



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: APPEARANCE—WHAT TO CONVEY, WHAT TO HIDE

2.1

List the qualities you want others to readily infer from your character's appearance; list other qualities you want readers to discover as they get to know him.

QUALITIES APPARENT TO OTHERS

QUALITIES HIDDEN AT FIRST

QUALITIES APPARENT TO OTHERS	QUALITIES HIDDEN AT FIRST



NOW YOU TRY: APPEARANCE—GET DOWN THE BASICS

2.2

Crystallize your character's features. Take all those ideas floating around in your head and get them in writing. Here's a list to get you started:

Gender:

Age:

Build:

Most striking feature:

Hair color, and if it's natural:

Hairstyle:

Wears what to work:

Wears what to a formal affair:

Wears what to sleep:

Facial hair, tattoos, body piercing, scars:

Ethnicity, and from what physical features others could guess it:

Mannerisms, gestures:

Health problems:

What actor or actress you would cast in the role:



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: STATUS AND AMBITION

2.3

List your character's present status and aspirations for the future. Identify the disparities that you can take advantage of in building your plot.

	PRESENT STATUS	ASPIRATIONS
Profession/Job		
Accomplishments		
Income Level		
Current Residence		
Reputation		
Romantic Attachments		
Children		
Lifetime Achievement		



NOW YOU TRY: BACKGROUND DECISIONS

2.4

Determine these aspects of your character's background.

Birth order:

Parents (occupations, education, and income):

Siblings:

Hometown:

Childhood home (apartment, ranch house, mansion, etc.):

Education:

Dream profession:

How and when the character lost his or her virginity:

Past trauma or formative event:

Keepsake from the past and what it represents:



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: TALENTS AND SKILLS

2.5

What are your protagonist's talents and skills? Here's a list to get you started.

Most obvious skill:

Hidden skill:

Most obvious weakness:

Hidden weakness:

Talent:

Things he or she hates to do:



NOTES



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: PERSONALITY TRAITS

2.6

Answer each of these questions for your character:

What is your character frightened by?

What angers your character?

What does your character find humorous?

What does your character hate to be teased about?

What qualities does your character find attractive in others?

What qualities does your character find annoying in others?

What is your character's capacity for physical violence?

What is your character's capacity for intimacy?

Who are your character's heroes and role models?

What nervous tics and obsessive behaviors does your character have?

What swear words does your character use when annoyed? Which ones does he use when he's angry? Outraged?



Jot down what your protagonist would do in each of these situations:

Gets a bad haircut:	
Is enjoying a steak dinner when the woman at a nearby table lights a cigar:	
Gets shortchanged at the supermarket:	
Discovers a pair of condoms in the purse or pocket of his significant other:	
Hits a dog while driving, hurrying to the airport to catch a plane:	
Gets propositioned by a beautiful woman or a handsome man:	
Breaks down at two in the morning on a deserted road:	
Finds a diamond ring on a park bench:	
Discovers that a best friend has been embezzling funds from a charity:	
Discovers that a close relative is a child molester:	



NOW YOU TRY: TASTES AND PREFERENCES

2.8

Use this list of questions to flesh out your character's tastes and preferences.

What is your character's favorite place to eat out?

What does your character eat for dinner, alone on a weeknight?

What does your character usually order at a bar?

What book or magazine is on the bedside table?

What music does your character listen to in the car?

What is your character's favorite thing to do on a quiet Saturday afternoon?

What is your character's favorite thing to do on a Saturday night?

What is your character's idea of the perfect vacation?

What is your character's favorite place to hang out?

What does your character have a weakness for?

What does your character collect?

What is your character's political affiliation?

Is your character an activist for a cause?



