

How to

WRITE DEADLY CRIME THRILLERS

**A No BS Guide
with 101 Killer Tips**

From Retired Homicide Detective
and Forensic Coroner, Now
Bestselling Crime Writer

GARRY RODGERS

Edited by Sue Coletta



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How To Write Deadly Crime Thrillers — A No BS Guide with 101 Killer Tips From Retired Homicide Detective and Forensic Coroner, Now Bestselling Crime Writer Garry Rodgers

Edited by Fellow Bestselling Crime Writer — Sue Coletta

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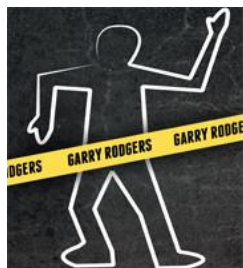
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This guide was edited by fellow Bestselling Crime Writer, Sue Coletta. Subscribe to her Murder Blog at SueColetta.com and visit Sue at:

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Preface

What's in this for you?

You're probably a crime thriller writer or you wouldn't be reading this. And because you're reading it, you obviously want to get something from it.

What I'm giving you is my writing experience from three careers. One as a homicide detective. Second as a forensic coroner. And now, as a bestselling crime writer.

Writing crime fiction is like investigating murders. You deal with lies.

Everyone lies to the police. Complainants lie. Witnesses lie. Lawyers lie. Believe it or not, even the crooks lie to the cops.

Homicide investigators are extremely good at detecting lies. They're human lie detectors. And they know that to get people to cooperate in investigations, there has to be something in it for them—just like there has to be something in this for you.

I'm giving you 101 tips on how to effectively lie to people. Because, as a fiction writer, that's what you do. You lie to your reader. Your reader signs-on for a pack of lies when she buys into your story, and you owe her an excellent load of excrement in return.

It's called "**suspension of disbelief**." That's what your fiction writing must do. Your reader must get so immersed in the story that she forgets it's all lies. The best stories string her along so well that she can't put it down, and that's the best compliment you, as a writer, can ever get. So you have to be really good at getting away with telling lies.

By the way, I want something from you in return and I've snuck it into one of the tips. You'll have to read on to find out what I want.

And no, I won't bullshit you. I used to be a cop for God's sakes. I might not have been a very good one, but that's beside the point.

Here's your ***No BS Guide with 101 Killer Tips on How To Write Deadly Crime Thrillers.***

PART ONE — THE SCIENCE OF STORY

Tip #1 — Understand Story

A story is about what happens (***Plot***) that affects people (***Characters***) who are trying to achieve a difficult goal (***Conflict***) and how they change as a result (***Resolution***).

Tip #2 — Understand Storytelling

Storytelling is about communicating what's happening. Humans are inherently curious creatures and, to keep your reader in the story, you must keep her constantly wondering about what's coming next.

Tip #3 — Understand The Crime Thriller Genre

Crime Thrillers involve sensational murders with huge overtones.

People are fascinated about these types of murders for the same reason they can't avoid looking at horribly gruesome accident scenes. Like they say in the news business, "If it bleeds, it leads." Being killed is the worst thing that could happen, and it's your reader's instinct to want to know what will happen, especially in perilous situations.

As a Crime Thriller genre writer, your job is to give your reader what she wants in a way she doesn't expect. Successful crime thriller writers know the conventions that make-up the story's genre or classification.

When setting out a crime thriller, it's vitally important to consider what kinds of expectations your story creates, so you can gratify readers in surprising ways. Remember—every agent and editor is a reader, too.

Suspense fiction is composed of **three main genres**—mystery, crime, and thriller. Each has its own sub-genres and individual expectations. Managing the reader's expectations is the core of genre.

Mystery, on the mild left of the spectrum, deals with the question “**What did happen?**”

Mysteries can be cozy or hard-boiled—both having reader expectations that a crime will be solved and the truth revealed. Mysteries are the most cerebral of suspense stories. They have good vs. bad themes and problems to solve.

