



NEW WRITING  
NORTH  
YOUNG WRITERS



## Cosy Crime Week:

Cosy Crime is a sub-genre of the Mystery/Crime genre. Although it is based around the solving of a crime, (usually murder!), cosy crime downplays violence and gore, and instead focuses on unravelling the mystery. This can make for some fun plotting adventures. Over the course of the next five days, we are going to plan, write and edit our own cosy crime stories.

The features of cosy crime tend to include:

- An everyday amateur detective – this person could be just like you or me and even though they're usually dismissed by the actual police force, they have special skills that help them to crack the mystery
- A closed community location – whether your setting is a village, or an even more isolated location, there tends to be a limited number of people who could have committed the crime
- A cast of characters – everyone should have a motive for committing the crime
- The murder victim – usually someone quite unpleasant who gives people a lot of reason to dislike them; although the murder tends to be using a method that isn't too violent or gruesome (poison tends to be popular!)
- Clues and red herrings so that the reader can try and guess along with your detective – clues are pieces of information that lead you to the correct answer, red herrings are pieces of information that lead you to the wrong answer!
- A fair solution – although you want to surprise your reader with the solution to the crime, you want them to feel that it was 'fair' and that they had the pieces of the puzzle to be able to work it out

Cosy Crime is a popular genre with all ages!



### **Middle Grade (roughly ages 8-12):**

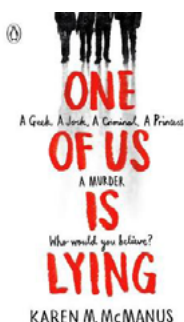
Think a kid can't be a detective? Think again!

### **Young Adult (roughly ages 12-17):**

Try Karen McManus and her teenage sleuths! *One Of Us Is Lying* is a great example of a 'closed community' because the murder had to be committed by somebody in the detention room!

### **Traditional Literature:**

Agatha Christie is well known as one of the most famous and prolific crime writers. Her character Miss Marple is an elderly woman who lives in a village and solves all sorts of murders that happen! (If you have access to watch ITVHub, you can get episodes of the ITV adaptation of Miss Marple for free).



## Day One: Creating your Detective

In cosy crime, the detective is not usually a member of the police force or a professional detective. Instead, it is more likely that your detective is an average member of the public. This is enjoyable for the reader, as they can plant themselves in the middle of the story and imagine themselves as able to solve a crime. Your detective is going to be the main character of your story.

### Activity 1:

Start by drawing a picture of your detective.

In one colour, write all the things about them as a person that make them 'ordinary'. These are the facts that make them an everyday sort of person who the police wouldn't take much notice of.

In a second colour, write all the things about them as a person that help them to solve the crime. This could be a particular interest in solving puzzles or listening to true crime podcasts. How did they get the skills to deduce the murderer?

### Activity 2:

Answer the following questions about your detective:

- Who is the most important person in their life? What is their relationship like with this person? How would this person react if your detective told them they were investigating a murder?
- What is your character's link to the police? Do they have a contact in the police who gives them information? Or is it the opposite and the police want them to stop meddling?
- How does your detective find clues? Do they eavesdrop? Use an intuitive 'feeling'? Perhaps you want your crime to have a fantasy element and your detective can read minds!
- What is your character's biggest 'flaw'? How can this hold them back in their investigation? For example, perhaps they are quite arrogant and can't help but brag about how clever they are, and this leads the police to shut them out of the investigation for a while, meaning they have to learn to be more sneaky!
- What is your character's motive? Why do they want to solve the crime? Was the victim someone they knew well?

## Day Two: A Closed Community

In cosy crime, there tends to be a limited number of people who could have committed the crime. This is to make the game or puzzle 'fair' for the reader. One way this can be achieved is by creating a closed community. This means that for the purposes of solving the crime, the location is in some way separate from the wider world. Here are some examples – feel free to choose one of these or create your own!

- A village cut off from society due to a snowstorm
- A theatre or cinema, where the murder took place during a show
- A plane in the air where the murder took place during the flight

### **Activity 1:**

Decide on the location of your closed community! Where might the murder happen? Why is this an exciting place to explore?

Create a map of your closed community:

- If this is a village or town then you'll need to identify the key places and locations
- If this is a single building or house you'll need to identify the key rooms and how they connect to each other.