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: PERSONALITY TRAITS

Personality traits exist across a spectrum. Draw an X to show where your character belongs on each continuum:

Cautious <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Impulsive

Aloof <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Gregarious

Analytical <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Emotional

Anxious <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Easygoing

Charming <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Abrasive

Cocky <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Insecure

Fastidious <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Unfussy

Honest <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Deceitful

Optimistic <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Pessimistic

Lethargic <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Energetic

Rigid <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Flexible

Sensitive <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Thick-Skinned

Stubborn <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Accommodating

Vain <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> Modest

Define any other personality traits that are important to your character below:

_____ <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> _____

_____ <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> _____

_____ <1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10> _____



NOTES



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: WHY YOUR CHARACTER MIGHT LIE

2.10

Put a check mark beside every reason you can imagine for why your protagonist might lie:

___ to hide a secret

___ to avoid facing the truth

___ to protect a loved one

___ to even a score or wreak revenge on an enemy

___ for personal gain

___ because he doesn't know what the truth is (has amnesia, wasn't there, misinterprets something he heard or saw, was intoxicated or stoned or unconscious, believes a lie someone else told ...)

___ because he's a pathological liar

___ other reasons: _____



NOW YOU TRY: NAME YOUR PROTAGONIST

2.11



NOTES

1. Think about what you want your character's name to convey. Strength? Vulnerability? Age? Ethnicity? Personality? Social class? Occupation? List at least four characteristics you want the name to suggest.

2. Now make a list of first and last names that meet your criteria:

FIRST NAMES	LAST NAMES

Pick the combination you like best.

3. Search the Internet for the full name you picked (using quotes) to see how common it is and if it's already been used in a book.



NOTES



ON YOUR OWN: PLANNING YOUR PROTAGONIST

2.12

1. Write a five-minute, one-paragraph biography of your protagonist that could actually appear in the novel.
2. List four of the most significant, formative events in your main character's life. Briefly describe the impact each event has had on your protagonist.

EVENT	IMPACT
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

3. Write a one-page, first-person monologue in your character's voice, talking about one of the events you listed in step two.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: THE VICTIM'S SECRETS

3.1

Write your own crime scenario on the following page. Brainstorm six possible victim's secrets. Think about which ones will work best in your novel.

YOUR CRIME SCENARIO: WHO GETS
HURT, HOW, AND WHERE

THE VICTIM'S SECRETS

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.



NOW YOU TRY: SPENDING TIME IN YOUR VILLAIN'S HEAD

4.1

Think about the villain in your mystery novel. Jot down your ideas.

Crime scenario:

Thumbnail sketch of villain:

Motive (ostensible reason for committing the crime):

Motive (how the villain sees the crime):

Life trigger(s):



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: MAKE THE CRIME FIT THE VILLAIN

4.2

How would your villain kill his victim? Consider your villain's motive, strength, and expertise. Consider the rage factor. Check the methods that could fit.

___ asphyxiate by smoke inhalation

___ beat to death

___ bludgeon

___ bury alive

___ drown

___ hang

___ mow down with machine-gun fire

___ poison with cyanide

___ poison with an insulin overdose

___ push in front of a train

___ run down with a car

___ run over with heavy equipment

___ shoot with a pistol

___ slit throat

___ smother

___ stab once

___ stab multiple times

___ strangle



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: THE SUSPECT'S SECRETS

5.1

For one innocent suspect in your novel, come up with the following:

Suspect's name:

Basic information:

Motive:

Lie(s):

Secrets:



NOTES



NOTES



ON YOUR OWN: INNOCENT SUSPECTS

5.2

1. Watch a crime show such as *NCIS* or *Law and Order*. List the characters who become suspects, and note the secrets revealed about each one. Notice that sometimes the secret makes a suspect appear to be guilty; other times the secret demonstrates a suspect's innocence.

Suspect:

Secrets:

Suspect:

Secrets:

Suspect:

Secrets:

2. Write a one-paragraph description of each innocent suspect in your novel.
3. Pick one innocent suspect in your novel. Brainstorm a list of possible secrets the suspect might be hiding.
4. Write a one-paragraph first-person monologue in the voice of the suspect you picked in step three, talking about the secret he's hiding.