Crime, in the center, questions “**What is happening?**”

Crime stories have dramatic plots that go from bad to worse. Sub-genres are police procedural, noir, legal/courtroom dramas, and scientific, medical, or forensic settings. A crime has been committed and the perpetrator must be brought to justice.

Thriller, on the spectrum's roaring right, asks “**What is going to happen?**”

Thrillers are emotional rides with a ticking clock and terrible trouble looming, or it's over for the hero. Thriller categories include epic, psychological, and supernatural stories with plots of increasing doom and danger.

Crime Thrillers are a **hybrid genre** which make the reader ponder all three central story questions. A crime thriller asks “**How does the perpetrator of the crime impact the other characters as they face increasing obstacles in moving perilously towards the solution?**”

Invariably, a sensational crime occurred and another one is on its way, which is why serial killings are the most popular storylines for crime thrillers.

Crime thrillers mix the wonder of a murder mystery with the tension, heat, suspense, threat, and white-knuckle excitement of a thriller. Think of them as a mystery on Viagra. Readers of the genre have clear expectations that the plot and characters are complex, the crime is solved in a realistic way, the pace is fast, and the solution isn't going to be pretty.

Writers who stumble into the crime thriller genre without understanding what readers, editors, and agents expect are cooking a recipe for disaster. However, if you know what's on the menu, and find a way to serve it on a platter they've never seen, it'll result in the biggest tip you've ever received.

Tip #4 — Understand Cops & Crimes

Joseph Wambaugh, one of the best crime writers, says, “***The best stories aren’t about how cops work on cases, but about how cases work on cops.***”

Police officers are normal human beings with emotions. Some crimes are truly horrific and there comes a breaking point for even the toughest. I know of dozens who died early from excessive drinking, smoking, and suicide.

Many police officers suffer from degrees of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some cops are religious. Most are family orientated. And the vast majority are more loyal to their individual comrades than to their overall force. Don’t make your police characters super humans. Make them flawed in the same way we are in real life.

Tip #5 — Activate Your Reader’s Brain

Humans are hardwired for story. We think and learn in stories. We have a primal need to know what’s going down in order to work our flight or fight survival instinct.

Stimulating your reader’s desire to know what’s happening subconsciously fires neurons in her brain, which releases dopamine, nature’s crack, and chemically sucks her into the story. She gets immense pleasure from going along for the ride.

Tip #6 — Give Your Reader What She Needs

Stories allow your reader to simulate intense experiences without actually having to live through them. ***It’s like being shot at—without worrying about being hit.*** Stories give vital instructions on how to survive in life, allowing your reader to become the characters without ever leaving the safety of home. She needs to feel what the people in the story feel—for her entertainment and her protection.

Tip #7 — Balance Right & Left Brain

Stories engage the left side of the brain to process words and sequence of plot. The right brain handles imagination and visualization. The best told stories balance the brain’s natural ability to look for, recognize, and match patterns, giving your reader those critical and so-satisfying “Ah-Ha!” moments.

Tip #8 — Study Neuro-Linguistics

Mind language is an amazing science that underlies storytelling. Neuro refers to what's happening in the mind. Linguistics is how communicating through words influences the mind. It's the art and science of communicating. The best form of getting a message across is by stimulating your reader's senses.

Tip #9 — Apply Neuro-Linguistics

The right words, and the right sequence of words, activate your reader's neurological system. This affects her physiology, emotions, and behavior. When she makes sense of your story, she believes in its world. She captures and conceptualizes the experience. It's what makes her say, "*I couldn't put it down.*"

Tip #10 — Give Pleasure, Avoid Pain

Humans are pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding animals. We go to extreme lengths to achieve this in life. It's the same for your reader. She expects a pleasurable experience from your story, even when it opens with blood & guts. If she doesn't enjoy a pleasurable state quickly into it, she's going to put-it-down and forget about it. If it becomes painful, she's going to slam-it-down, and then slam you on Goodreads.

