death.

This is the pivotal point in the story where it become evident that the sleuth was on the wrong track.

Change of focus and scope of the investigation after what happened.

This new crime is critical to the case – it provides vital information.

Layers are peeled away until the real killer is at the centre.

- More interviews. Follow up on alibis and clues and gather info on the second murder. Suspects refute evidence pointing to them from the 1st murder.
- Moment of danger for the sleuth or moment of increased tension/hostage etc leading to the story climax.
- Murder 2/crime 2 leads a trail of evidence to one of the suspects. New motives and suspects are revealed.
- OR major plot twist that sends sleuth off in a new direction.
- Give some time for reaction and reflection in between the action scenes. Use the Sidekick and romance subplots for this.
- Reveal hidden motives and secrets for the key suspects. This could be linked to previous clues and revelations.
- Formerly secret relationships come to light, such as business arrangements, romantic involvement’s, scores to be settled or previously veiled kinships.
- Develop and expose meanings of matters hinted at in Act One, to slowly clarify the significance of earlier clues.

Sequence 10. More Complications. Stakes increase

- The sleuth is blocked and goes over what they know so far with the sidekicks and other investigators so that all the options are explored.
• Some major new revelation has to be explored, but they do not seem to be getting any closer to finding the killer.
• Have they missed the crucial piece of information? Or misinterpreted the information they already have?
• The killer uses clever misdirection to put them on the wrong track.

MORE COMPLICATIONS, HIGHER STAKES AND SUBPLOTS
The goal is harder to achieve than the hero thought and is tested more than he ever expected.

More things go wrong. The suspect in the second crime is innocent but framed etc.

Subplots develop and further complicate the hero’s path to his goals and raise the stakes.

• The sleuth reveals the results of the investigation. The reader, as well as the protagonist and other characters, are given an opportunity to review what is known and assess the possibilities.
• OR there is a major plot twist that sends sleuth off in a new direction.
• Give her the means and/or skills early in the story to make these actions believable
• Give some time for reaction and reflection in between the action scenes. Use the Sidekick and romance subplots for this.
• The solution of the crime appears to be impossible. Attempts to solve the crime have stymied the sleuth. Misinterpretation of clues or mistaken conclusions have led him or her in the wrong direction, and logic must be applied to force a new way of grasping an understanding of the uncertainties.
• Complications/higher stakes. Bad boys plan to get away with it.

Minor Pinch Point.

At the end of this step, there is often a ramp up in conflict where the real killer and/or their helpers shows the sleuth that they are very much still in charge. The sleuth is getting too close – they need to scare them off.

This is often a character development scene where the sleuth has to dig deeper, work more closely with her team and sidekicks and become more assertive.

Sequence 11. Suspects narrowed down

• The sleuth starts to discover more about the real killer and their motivation.
• More secrets are revealed, and the number of suspects narrowed down as the real crime becomes clearer.
• The focus shifts as more evidence come to light about what happened in the second attack/murder and how it links to the first.
• The killer was careless in the second attack and left a crucial clue which nobody has picked up on until now. The real chain of events starts to emerge.

**CULMINATION TOWARD THE MAIN PLOT**

The conclusion of one dramatic tension and the start of a new one.

The hero moves inexorably closer to his goal and discovers new info and better understanding of the nature of the opposition before him.

The killer is aware of the sleuth’s actions and takes actions to prevent them from learning the truth about the conflict and obstacles the sleuth is trying to overcome.

The focus shifts from subplots to the main plot.

• Sleuth makes some progress (REWARD).
• Sleuth discovery of BETRAYAL.
• Sleuth uncovers the true “Evil Plan”.
• Have the sleuth review the case to determine where he or she went wrong.
• All the secrets are revealed. Number of suspects narrowed down.
• Layers are peeled away until the real killer is at the centre.
• Reveal the chain of events which provoked the crime.
• The crucial evidence is something overlooked in Act One, which appeared to have been of little consequence at the time it was first disclosed. That evidence takes on new meaning with information disclosed in Act Three.
• The sleuth (and perhaps the reader, if a keen observer) becomes aware of the error which remains undisclosed to the other characters.

**Sequence 12. APPARENT DEFEAT – all is lost.**

• Huge set-back for the sleuth.
• The killer’s plan is working, and all seems lost. Perhaps someone betrays them, or they are threatened/people they care about are hurt.
• Their whole investigation seems to fall apart, but they cannot give up at this point, they have come too far to see the killer escape.
• Stakes increase more and more and in a fast-paced sequence.
• Moment of danger for the sleuth or moment of increased tension etc.
• This has to be a huge turning point which forces the sleuth to change tactics and give a new response to the threat from the killer.
• This is the beginning of the way back where they push against the killer.
Everything fails and blows up big-time in their face (due to EVIL PLAN or due to the hero's goal or plan being the wrong goal or plan).