NOW YOU TRY: TRAITS FOR A SIDEKICK

6.1

Make a list of your protagonist's characteristics; list the opposites you could give to a sidekick. Circle the ones you like best.



NOTES

PROTAGONIST	SIDEKICK
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: FIND AN ADVERSARY

6.2

Think about the characters you have planned for your novel. Which ones can act as adversaries? List the possibilities below, and brainstorm how each character can complicate your character's life or obstruct the investigation.

POTENTIAL ADVERSARY	COMPLICATIONS AND OBSTRUCTIONS



NOTES

1. List your characters and their goals. (Keep going until you run out of characters.)

Protagonist/goal(s): _____

Character/goal(s): _____

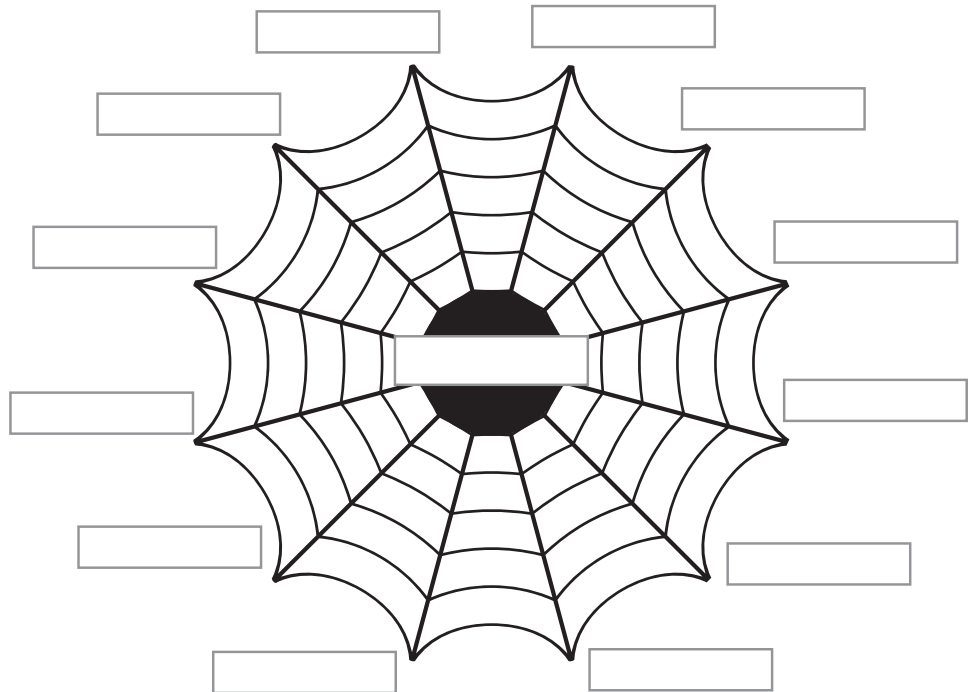
Character/goal(s): _____

Character/goal(s): _____

Character/goal(s): _____

Character/goal(s): _____

2. In the web diagram below, write your protagonist's name and her goal in the center; write the other character names in the other blocks. Draw arrows to show which characters are helping the protagonist, obstructing her, or both.



3. Assess. Have you built in enough conflict and enough tension? Think about how you can add more.



NOW YOU TRY: INCLUDING CONCURRENT EVENTS

Make a list of the events that are concurrent with your novel's time frame. List reasons in favor of including or excluding those events.

YEAR:

CONCURRENT EVENT	REASONS TO INCLUDE THE EVENT	REASONS TO EXCLUDE THE EVENT



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: MAKING THE MOST OF "WHEN"

8.2

Write down the year(s) and season(s) you've chosen to set your novel. Brainstorm a list of how your choices can affect your story in terms of investigational techniques, concurrent events, weather, and so on.

YEAR/SEASON	HOW YOUR CHOICE AFFECTS YOUR STORY



NOW YOU TRY: MAKING THE MOST OF "WHERE"

8.3

Pick a geographic location and list all the interior and exterior settings where you've chosen to set your novel. List the aspects of setting that you'll be able to use to your advantage in the story.



