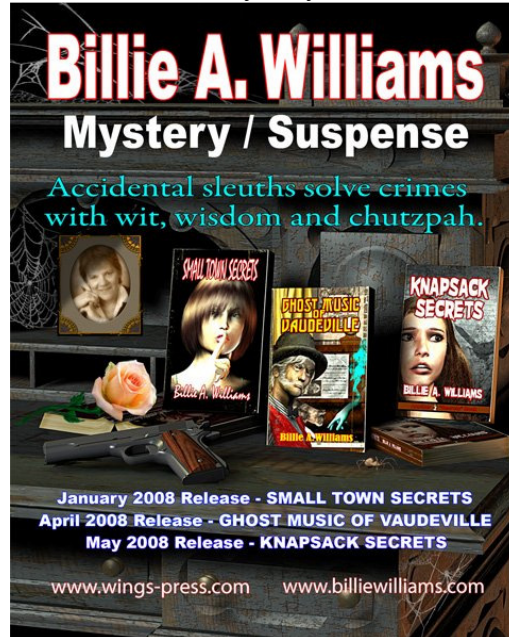


TIPS –  
For the Mystery Writer



(These are specifically for Mystery Writers but most of them apply to all genres.)

1. How to start:
  - Every story beginning starts as a thought an idea~~a what if? in your mind.
  - A curious, an open mind, a sharp eye for seeing what might be, a tuned ear, writers are allowed to eaves drop— these are the things every writer needs.
  - Check your local newspaper for ideas. If there were burglaries, a series of them, begin by asking yourself questions such as: -How did the thief know no one would be home-was he friend or neighbor who would know their schedule? What were they looking for; did they steal the same thing from every house that was robbed? After the where—the who, what, when, why should being your thinking to turn this newspaper article into your own story.
2. Characters for me are the beginning of any story I write. The idea, what my main premise or theme is, and then I pick and choose my main character. One who can display all the traits needed to fully develop and tell the story.  
The main characters station in life, his or her personality, the psychological make-up and more will determine which direction your plot will grown. This will be your protagonist.
3. Next select your other view point characters who will carry less weight than the protagonist, but have a voice in your story. These might include the antagonist, the confidant or best friend, the romantic interest if there is to be one. Then the miscellaneous/secondary characters. These secondary characters have what amount to cameo appearances. They are not view point people, but they have a needed place, a reason for being in your story, a function of their own, they aren't just window dressing.
4. The Plot. Always your plot is the result of a problem your main character has either with in him (inner or psychological) with his environment, or with some other character or

characters, or entity (a company, or organization for instance). In the mystery story the problem has to do with solving the mystery.

Your questions should be what should the main character discover? It doesn't need to be a murder—it merely needs to be a crime that threatens your protagonist's status quo. What or who will get in your sleuth's way so that his/her solution won't come too easily.

5. Here comes the fun part. Make a list of the clues you could use in your story—you don't necessarily have to use all of them that you list, so make the list extensive. Pick which one will be your decisive clue. Which one proves to be so vital to your story that it is the one that sets your sleuth on the trail to solve the mystery? This piece of information, this pivotal clue might be something that points directly to the criminal (the antagonist).
6. Another area always included in a mystery is your 'red herrings' the original meaning of this term will clarify exactly what this means to your mystery. Originally, a herring, which is quite the odiferous fish, was dragged across a trail to confuse and confound the dogs training to be trackers in fox hunts or man hunts. (the blood hound, and the fox hound are examples)

These make your mystery harder to solve, but also challenge your reader. Red Herrings are slipped in where they act as a distraction or diversion while a real clue slips by unnoticed by our readers and perhaps your sleuth at this point. Usually, but not always this covert clue, will trigger a recollection in his/her mind at some crucial later point in the story to help solve the mystery.

7. Think about the mysteries you've read. Suspense is a very big part of the mystery genre. Scaring your character with footfalls being heard on the darkened stair case, a door squeaking slowly, deliberately open or slammed shut, raises the hackles on your readers' and sleuth's necks. This is but one way to get your readers to identify with your sleuth as they both shiver in fear.
8. In some mysteries, the setting becomes a character and does as much to flavor the story as any of the characters. It is true your setting should fit the mood of your story. It could be a dank damp Sunday afternoon with a fog so thick you can't see your hand in front of your face, it could be a dark drizzly night, it could be a sunny day when your sleuth needs to proceed to the dark dungeon like basement and its array of rooms... Think of Snoopy, the Peanuts character's dog sitting on top of his dog house typing "it was a dark and stormy night." Write what your reader will be able to visualize. Make it so vivid, so real a reader can't help but feel the angst of your sleuth or character. Remember, don't TELL us s/he was afraid make us feel it by SHOWING with details that pulls our emotion into the same panic sphere your character is in. Need an example? Read a Stephen King or John Saul novel.

9. The best place to begin your story is ‘in media res,’ or in the middle of some action already happening. Mysteries (any story really) should begin with action, with a gun shot or at the very least, something exciting, or very interesting. A hook to pull your reader into your story. Most manuals on writing suggest an action beginning that quickly introduces your main character—your protagonist.

My book, *Skull Music*, starts with my main character/protagonist arriving at the scene of flashing police and ambulance lights against the faded, dilapidated walls of the narrow alley way behind stores on Main Street where a mutilated body has been discovered. In the car of the victim are a cassette tape which turns out to be recorded sounds, weird noises no one can place on it and a very strange x-ray that couldn't be of a human skull, but what is it. Clearly the chief investigator is nearly sick and one of his rookie deputies leaves the scene to regurgitate from the dread of the scene.

10. Before you begin, know how the story will end. If you set a story goal before you write the first paragraph—the story goal will be your ending—you will be like an archer aiming for the bull's eye on a target and your story will be straight on the mark even with all the twists and turns of a good mystery – you want to keep your eye on the bull's eye, i.e. the story goal.