### **Activity 2:**

Write an opening description of the first time we are introduced to the location, before the murder happens. Why is your detective there?

## Day Three: A Cast of Characters

Now you have your detective and a closed community, you need a crime for them to solve! Start by **creating a cast of characters**

Now, consider the suspects. Ideally, you want to create a whole cast of characters – some who can be easily ruled out as the murderer, some who leave you guessing, and, of course, your actual murderer!

The location you decided on yesterday can help you to create a cast of characters!

- If your closed community is a family gathering, then you will automatically have people who fit into certain roles (e.g., father, mother, grandma, grandpa, auntie, uncle, cousins, brothers, sisters... etc.).
- If your closed community is a village, then you will automatically have people who perform certain jobs in the village (e.g., doctor, shopkeeper, dentist, headteacher, police)
- If your closed community is more unusual like a theatre or a plane, then you will have people who are in positions of 'power' (the pilot or the lead actor) and people who are at their mercy (the passengers or the audience)

### Activity 1:

Using the grid below, or drawing your own, make a list of the 'type' of people you would meet in your situation. Then in the next column, list the 'stereotype' of this sort of person. In the final column, make a list of ways you could surprise your reader by making your character different from what they might be expecting!

Role	Stereotype	Challenge
Grandma	Frail Not very good at technology Caring and kind Enjoys hobbies like knitting and reading	Strong? An expert in some type of technology? Cruel and vicious? Enjoys hobbies like collecting knives and playing electric guitar

Are some ideas appearing for your story? Make a note of them! You might not use all of your ideas but some of them will form the basis of your plot.

## Activity 2:

Out of the characters you've outlined, which one is going to be the murder victim? In Cosy Crime, this tends to be somebody who 'had it coming' – for any number of reasons, people dislike them and they have done some terrible things to people that means they aren't missed much! However, you might prefer to create a character who seemed like a wonderful person but was hiding secrets that can be revealed throughout your story.

To develop your victim, imagine that you are a journalist interviewing them. Answer these questions the way that your murder victim would answer them.

What do you do to relax?

Who is your closest friend?

Who is the person you have hurt most?

Where do you live?

What sort of clothes do you wear?

What is your dream holiday?

What is your biggest fear?

What are you known for?

Who do you most admire?

What is your best memory?

What is your biggest regret?

What are you most excited about in the future?

**Note: You're the author so you get to decide if they live to see this event or not!**

## Day Four: Motive and Cause of Death

Now you know who your murder victim is, and you have a list of characters who are suspects, it's time to start plotting your story.

The BIG question is: **Why would somebody want to kill your murder victim?**

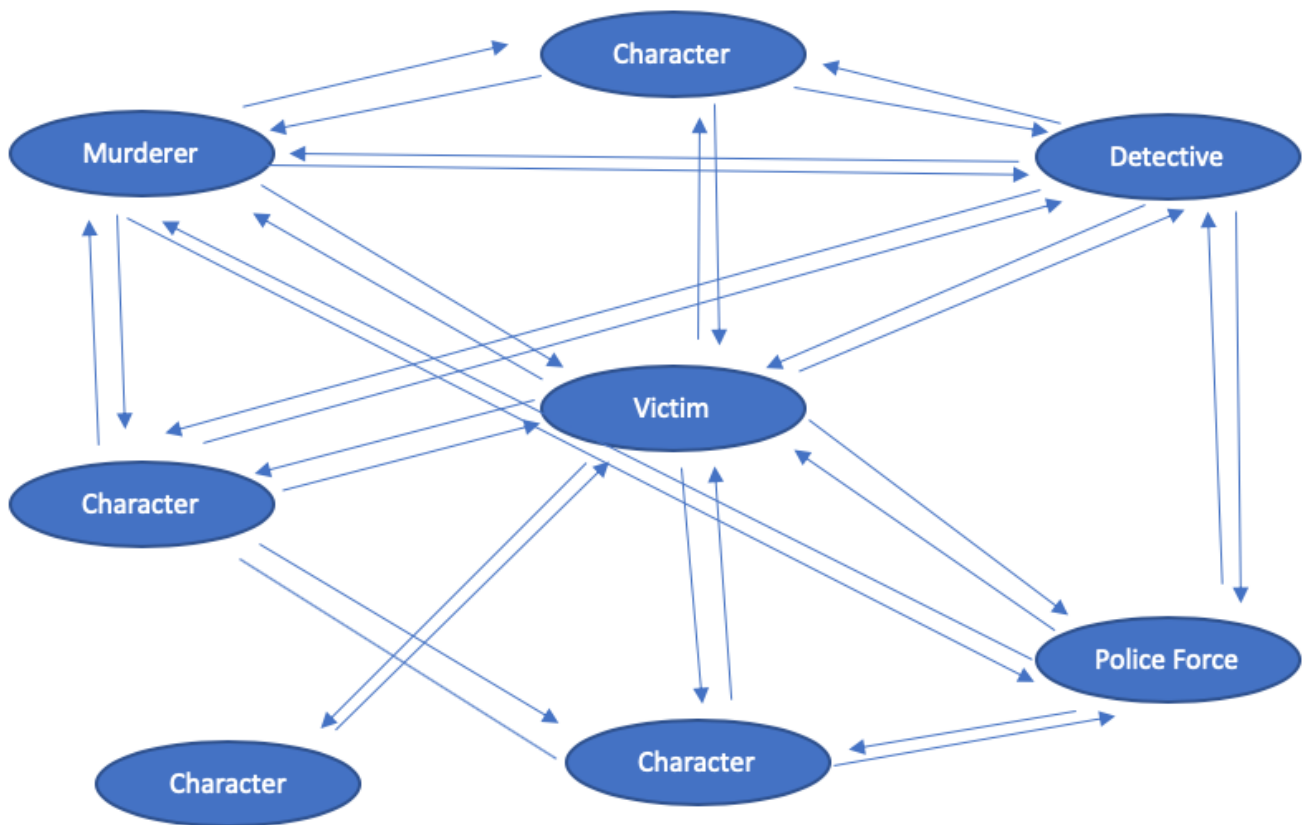
### Activity 1:

For each character you've outlined, come up with a motive for them. This makes it harder for the reader to guess your murderer, if everyone has a reason to want to kill them!

Which of these would make for the most satisfying revelation at the end of your story? Nominate this character as the murderer!

### Activity 2:

Draw a diagram of how all your characters are connected to each other. Start with the motives your characters have against the victim, but also include all the ways characters know each other. Some characters will know each other better than others and this might reveal story ideas to you. This will get complex quite quickly (see below!!) so don't worry if you need to do this task more than once.



### Activity 3:

Finally, can you decide how the murder happened? (Usually in Cosy Crime, this tends to be a method that isn't too violent or gory, like poison, but you're the author!)

Describe the crime scene and what was found – are there items which can act as the clues which ultimately reveal the truth?

## Day Five: Timelines

Before you can start writing, there are two timelines that you need to plan!

The first is **what actually happened**.

### Activity 1:

Create a timeline of the day of the murder.

Start by working out where the murderer and the murder victim were and what they did.

Then you can add the other characters – can you give them alibis? Remember, if a character doesn't have someone who can back up where they were, that makes them suspicious! You can use this as a 'red herring' to keep your reader guessing.

### Activity 2:

Create a timeline of **the order things are revealed to the reader**.

This will be from the perspective of your detective.

- How do they first find out about the murder? Are they the person who discover the body?
- Who do they speak to first?
- What is the involvement of the police?
- Decide the order they find the 'clues' that lead to the real murderer
- Add in 'red herrings', clues that lead them (and the reader) down the wrong path
- Does anyone else die throughout the story? Perhaps the key suspect dies, revealing their innocence?
- What is the murderer doing all this time?
- How does everything get revealed at the end?
- How does the murderer react to being uncovered? Is your main detective safe or do they need to escape the danger of the murderer?

**Once you've created all these documents, you have a solid guide to writing your own Cosy Crime!**

**This workshop was devised by Heather Askwith for New Writing North Young Writers.**

Heather Askwith has a Masters in Creative Writing from Northumbria University. She won a Northern Writers' Award in 2017.

New Writing North Young Writers is a programme for young people aged 12-19. We run creative writing groups, masterclasses and programmes in schools across the North East. We support young people to express their ideas, to work with professional writers and artists, to create and share new work, and to meet other young writers.

We would love to read your writing! Share it with us on social media using #writingfromhome or by emailing [youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com](mailto:youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com). Search for New Writing North Young Writers on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, where we will also be sharing regular writing prompts. Each week we will select a Young Writer of the Week whose work will be shared on our channels.

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