NOTES

GEOGRAPHIC LOCALE

ASPECTS YOU CAN USE IN YOUR STORY

INTERIOR SETTINGS

ASPECTS YOU CAN USE IN YOUR STORY

EXTERIOR SETTINGS

ASPECTS YOU CAN USE IN YOUR STORY



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: MAKING THE MOST OF THE BACKDROP

8.4

Write down the institutions and activities that provide a backdrop for your mystery novel. Make a list of the questions you need to answer in order to write a convincing backdrop.

BACKDROP: INSTITUTIONS AND ACTIVITIES	QUESTIONS TO BE RESEARCHED



NOW YOU TRY: IMAGINING A PERSONAL SPACE

8.5

Think about your character's bathroom and jot down the details that make this personal space unique:



NOTES

What's in the medicine cabinet?

What's in the trash?

What's on the sink?

Does the faucet drip?

Do the drains drain?

Are the towels hanging and folded?

How does the room smell?

What kinds of hair products are there?

Is it clean where you can see?

Is it clean where you can't see?



NOW YOU TRY: YOUR SLEUTH'S QUEST

9.1

In a sentence or two, describe your sleuth's quest. What does she want or need to achieve before the novel ends? Where does the quest start, and where does it end? Then make a list of plagues—potential setbacks, roadblocks, and other forms of misery you might throw in her way. Finally, decide how you're going to raise the stakes.

Your Sleuth's Quest



NOTES

Plagues

How the Stakes Are Raised



NOW YOU TRY: FIND YOUR OPENING SCENE

9.2

Review your crime scenario and your sleuth's quest. Think about where you want your story to start, and find a dramatic opening scene. Is it the crime itself? The start of the investigation? Or is it some other dramatic prelude to your story?

Write a one-paragraph description of your opening scene. Be sure your scene meets the criteria shown below.



NOTES

CRITERIA FOR OPENING SCENE	DESCRIPTION OF OPENING SCENE
1. Dramatic	
2. Poses an unanswered question that propels the reader forward	
3. Sets up your story	
4. Doesn't give away too much too soon	



NOW YOU TRY: ANALYZE PLOT STRUCTURE

To get the hang of how a mystery works, analyze the plot of a standard, one-hour crime show. These tend to be structured like mystery novels. They begin with a dramatic opening, and the commercial breaks impose a four-part structure. Usually there's a plot twist before each commercial. Often they end after the final dramatic scene, dispensing with a coda.

Watch a show and analyze the structure of the plot by filling out this scorecard:

	DESCRIPTION	MOST LIKELY SUSPECT AT THE COMMERCIAL BREAK
Opening scene: short scene at the very beginning, before the first commercial		
Plot twist before the next commercial break		
Plot twist before the next commercial break		
Plot twist before the next commercial break		
Final climax: final plot twist and resolution		



NOW YOU TRY: OUTLINE THE MAIN TURNING POINTS

While outlining the entire book in advance may seem daunting, mapping out the turning points is a good planning exercise. Briefly describe what's going to happen at a few key moments in your book.

KEY TURNING POINTS	WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN
Opening	
End of Act I	
Middle of Act II	
End of Act II	
Climax of Act III	



NOW YOU TRY: MAP A MULTIPLE-CHARACTER TIME LINE

Choose two major characters in your book, and list events from their pasts in chronological order; shade the rows for events they experienced together.

	CHARACTER:	CHARACTER:
Age on Page 1		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year:		
Year/Page 1:		



NOW YOU TRY: EXAMINING YOUR FAVORITE TITLES

10.1

Think about what you like in a book title. List five of your favorites—they don't have to be mysteries. What is it about each title that made it memorable, and what does that title evoke about the book itself?



NOTES

FAVORITE TITLES	WHAT MAKES IT MEMORABLE AND WHAT IT EVOKES
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	



A BLUEPRINT FOR PLANNING A MYSTERY NOVEL

PREMISE: SUPPOSE ... AND WHAT IF ...

