

Love You to Death

HOW TO WRITE A THRILLER

from Gina Blaxill

Are you interested in writing thrillers? Thrillers are an incredibly fun genre, ranging from ticking clock action-based stories to slow build suspense to murder mysteries. Here are my top five tips!

1. Strong first chapter

Many thrillers start with something exciting happening. That said, your opening doesn't HAVE to be super dramatic, with an explosion or a car crash. It's usually better if we've been properly introduced to the main character before the plot starts speeding along.

It is a good idea, however, to consider what the hook of your first chapter is. What is going to pique your reader's interest and encourage them to read on? Is it a creepy situation, sinister atmosphere or tension between characters? And what sets the story in motion? This is known as your instigating incident. Without it, there's no story.

Tip: If your first chapter is more of a slow burn, you could consider inserting something else before page 1. In *Love You to Death*, I open with the discovery of a dead body, then go back in time to show what happened leading up to the murder. This gives a teaser of what is to come, and sets a sinister tone.

2. Pace

Thrillers tend to be fast-paced, with constant bombshells and building intrigue. Sometimes, they're action-heavy, but you can also create thrills by building a strong atmosphere. But things do need to be happening - if you have pages and pages of characters chatting, and not a lot of action, you might need to stop and have a think. Speed up your pacing by revealing new information, throwing in something unexpected, or having your main character take a risk to find something out.

3. Suspects

Whether you're writing a ticking clock thriller or a murder mystery, something bad will be afoot, and someone will be behind it. Identify who you want the reader to suspect, and why. Avoid having too many suspects - it's better to have better developed characters than lots of vaguely suspicious ones. Some suspects can be proved innocent before the denouement - it's satisfying to cross names off as the story progresses - and make sure you employ red herrings. These are clues or pieces of information designed to mislead the reader. Perhaps your protagonist finds incriminating evidence in a suspect's room that appears to prove

without doubt that he's guilty, but later discovers it was planted by someone else. Or maybe she overhears a conversation that sounds very suspicious but which upon investigation turns out to be innocent.

4. Twists

Readers love things they don't see coming! We often think of twists as a sudden reveal at the end, but you can also consider a big midpoint twist, to send your protagonist (and your readers) in a different direction. Twists usually involve getting your reader to think one thing, and then flipping their assumptions completely. Try identifying your twist, then considering how you can pave the way for it and drop little clues to hint at what's to come (without giving the game away!). The best twists are guessable but not obvious!

5. An interesting protagonist

Thrillers tend to be quite plot-driven, but your characters need to shine, too, else your reader won't care about what happens. Your protagonist needs a compelling motive (i.e. something that they want) so we can relate to them, and cheer when they succeed! In *Love You to Death*, Mia has an obsessive stalker. If she wants life to return to normal, she has no choice but to unmask them.

There are lots of other things that make an exciting thriller but these are my top five tips! While there are some genres you can make up the plot of as you write, I'd suggest that with thrillers it pays to know who did what and why, and plot out at least a couple of key events before you start. If you're stuck, read a thriller for inspiration, and think about what makes it so brilliant. And, of course, the most important thing of all is to have fun!

