

# Mystery / Crime Thriller Plot Outline

For more information about plot outlines, go to: <https://www.novel-software.com/genrestorytemplates>

## Act 1

Present the crime	Mysteries and crime thrillers often begin with a prologue in which the inciting crime takes place. The first crime is very likely to be a murder or kidnapping. This is from a POV that is not the main protagonist, it may be from the point of view of the victim, the killer, or an omniscient narrator.
Introduce the sleuth	Next we meet the sleuth, who is the protagonist. This person is often a professional detective, but not always. Sometimes they are a normal person thrust into a situation which gives them no choice but to take action – usually because someone they love is missing or threatened.
Offer plausible suspects	Arguably the most important objective of the murder or crime thriller is to keep the reader guessing who the perpetrator is. In order to do this, there must be several candidates, preferably all acting suspiciously. It will turn out that they're all acting suspiciously because they do all have something to hide, just not the murder. Obviously, the actual murderer will ideally not even make it to the reader's suspect list. During the course of the initial investigations, the sleuth will meet these people as well as gathering early clues and red herrings.
Introduce crime complications	Around this point another body may turn up, and there may be hints that this is all part of a larger conspiracy.
Introduce private life subplot	While hunting down the external criminal demons, the sleuth is also battling their own inner demons.

+ Add Act Item    Delete Act

## Act 2

Investigation and interrogations reveal further clues	Pressure should begin to build. If the sleuth is a professional detective, then they may feel pressure from their boss and colleagues. If they are a civilian, then they will get the sense that time is running out to find / save their loved one. They pick up the pace, following every lead and interrogating anyone who might know anything. Their efforts yield some results (including red herrings).
Disappearance of one suspect	Optionally, one of the key suspects will suddenly vanish, or turn up dead. This indicates that the murderer knows they are being investigated, and that the investigations are getting closer. The sleuth may then look even more closely into the dead suspect, discovering clues that the murderer was hoping to silence.
Raise the stakes	The sleuth gets the clear message that the more they dig, the more they are putting themselves a personal risk from the murderer.
Development of sub plot	Something about the case antagonises the sleuth's inner demons and they start to go off the rails while trying to hold it together.

+ Add Act Item    Delete Act

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## Act 3

Reveal hidden motives of stakeholders	Most of the suspects will have their secrets revealed, showing them to be flawed, but not murderers.	+	🗑️
Unsatisfying solution reached	There may be a false ending, where the case is closed. It may be that powers above have shut down the case, or that its believed that the perpetrator has been caught.	+	🗑️
Return to overlooked clue from act one	However, the sleuth can't help thinking that something just doesn't sit right. They pore over the case, trying to figure out what's wrong, and they stumble back onto a clue that they right at the very beginning of Act I, which finally makes all the pieces fall into place.	+	🗑️
Confrontation with perpetrator	The sleuth races to find the real perpetrator and confront them with their evidence. There is a big showdown, and the positive resolution is not certain until the very last moment.	+	🗑️
Resolution of subplot	The sleuth returns to their normal life, and buoyed by their successful heroism, they find the inner strength to confront their own demons. They return to every day life more fulfilled, complete and optimistic.	+	🗑️