PROTAGONIST: THE MYSTERY SLEUTH

Name:

Reason for getting mixed up in investigating crimes:

Physical appearance:

Present status and ambitions:

Background:

Talents and skills:

Personality:

Tastes and preferences:

THE CRIME(S)

	CRIME 1	CRIME 2	CRIME 3
Crime scenario: Victim, modus operandi, scene of the crime			
What appears to have happened			
What really happened			
Why this crime matters to this sleuth			

THE VILLAIN

Name:

Thumbnail sketch:

Apparent motive:

How this character justifies the crime(s):

VICTIMS

Victim's name:

Thumbnail sketch:

What put this victim in harm's way:

Secrets:

Victim's name:

Thumbnail sketch:

What put this victim in harm's way:

Secrets:

INNOCENT SUSPECTS

Suspect's name:

Relationship to victim:

Thumbnail sketch:

Apparent motive:

Secrets and lies:

Suspect's name:

Relationship to victim:

Thumbnail sketch:

Apparent motive:

Secrets and lies:

Suspect's name:

Relationship to victim:

Thumbnail sketch:

Apparent motive:

Secrets and lies:

SETTING

Time: year, season,
concurrent events

Location: geographic locale,
exteriors, interiors

Context: institutions
and activities that
provide the backdrop

THE PLOT: MAIN TURNING POINTS

Dramatic Opening	Description:
Out-of-Whack Event	Description:
End of Act I Plot Twist	Description:
Middle of Act II Plot Twist	Description:
End of Act II Plot Twist	Description:
End of Act III Climax	Description:
Subplots	Description:

WORKING TITLE



NOW YOU TRY: SKETCH OUT A DRAMATIC OPENING

11.1

Review your description of your novel's dramatic opening. Then visualize the scene in your mind. Sketch it out below.

WHERE:

WHEN:

CHARACTERS IN THE SCENE:

WHAT HAPPENS:

QUESTION THAT PROPELS THE READER FORWARD:



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: INTRODUCE A MAJOR CHARACTER

13.1



NOTES

1. Write the first appearance of a major character using the one-two punch method. First describe the character; show with a few telling details. Then use dialogue and/or action to give the reader more insight into his attitude and personality.

INTRODUCE A MAJOR CHARACTER	DETAILS YOU MIGHT WANT TO INCLUDE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full name • gender • physical appearance • clothing • posture • hygiene • speech patterns or dialect • habits • voice • movement or gait

2. Now revise that first appearance, tweaking your word choices to convey as much as you can about the *narrator's attitude* toward this character.

REWRITE THE PASSAGE TO CONVEY THE NARRATOR'S ATTITUDE.



NOW YOU TRY: INTRODUCE A MINOR CHARACTER

13.2

Write a one-paragraph first appearance of a minor character.

INTRODUCE A MINOR CHARACTER

DETAILS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONVEY

- full name
- gender
- role (co-worker, neighbor, etc.)
- approximate age
- a few telling details
- a bit of action or dialogue



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: INTRODUCE A WALK-ON

13.3

Write the appearance of a walk-on character. All it takes is a sentence or two.

WRITE THE APPEARANCE OF A WALK-ON CHARACTER

DETAILS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONVEY

- role (waitress, pedestrian, etc.)
- gender
- a telling detail or two



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: CONTINUE WRITING THE SCENE

14.1



NOTES

Continue the scene. You decide if the caller hangs up or leaves a message. You furnish the apartment. Is it a jumble of legal briefs and law books covering coffee table and desk, or is it neat as a pin, all chrome and glass on white carpeting? Pick details that convey to the reader, in a few brushstrokes, something about the attorney who lives there. Put us inside Jason's head as he moves from room to room. What does he think when he notices the acrid smell? What does he see when he gets into the bedroom? Where's the Doberman? Convey how Jason feels by *showing the reader his reaction*, not by telling.

CONTINUE THE SCENE.