PART TWO — TELLING THE STORY

Tip #11 — Do Not Come Lightly To The Page

Be honest. Be original. Be brutally in their face. Your job is to tell it like it is. To hell with offending anyone. Say what the story's message is. The best stories challenge social norms.

Tip #12 — Write For One, Publish For A Million

To be authentic, you have to quit giving a shit about what anyone thinks of your work while you write. Let it come right from the depths of your bowels as if you're the only one who's ever going to read it. But when you edit and go to publish, assume that you're going to make the bestseller list once it's shipped. It's your responsibility as an author to produce a professionally published product.

Tip #13 — Don't Hesitate To Lie

Remember, ***a novel is a lie that tells the truth***. And if you write truthfully, your days as a member of polite society are numbered anyway. So tell the truth about society...by lying.

Tip #14 — Don't Be Boring

Your reader wants to be entertained. She wants to escape. Plunge her into your story world so she forgets her own boring world exists. Her life is pretty much plotless, so let her get it on with James Bond. A recent Goodreads survey said that 46% of readers "***put it down***" simply because the story was boring.

Tip #15 — Understand W-5

Who. What. When. Where. Why. These are the basic principles of all investigations. And they're the basics of storytelling. Tell the W-5. It's no more complicated than that.

Tip #16 — Think of Story as a Map

It's what the reader is going to see. Where she's going to go. It's the skin.

Tip #17 — Think of Plot as The Course

Plot is the sequence of events. It's the means to the end. And it's best that it's not mentioned, just silently hidden inside, supporting the story. It's the flesh.

Tip #18 — Think of Theme as The Destination

Theme is the point of the story. It's the emotional message that your reader connects with at the end. It's the universal truth your lies are telling. And remember that it's the story telling the theme, not the theme telling the story. Theme is the take-away from the story. It's the heart and soul.

Tip #19 — Ask The Central Story Question

Every riveting story has a main question that begs to be answered. To hook your reader, you must quickly and clearly ask it; preferably in the prelude, or at least in the opening paragraphs on Chapter 1. Periodically you should re-ask the question.

PART THREE — STORY IS ABOUT PEOPLE

Tip #20 — Know Why You Want To Tell It

Take a good look at your motive for telling the story. Why are you passionate about it? Passionate. You have to be passionate! If you're not, your reader won't be either. Then your writing is dead.

Tip #21 — Think of Your Ideal Reader

Tell your story as if you're writing a letter to your ideal reader. Who is she? Who's that perfect demographic who's buying into your BS? Think about her. Then ***write as if it's a long, passionate letter to her*** — about what happened.

Tip #22 — Let Your Reader Give-A-Shit

She's not thinking about story science. Chances are, she doesn't even know it exists. It's the characters that make her care. Who the people are and what's happening to them, that's what matters. People make the story. So make thrilling shit happen to the people, and she'll give a care about them.

Tip #23 — Jerk Her Emotions

All stories are emotionally-based. If we're not feeling, we're not reading. Everything we experience is coated in emotions that ask the question, "***Will it help me or will it hurt me?***" Neutrality bores the reader. Make your words hurt and make 'em hurt bad. Make her grovel on broken glass.

Tip #24 — Use Flawed Protagonists

The very nature of crime fiction is good guys vs. bad guys. No one's perfect, so don't make your good guy all that good. But avoid clichés like the hard-drinking, thrice-

divorced, doddling detective. Get creative. Make her a fat, little ferret-hoarder with schizoaffective disorder and a bone-blushing browser history.

Tip #25 — Don't Judge Your People

Your job is to lay out what happens as clearly and impartially as possible, then get the hell out of the way. Make your reader feel. She'll judge who's right and who's wrong. This is where you show, not tell.

Tip #26 — Understand Show vs Tell

Show vs. Tell is the most misunderstood advice in fiction writing. You **tell** a story, not show it. But you tell it through showing.

