

7 Secrets to Crafting the Cozy Mystery

1

What is a cozy mystery?

Written in the tradition of Agatha Christie, with an amateur sleuth solving a crime, usually a murder.

The term comes from “tea cozy,” indicating a comfort read, perhaps enjoyed with a nice cup of tea and a kitty on your lap.

Modern cozy mysteries must have a “hook” that fits into this well-defined marketing niche.

2

The amateur sleuth is anything but a wimp!

Cozy readers want a strong protagonist.

Usually a woman, any age. Smart with a sense of humor.

Compelling reason to solve the crime (ie, someone she loves is a suspect).

She makes good decisions.

She has flaws.

In cozies, the mystery is important, but readers come back because of the protagonist.

She will prevail, justice will be served.

3

Choosing your protagonist’s occupation/vocation might be the biggest decision you’ll make.

That occupation/vocation is the Big Kahuna of HOOKS in the cozy world.

Find a job that fascinates you, and it will fascinate readers.

Look at the market, then do something different, give it a new twist.

In a cozy mystery, readers want occupational details. If your protagonist is an herb gardener, we want details right down to the kind of dirt she’s using.

There are infinite ways to make a living. If you’ve ever been intrigued by someone’s career, it could inspire a cozy mystery series.

Cozy readers are looking for a new and interesting reading experience.

Example: the Bibliophile Mysteries feature a bookbinder who specializes in rare book restoration. A rare book is the catalyst for murder, treachery and revenge.



4

Quirky secondary characters are a must.

Secondary characters draw readers back to the series.

Friends, family, townspeople, a mentor, a thorn in her side.

Pets – usually cats, but dogs are popular, too.

Law enforcement presence.

Love interest.

Suspects, victim, killer.

5

The setting of a cozy series is a character itself.

Where most of the action takes place.

A place where the reader wishes she could live—and where you'll enjoy spending lots of time.

Small town or a "village" of support in a larger city.

Protagonist might know everyone in her world. . . and then a stranger enters.

The setting may be inextricably bound to the protagonist's occupation.

7

Cozy mysteries sell!

Study the market. What are editors

buying?

Cozy mysteries are currently hot. Lighter read, less trauma.

Plan for at least three books with ideas for more.

Don't kill off the whole town. Always strangers, old friends, new people visiting.

Romance grows slowly through the series. Protagonist grows and changes. Relationships change. Setting grows.

What cozies are not

Bloody murder

Intense violence

Explicit sex

Strong language

6

Despite the emphasis on characters, cozy mysteries really must have a plot.

POV, almost always first or third.

Ordinary world, something changes, body is discovered, protagonist decides she must solve the crime.

Clues, red herrings. In each chapter, a new fact is revealed. Each chapter is almost a turning point of its own.

Subplots—relationship/romance, secondary characters. In the Bibliophile Mysteries, there's often a subplot around another rare book. Subplots work best when they weave in and out of the main storyline.

Juicy occupational details.