A jolt went down Jason's spine when the phone in the apartment rang. He inhaled and drew back, pressing his shoulder against the wall. *Rrrring*. No claws scrabbling on the wood floor. *Rrrring*. No footsteps. *Rrrring*. A click, and there was Drew's voice. "Sorry I can't come to the phone ..."



NOW YOU TRY: REVISE THE NARRATOR

15.1

Revise the scene between Sharon and Bob. Use only this dialogue:

BOB: "Sharon?"

SHARON: "What do you want now, Bob?"

BOB: "Hold up a sec."

COMMUNICATE THIS WITH INTERNAL DIALOGUE—

From Bob's point of view: Bob is a private investigator, deliberately acting like a goofball so he can get close to Sharon without revealing his true identity.

From Sharon's point of view: Sharon is madly in love with Bob, but afraid to show her true feelings because he sees her as a friend.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: SLIPPING AND SLIDING POINT OF VIEW

15.2

Read the passage below and find the point-of-view shifts.



NOTES

PASSAGE

When Corrigan looked up, he saw Mary gazing at him like a lost puppy. He looked away, got up, and made for the door. As she watched him leave, her look hardened.

“So you think you don’t owe me anything?” she said, her voice raspy and dull.

He whipped around, his eyes blazing.

“I don’t owe you a damned thing.”

He had no business treating her like that. Mary stumbled to her feet, her fists clenched.

POINT-OF-VIEW SHIFTS

Revise the entire passage so Corrigan is the only narrator.

PASSAGE IN CORRIGAN’S POINT OF VIEW



NOW YOU TRY: WRITE A DINER OF YOUR OWN

17.1

Write a paragraph or two in which your character is sitting in a diner reading a menu in rural Vermont, Malibu, Tijuana, your home town, or the town where you've set your novel. Pick details that give that setting its own unique flavor.

WRITE A DINER OF YOUR OWN.



NOTES





NOW YOU TRY: ADDING BODY LANGUAGE

18.1

Combine physical gestures, internal dialogue, and body language with the dialogue below to develop one of these scenarios. Alter the word choice and add more dialogue to convey the dynamics of the scenario you pick.

BASIC DIALOGUE	SCENARIOS
<p>"Are you going to tell me what happened?"</p> <p>"Well—"</p> <p>"What did you see?"</p> <p>"I saw a car. Red. Coming fast. I got the hell out of the way."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A PI questions a seven-year-old boy who's afraid that if he admits what he saw, he'll be punished. (He was supposed to be in school.) • A reporter questions the bereaved mother of the murder victim. • A police officer questions a local thug who, until now, has denied he witnessed anything.

Write the Q&A, adding physical gestures and body language to convey one of the scenarios.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: MIX UP CLUES AND RED HERRINGS

18.2

Write a few paragraphs in which your sleuth does one of the following:

- inspects a murder scene
- searches a victim's bedroom
- examines a suspect's car

Have your sleuth find at least one real clue that implicates the villain, but camouflage it among false clues and extraneous details of everyday life.

WRITE AN INVESTIGATION SCENE THAT MIXES RED HERRINGS AMONG THE CLUES:



NOTES





NOW YOU TRY: ANALYZE SUSPENSE

Analyze this passage from Hank Phillippi Ryan’s *The Wrong Girl*:

Jane couldn’t move. Couldn’t risk it. From her place against the wall—light switch stabbing her in the back through her jacket—her line of sight was a narrow sliver.

She couldn’t see the office door across the carpeted hall. She’d have to listen for the click of the latch. Listen for footsteps.

When whoever it was got close enough to her, she’d have them in view. Briefly. Long enough to know the score. If it was Jake and all was well she’d stay hidden, and he’d never know she was there. Nor would anyone else.

In that case, she’d leave, come back later. Make an appointment. All by the book.

Her eyes hurt from having to look sideways. Her neck was complaining. But she couldn’t risk a move.

Footsteps. A door closing.

They were coming.