Confused? Don't worry. Most of us struggle with it. Put it this way. Don't just tell your reader that someone is an asshole. Show the guy pawing his decrepit, old mother's wedding ring. She'll get the gist. Trust her.

I'm sure you've heard all about show vs. tell. It's a tired adage, but the basic idea is that you're supposed to define scenes and characters through action rather than describing point-blank and forcing your reader to take your word for it.

It's a stylistic choice, one that makes more sense as you practice. In my opinion, you need to tell through narration/exposition some of the time. It can't be all show. The trick is finding balance.

Tip #27 — Just Tell The Goddamn Story

This is the best piece of writing advice ever and it comes from Stephen King. Nuff said.

PART FOUR — STORY HAS STRUCTURE

Tip #28 — Understand Story Structure

This is a direct quote from crime writer and editor Sue Coletta. "***If there's one secret to great storytelling, it's to understand structure. It controls the pace, creates empathy for your characters, aka rootability, and provides the reader a vicarious***

experience.”

A universal structure used since humans started telling stories is the three acts:

- Beginning Hook — The inciting event which disrupts a pattern of normality.
- Middle Build — Carrying momentum of the story by a point of no return.
- Ending Payoff — A resolution or denouement through a climax or showdown.

I saw a formula called $3 + 2 = 1$, meaning three acts with two crucial decisions made by the protagonist in each act makes for a great story structure. It's an interesting formula to keep in mind when revising for structure.

I also found these rules that apply specifically to crime thrillers:

- There has to be a crime at the center of the plot (Duh) with a good guy and a bad guy.
- There has to be an investigation with procedural details.
- There has to be building suspense—a thrilling chase against time with twist and turns and red herrings.
- The story has to make sense. It has to be believable and set within a real world with no contrived coincidences.

The best guy around who has a grip on structure is Larry Brooks, author of *Story Engineering* and *Story Physics* which are must-reads for crime thriller writers. [Click Here](#) for Larry's web site *StoryFix.com*. Larry says proper structure has these milestones:

- Opening scene
- Hook
- Inciting incident (optional)
- First plot point (20-25%)
- First pinch point (a peak at the antagonist force at 37.5%)
- Midpoint (50%)
- Second pinch point (62.5%)
- Second plot point (75%)
- Climax
- Resolution

Here's what plot points do:

- Introduce a threatening change.

- Always have consequences.
- Shoot events / drama off in a new direction.
- Have revelations that allow the reader to see things in new light.
- Result in things never being the same afterward.
- Ratchet up tension and suspense.

Notice how Larry's milestones fit with the $3 + 2 = 1$ formula. The best takeaway here is to read, understand, and apply Larry Brooks' advice.

Tip #29 — Sharpen Your Hook

Hooking your reader is getting her attention. Right away. Something that hooks her attention and makes her want to know more. You don't have to get her right into the brawl and you don't have to open with a body, a gunfight, a drug deal, or a drunken, axe-wielding, ride-on lawnmower chase. But you do need to open with a **powerful central story question**. Something exciting. As long as it hooks her emotions, you're golden.

Tip #30 — Never, Ever Open With The Weather

"It was a dark and stormy night and you just knew from the thunder and lightning that something really evil was about to happen." Good God! Please don't do this. That's like smashing your genitals with a club. Remember, you can describe the weather as part of the scene, but do not make it the focus.

Tip #31 — Be Careful With Prologues

There's nothing wrong with prologues. Probably half of the most successful crime stories open with prologues. It's an effective way of asking the central story question from the point of view of an earlier happening, but it must be entirely relevant to the first action scene. Keep your prologue fairly short because your reader wants to get on with the action. And don't open with the goddamn weather.

Tip #32 — Never End (or Begin) With A Dream

This is the kiss of death for editors and publishers. It's the brand of a rank amateur. And so is killing off your first point of view character at the end of Chapter One.

