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Reference

You Can Write a Mystery
Gillian Roberts
Writer's Digest Books
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Award-winning author Roberts begins this text with a simple but too often overlooked reminder concerning the creative process: "…all disciplines have a craft component…" This is a practical crafting guide for first-time mystery writers and a life-saver for languishing manuscripts sunk in drawers. The book unmistakably outlines where the perspiration needs to go within the writer's inspiration.

You Can Write A Mystery covers most of the questions a novelist is faced with, from writer's block to the overuse of dialogue tags, sleuthing ideas to agent queries. Before the writing even begins, this book can help a writer organize his or her thoughts into a workable plan. Outlining and who does it is discussed as is how to build characters and use them to grow a plot, point of view choice and the use of a "spine" to keep the story together. Other areas such as dialogue, flashbacks and scene description are managed straightforwardly and illustrated with examples taken from the work of different and varied authors. Red-herrings and burying clues, problems specific to the genre, are expertly discussed and the solutions revealed.

The final sections of the book demonstrate how to refine the completed novel, many times with the use of a computer. There is a checklist for the finished manuscript and some excellent suggestions on how to pinpoint problems. Roberts, who writes under the pen name Judith Greber, is the author of the Amanda Pepper series, frequently featured by the Mystery Guild Book Club. She maintains that anyone can write a mystery, but certain rules must be adhered to.

New writers would save themselves hours of frustration by heeding the advice found on the labels of most complicated projects: Read Manual Before Assembling Product.

H. Shaw Cauchy