NOTES

WHAT HAPPENS	SENSORY DETAILS THAT CREATE SUSPENSE



NOW YOU TRY: CREATE SUSPENSE

Using the simple scene description below, make a list of sensory details you might use to create suspense. Try to use details that incorporate all the senses. Decide what the payoff will be. Then write the scene.

WHAT HAPPENS	SENSORY DETAILS TO CREATE SUSPENSE	PAYOFF
Janie M. locks the door to her office building and walks across the parking lot to her car. As she gets nearer, she realizes her car window is partly open (didn't she remember to close it?) and she catches a glimpse of a dark shape in the back seat.		

WRITE THE SCENE.



NOW YOU TRY: ANALYZE ACTION

Read the following action sequence from Kate Flora's *Liberty or Death*. List the ways Flora uses the language and sentence structure to convey action. Notice, also, how she conveys heroine Thea Kozak's complete exhaustion, despite the action that's going on.



NOTES

EXCERPT FROM <i>LIBERTY OR DEATH</i>	HOW LANGUAGE AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE CONVEY ACTION
<p>I took some quick steps forward, raised my gun, supporting it in two hands as I'd been taught, and fired. I kept it pointed toward Belcher and kept on firing until the gun was empty. Fired at his back. Fired at his side, fired as he turned to face me. Fired as he took a step forward and brought his gun the rest of the way up. I fired until he fell onto the ground and lay still. If I'd had more ammunition, I would have gone right on firing.</p>	1.
<p>I sat down then, a surprised collapse, the sudden boneless fall of a baby just learning to walk. Still holding the gun, I brought my knees to my chest, and rested my head on them.</p>	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.



NOW YOU TRY: MAPPING OUT THE ACTION

20.2

1. Find a two-character action sequence from a television show or movie.
2. Play one minute of this scene with the sound turned off, and replay it as many times as necessary to map out the sequence below.

WHO:

WHERE:

WHAT HAPPENS:

NOTES

CHARACTER ONE'S ACTIONS

CHARACTER TWO'S ACTIONS





Rewrite this action sequence, getting rid of the clinical detail.



NOTES

ACTION INFESTED WITH CLINICAL DETAIL

YOUR LEAN AND VISCERAL REVISION

He took three steps forward and stood facing me, inches away. His breath smelled like he'd been chewing on old tires. I averted my face, a quarter turn to the right, and poked my left index finger into the middle of his chest. He stepped back six inches, tilted his head twenty degrees, and batted away my hand.



NOW YOU TRY: WRITE INTROSPECTION

21.1

Your protagonist wakes up in pain and in a small confined space, up to his ankles in cold water. Write an introspective scene as he deduces that he's in a basement closet and the water is rising.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: PUT BACKSTORY INTO NARRATION OR DIALOGUE

22.1

Jot down some aspects of your character's life history or professional background that you want to convey to the reader early on in your novel.

1.

2.

3.

NOTES

WRITE IT AS NARRATION.

WRITE IT AS DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO CHARACTERS.



NOW YOU TRY: LAYER BACKSTORY INTO A MEMORY OR FLASHBACK

22.2



NOTES

1. Jot down an event in your character's past that you want to convey dramatically to the reader.

2. Write the flashback as internal dialogue—a memory triggered by something in the present. Write the trigger, then the memory.

3. Write an extended flashback. Remember to orient the reader to the time-and-place shift, shift the verb tense (present to past or past to past perfect), and segue back to the main story at the end.



NOW YOU TRY: HITTING BOTTOM

23.1

How does your character hit bottom in the buildup to the final confrontation with the villain? Check the items that apply, and describe them.

Injured

Ill

Exhausted

Overmatched physically

Blocked

Restrained

Mentally impaired

Afraid

Disarmed



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: WRITE THE FINAL CODA

24.1

A final coda is a workhorse of a scene, so a little housekeeping is needed to make sure it provides a satisfying conclusion to your novel. Make a list of everything you want the ending to accomplish.