Tip #33 — Use Chapter Headers

Setting out chapter numbers or names, the date, time, and location are practical, effective, and accepted opening dynamics. It gets the When and Where out of the way, letting the scene carry on with the Who, What, and Why.

Tip #34 — Understand Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the basic units of writing, not words or sentences. They're like sound bites. Short paragraphs speed things up. Long ones slow the pace down. Watch the number of sentences in each paragraph, the number of words in each sentence, and the number of syllables in each word. Anything more than twelve lines in each paragraph will bog down your reader. And pay attention to how blogging is done.

Tip #35 — Don't Shy Away From Backstory

Everyone has a backstory. Something led up to who the people are and how they got into their mess. There's a balance needed to introduce backstory, by peppering throughout rather than dumping in large chunks (info dumping). And never, ever put backstory in the first ten pages.

Tip #36 — Use Read-On Prompts Often

At the end of every chapter you must give your reader a reason to read on—to turn the page and to not put it down for the night. To polish your prompts, go through your favorite bestselling author's books and see how they've done it. There's no crime in stealing techniques. Matter of fact, all the best writers do it. That's how we learn and grow.

Tip #37 — Use Cliffhangers Occasionally

Cliffhangers are a stronger device than read-on prompts, therefore, they should be used sparingly. For instance, when you change acts. Too many will overpower your reader.

Tip #38 — Use Foreshadowing Carefully

Foreshadows are the opposite of cliffhangers. They hint of a direction change or things to unfold, but can distract from your reader's natural ability to interpret the story as it's unfolding. Sometimes it's better to have a complete surprise leap down the back of your reader's pajama top rather than having them glancing over their shoulder. When using foreshadow, make sure it's for a crucial event. Leave the reader saying, "***Holy Shit! I shoulda seen that comin'.***"

Tip #39 — Resist The Urge To Explain (RUE)

Trust your reader's ability to figure it out. You never explain the punch line in a joke, so be careful about being too clear at times. If you insult your reader's intelligence, you'll piss her off, and she'll shut you down.

Tip #40 — Careful With Clichés

This is another piss-off for most readers. If it at all sounds like a tired old cliché, don't use it. Get creative and invent your own. That, your reader will love.

Tip #41 — Think Theatre-Of-The-Mind

This might qualify as a cliché, but it's exactly what's going on in your reader's head. For most readers, sight is the most powerful sense. She has to see the story play out in her mind. Other readers are auditory. They hear the story through the voice of characters and/or writer, depending on POV.

Tip #42 — Use Metaphors, Similes, and Analogies

A metaphor *is* something, whereas a simile is *like* something. All similes are metaphors but not all metaphors are similes. How's that for confusing? Here's a couple of examples from Stephen King, a guy who knows what he's doing. "***As dark as a carload of assholes.***" and "***He lit a smoke that tasted like a plumber's handkerchief.***" Metaphors are vital devices in storytelling because they activate the senses. Analogies are comparisons between two things.

Tip #43 — Don't Lecture

I remember giving a guy a long sermon on how it was wrong that he'd knifed his landlord to death. He looked at me like I was the stupidest sonofabitch to ever pin-on a badge, replying, "***I know I fucked-up, but you don't have to lecture me, man.***" Good advice. Never forgot it.

Tip #44 — Use Her Senses (SSSTF)

This is crucial. You can only engage your reader's emotions through her five senses. Everything you describe must be anchored to her sight, sound, smell, taste, and feel. **Sight. Sound. Smell. Taste. Feel.** And all five must appeal to her sixth sense—common sense. I feel so strongly about triggering senses that I keep a small Post-It note on the lower corner of my screen with this list. I use the acronym — **SSSTF**.

Tip #45 — Never Send Her for a Dictionary

Don't use orphic, sibylline, esoteric, and abstruse words that require your reader to grab a dictionary. Most readers function at about a Grade 9-10 level, so adjust accordingly. Fancy words won't win any friends in crime thriller circles.

