



# How to Write a Damn Good Mystery: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide from Inspiration to Finished Manuscript

By James N. Frey

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## How to Write a Damn Good Mystery: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide from Inspiration to Finished Manuscript By James N. Frey

Edgar award nominee James N. Frey, author of the internationally best-selling books on the craft of writing, *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, *How to Write a Damn Good Novel II: Advanced Techniques*, and *The Key: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth*, has now written what is certain to become the standard "how to" book for mystery writing, *How to Write a Damn Good Mystery*.

Frey urges writers to aim high-not to try to write a good-enough-to-get-published mystery, but a damn good mystery. A damn good mystery is first a dramatic novel, Frey insists-a dramatic novel with living, breathing characters-and he shows his readers how to create a living, breathing, believable character who will be clever and resourceful, willful and resolute, and will be what Frey calls "the author of the plot behind the plot."

Frey then shows, in his well-known, entertaining, and accessible (and often humorous) style, how the characters-the entire ensemble, including the murderer, the detective, the authorities, the victims, the suspects, the witnesses and the bystanders-create a complete and coherent world.

Exploring both the on-stage action and the behind-the-scenes intrigue, Frey shows prospective writers how to build a fleshed-out, believable, and logical world. He shows them exactly which parts of that world show up in the pages of a damn good mystery-and which parts are held back just long enough to keep the reader guessing.

This is an indispensable step-by-step guide for anyone who's ever dreamed of writing a damn good mystery.

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### Editorial Review

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From the author of *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* (1987) comes a companion volume aimed at would-be mystery writers. Frey doesn't believe in those collections "of tips on what to do and what not to do," arguing that they give the false impression that writing good fiction is merely a matter of mixing ingredients in the right proportions. Instead, Frey contains, the key to a good mystery isn't picking clues and getting the technical stuff right; it's a matter of finding the right people to tell your story, finding the right words to frame it, finding the right sequence of events to maximize suspense. Frey also spends time on an important but frequently neglected aspect of the writerly trade: the audience. Who reads mysteries, and what do they expect from them? Meanwhile, he tackles the nuts and bolts in a particularly clever manner, by guiding the reader through the creation of a virtual novel, which he calls *Murder in Montana*. This approach proves eminently practical and rich in details. A must for budding crime-fiction authors. *David Pitt*

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### Review

"Confidently guides the novice through the crime-writing basics." ?*Publishers Weekly*

"Eminently practical and rich in details. A must for budding crime-fiction authors." ?*Booklist*

"Frey ... delivers a witty and entertaining writer's-conference-in-a-book." ?*Library Journal*

### About the Author

**James N. Frey** is the author of internationally bestselling books on the craft of fiction writing, including *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, *How to Write a Damn Good Novel II: Advanced Techniques*, and *The Key: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth*. He is also the author of nine novels, including the Edgar Award-nominated *The Long Way to Die*. He has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, Extension, the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, and the Oregon Writers' Colony, and he is a featured speaker at writers' conferences throughout the United States and Europe. Former students include recent Anthony award-nominees Betty Winkleman and Cara Black, and many best-selling authors including Marjorie Reynolds, Melba Beals, and April Sinclair.

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