NOTES

ELEMENTS OF A CODA	WHAT YOU WANT YOUR CODA TO INCLUDE
Fills the reader in on what happened since the climactic scene	
Ties up loose ends	
Ends subplots	
Deliberately leaves subplots dangling	
Communicates the protagonist's feelings about the resolution	



NOW YOU TRY: COMBINE DIALOGUE AND ACTION

26.1

DIALOGUE: "Don't move. If you do, I'm going to have to shoot you."

ACTION: The gun trembled as he gripped it with both hands.

Combine the elements and circle the version you feel is most effective.



NOTES





Add your own concerns to the list of questions below.

QUESTIONS

1. What did you like or dislike?
2. Is the story holding your interest, or does it bog down in places?
3. Is the story easy to follow or confusing?
4. Did any parts seem implausible? What doesn't make sense?
5. Are there aspects of any of these characters that you especially like or dislike?
6. Were there any characters who didn't ring true? If so, which ones, and how did they seem artificial?
7. Does the story so far seem predictable or surprising?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

Give the questions and the chapter to a trusted friend or fellow writer. Invite that person to read the material, write her reactions on the manuscript, and think about the questions.

Sit down and discuss the chapter with your reader. Go through the questions. While you're listening, jot down notes about the person's comments along with notes about your personal reactions.

NOTES ON THE CRITIQUE

NOTES ON YOUR REACTION TO THE CRITIQUE

Assess both the critique and your reactions. During the next critique, try to consciously adjust anything you are doing or feeling that might prevent you from getting the most out of the critique.



NOTES



NOW YOU TRY: FIND YOUR OWN FIX

Return to the comments you captured during the previous exercise. In the table below, note the reader's main criticisms or suggestions on the left, and note the changes you're going to make on the right.

THE READER'S CRITIQUE	MY FIX



NOW YOU TRY: CREATE AN ACTION PLAN TO TARGET AGENTS

1. In the first column, compile a list of ten to thirty potential agents.

AGENT/AGENCY	REASON YOU PICKED THIS AGENT	CURRENTLY TAKING QUERIES?	COMPLAINTS	MEMBER OF AAR?	CONTACT INFORMATION

- Write down why you picked each agent:
 - name of the friend, relative, colleague, or other writer who referred you
 - date and event where you met the agent
 - published mystery author this agent represents
 - the great deal this agent recently negotiated
- Cut one: Check with the agency's website and eliminate any that are currently not taking queries.
- Cut two: Notice whether any agency on your list has had complaints against it, and if so, do you see a pattern? Websites with useful information for identifying agents with sketchy reputations include *Preditors & Editors* and *Writer Beware* (hosted by Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America).
- Check to see if the agent is a member of the Association of Authors' Representatives (www.aar-online.org/). While there are good agents who are not AAR members, it may be something to consider when you prioritize.
- Sort: Prioritize your list, from most desirable to least.



NOW YOU TRY: PREPARE TO APPROACH SMALL PRESSES

1. Decide if you want to be published by a small press.
2. Compile a list of small presses to target—fill in the first column below:

SMALL PRESS	REASON YOU PICKED THIS PUBLISHER	AUTHOR COMPLAINTS	THEIR BEST-SELLING AUTHORS	CONTACT INFORMATION

3. Check the reputation of each publisher on your list by consulting the Preditors & Editors website (pred-ed.com). Try to distinguish between a few disgruntled authors and a pattern of poor business practices. Eliminate any publishers with consistently reported problems.
4. Check out each publisher on your list in *Novel & Short Story Writer's Market*, published by Writer's Digest Books. Based on what you glean, add this publisher's contact information or eliminate it from the list.
5. Search Amazon for mysteries published by each publisher, and note their sales rank. Search *inside* some of its books to see if they are professionally presented and edited. Decide whether this publisher seems like the company you want to keep.
6. Sort. Prioritize your list from the most desirable small presses and independent publishers to the least.
7. For your final choices, visit the publisher's website and prepare a query package that meets their specifications for submissions.