The greatest set back of the story for the hero.

It appears as if achieving the goal is impossible, but the hero has no choice but to try because he will have an even worse fate should he abandon his quest now. The hero’s internal needs/flaws are confronted defining the hero’s arc.

Stakes increase more and more and in fast sequence.

- Increased threat to the sleuth. Leading to a huge reveal with an increased sense of hopelessness. Often comes when the opposition is hidden, and the opponent ally is revealed
- Moment of danger for the sleuth or moment of increased tension or hostage etc leading to the story climax. Chase/escape/setbacks.
- **Dark Night of the Soul.** Sleuth is at their lowest point. Suicide? Smell of fear.
- The sleuth is confronted with a choice of whether to stay in the investigation or accept that they can never get to the truth, defeated, with the killer still at large.
- Large turning point which forces the sleuth to change tactics and give a new response to the threat from the killer.

**Act Three ends with some shocking revelation about the killer.** The sleuth discovers a hidden truth that turns everything on its head. They have been going about this totally wrong. Now it is time to get serious.

This is the beginning of the way back where they push against the killer.

Re-frame a new plan for final Act Four.
ACT FOUR

Sequences 13 to 16

- Reconstruction of what happened on that day of the murder
- Final interview and confession
- The grand finale.

**Sequence 13. Heroine sleuth gets her mojo back and is back on track.**

They have to completely change direction and move forward or give up. What have they been missing? And just how much is the sleuth willing to sacrifice to get to the truth?

If possible, link this self-revelation to a personal character flaw in the sleuth so that the final resolution is linked to their personal character arc.

The sleuth evaluates the clues, evidence and information gleaned from the other characters.

- The sleuth discovers a secret about one or more of the suspects which sets them on a new path that will lead to the real killer.
- All secrets revealed. The Killer’s motivation has to be powerful – why they did it, who helped them, how and when.
- More complications and setbacks. They need the evidence to prove that their suspect is the killer etc.

**The final puzzle piece falls into place in the form of a history lesson.**

The history lesson answers the question *why*?

- Why is the bad guy bad?
- Why is he doing what he’s doing?
- Why is he so good at it?
- Why has he started now?

The key to a good reversal is compactness.

Most of the breadcrumbs should have been picked up already.

It’s just the last thing that has to fall into place for everything to make sense, and we finally learn the killer’s motivation.
If there’s a mastermind, he could be revealed or confronted in this scene, but not defeated. He is at the height of his power.

He is about to execute the plan he has been dreaming about for so many years.

Only one thing can stop him. A sleuth who knows what’s actually going on for a change.

She is no longer on her back foot, but she now has to drive toward the solution, usually by escaping the trap first.

What to look for:

- The story or flashback of the seminal incident.
- The oldest bit of backstory.
- Everything stopping so the hero can learn the history lesson.

**Sequence 14. A New Action Plan**

- She has a sudden revelation about a clue and suspect and realizes that she been going about things in the wrong way.
- She needs a new action plan and has to work quickly.
- The friends, family and allies come together to create a plan. They agree to go forwards, even if there is only a small chance of success.

**Sequence 15. The grand finale.**

This is usually a one-to-one confrontation with the killer where the sleuth demonstrates their skills and wins the day.

With resolve and determination, the sleuth and the allies battle to discover the killer, who does not make it easy for them.

Just when everything seems lost, the sleuth finds the strength to unlock the secret weapon in a sudden twist and the killer is finally revealed.

**Make the final confrontation with the villain slow.**

Reveal every heartbeat, every pulse pounding moment of fear.

The pacing must be quick, but you should not cheat the reader out of emotional reactions, either during the scene or afterwards. Don’t rush the fight scene.

**Top Tip. Make the final battle with the killer real. No silly heroics.**

No going down into the cellar with the lights out. This has to be a battle of equals in order for the reader to feel satisfied that the killer was caught using logic, deduction and intelligence.
After the villain has been defeated, have a wrap up scene where the sleuth had a quiet moment with friends/sidekick/love interest or family as they review events.

**Sequence 16. Resolution**

Has to be a solid resolution which makes sense to the reader. Strong ending.

- Heroine discusses clues with her family and friends and how she solved the case.
- The sleuth comes to a realisation about herself which demonstrates the character growth/character arc which occurs because she steps outside her comfort zone to investigate this death.
- Plot-B: Scene showing full character growth of the sleuth.
- SHOW the sleuth back in the old world as a different person. A static sleuth who never changes will lose readers interest over time.
- Use the last chapter to tie up the loose ends and perhaps frame/bookend the story to match the opening sequence. The mystery has to be completely solved – but maybe add a hint or a hook for the next story in the series.