

HO-19 Sentence Techniques

Knowing how to use different kinds of sentences can make your mystery writing more effective.

Here are some tips and techniques to keep in mind:

- **Use long, descriptive sentences.**

Descriptive sentences are important in a mystery story. If you want your reader to “see” the scene of a crime or to feel the mood of a spooky setting, you’ll have to include lots of details and good adjectives. A sentence that contains a descriptive list of possible clues is a good place to drop in that very important clue without making it look too obvious. Long sentences can be tricky to write – remember to watch out for run-on sentences, to use commas if you’re including a list, and to check to see if you’ve used the right connecting words to put ideas together.

- **Include questions.**

Most detective stories would be pretty short if the detective solved the mystery right away. Have your detective struggle with puzzling clues by asking himself or herself some tough questions. Your detective will also have to ask suspects and witnesses lots of questions to uncover the facts. Don’t forget those question marks?



- **Use short sentences.**

When you want the pace of your story to move quickly, or you want to heighten the suspense, try using a series of short sentences. For example, these could tell what is happening in a scene with lots of action, or show a series of thoughts racing through the mind of a desperate criminal about to be caught. Short sentences can be very effective, but don't overdo it. Too many short sentences can make your writing seem too choppy.

- **Exclamations create impact.**

Exclamatory sentences can show surprise, shock, fear, joy, or a sudden, brilliant idea. They can also suggest that a character is speaking with a lot of emotion. Exclamatory sentences are often more effective if you keep them short. Be careful – if you use too many exclamation marks, they will lose their impact. Save them for your most dramatic moments.



- **Balance is the key.**

Don't overdo it with any one technique in your writing. When you're reading over your first draft, check for too many long or short sentences in a row, too much description all at once, and too many questions or exclamatory sentences. All of these techniques can be very effective, but they'll lose their effectiveness if you use them too often. Check for a balance of different techniques by reading your story out loud or having someone read it to you. Your ears are one of your most valuable writing tools.