

**Excerpt from *Writing the Cozy Mystery: Expanded Second Edition*
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Traditional mysteries are akin to Agatha Christie novels, wherein the puzzle is the thing. Readers expect to solve a crime along with the sleuth. A cozy is a type of traditional mystery.

A cozy mystery can be defined as a whodunit featuring an amateur sleuth, a distinctive setting, and a limited number of suspects, most of whom know each other and have a motive for murder. These stories contain no explicit sex, violence, or bad language. For the most part, they are “clean” books that can be read by all ages. As one reader said, “I love a good mystery with no obscenities, smut or gory details.”

Humor is often evident in cozies (as witnessed by the “punny” titles), and so are recipes. Pets, crafts, and culinary skills are welcome, but don’t kill the favored cat or dog. While murder is usually the basis for the story, the focus of a cozy is on interpersonal relationships rather than crime scene details or lab results. Readers who don’t like to be frightened know they will get a lighthearted story with a challenging puzzle, interesting characters, and a view of a world they might not experience otherwise.

These novels center on the connections among individuals, and not on large, impersonal groups like global terrorists, international drug cartels, or secret government agencies. Those are reserved for thrillers that deal with a broader scope. Psychological studies of the criminal mind or profiles of serial killers don’t play a big role here either. These would more likely be seen in suspense novels. Police procedurals, detective stories, and courtroom dramas are other subgenres of the mystery field.

In a cozy, the sleuth’s world is just as important as solving the murder. We read these stories to learn about a new occupation or to vicariously explore a different locale. Readers like to follow the sleuth’s personal life, which is the key to bringing fans back for the next installment. Be prepared for the long haul with your characters and setting, because readers as well as editors prefer series.

The amateur sleuth is your average Joe or Joanne. This person is not professionally engaged in hunting down or prosecuting criminals. The sleuth may run into serious danger but isn’t physically damaged to any great extent.

Occupations of today’s protagonists range from bakery owners to antique dealers to real estate agents to caterers. Popular subcategories include culinary cozies, animal mysteries (i.e. pets), cozy craft and hobby mysteries. Paranormal mysteries may include ghosts or other supernatural elements, while historical mysteries always attract a following. Don’t be afraid if your story doesn’t fit into one of these subsets. Readers are always looking for something new and fresh, and so are editors.