Tip #46 — Keep Your Thesaurus on a Back Shelf

A thesaurus is a not a writer's best friend. Your voice will best be heard when you write naturally as if speaking directly to your ideal reader. Use a thesaurus sparingly if you get stuck repeating pet words, but use it wisely and don't let it puke on your slippers.

Tip #47 — Appeal To Women

Women make up 75% of the Crime Fiction genre readers and 95% of the book reviewers. I'm resisting the urge to explain why I keep using **she** and **her**.

Tip #48 — Watch for Head-Hopping

This is a tough one for most new writers to grasp. It's been a bitch for me and I still do it. Head-hopping is easy to write and hard to detect. It's when two or more characters are in a scene and the point-of-view (POV) is bouncing between them. A hard and fast rule is only one point of view per scene.

Tip #49 — Understand Point Of View (POV)

Point of view is the perspective of how your reader is hearing the story. Common narration POV is first person (I did... I saw...), third person (He did... She saw...), and omniscient (Told by an unseen force that knows everything, including character thoughts). Omniscient POV is rarely used today unless the author is hugely famous and can pull it off without the reader recognizing it.

There's a technique called **Deep POV** that's popular in today's fiction and gets the reader so deep into the characters' minds that the reader never hears any author intrusion. POV is such an important part of story structure. Every writer must study and understand POV.

Tip #50 — Give False Clues & Red Herrings

This is the oldest trick in the book and a must in crime thriller writing. **Nothing is ever as it seems.** Your reader is longing to solve the crime, so make it like a real homicide case—make it tricky and make it hard. Just remember, at the end of the story everything must add up and make sense. There can be no other explanation for what happened and no coincidences.

Tip #51 — Give “Ah-Ha” Moments

Give your reader the pleasure of making connections. Her brain is programmed to look for patterns. It's satisfying for her to put things together. These should be the major turning points in the story. Reward her investigator alter-ego.

Tip #52 — Ride-Alongs

Letting civilians ride along with the cops is a super PR tool. They're fascinated by what they see and become huge police supporters. Do the same for your reader. Think of her riding along in the patrol car, en route to the crime scene. Think of her attending the autopsy. Think of her as a juror in the courtroom. It's all about her experience. Give her a vicarious one and she'll be your biggest supporter.

Tip #53 — Create the Stockholm Syndrome

This is a psychological phenomenon known as **Traumatic Bonding** that was first identified during a 1973 bank robbery/hostage-taking incident in Stockholm, Sweden. It's now clinically recognized as a victim's subconscious survival mechanism when faced with life-threatening danger and they go on the side of the aggressor. Your reader will have the same experience if the people in your book take her hostage.

PART FIVE — CHARACTERS ARE PEOPLE

Tip #54 — Characters Are People

From now on, think of characters as **people**. Characters are caricatures and have no soul. People have souls. Your reader will only bond with creatures who have souls.

Tip #55 — People-Driven, Not Plot-Driven

I think all this Plot vs. People driven discussion is bullshit. It's for the elbow-patched, tweed-jacket, literary book-dorks. It's nonsense, poppycock, and horse piddle. **Stories are about people doing interesting things.** That is what plot is. Plot is the forward momentum by the actions of people. Your reader must empathize with the people. Plot is action. Force your reader to care about what the people in the story are doing and why they're doing it. Then you'll have a thrilling plot.

Tip #56 — Make People Larger Than Life

Plain Jane people bore your reader. Who wants to be bored? She doesn't want to read boring shit. Not every person has to be Indiana Jones, though. Something quirky is good. Just make sure they're unique and always doing something. Remember, forwarding the action is plot.

Tip #57 — Motive, Means, and Opportunity

This isn't some kind of corny, old police line. Let your reader know what your people are about—their depth. People must have a reason, a method, and a chance or opportunity. Believability is key. The bad guy in your novel must have a believable motive, means, and opportunity.

Tip #58 — The Bad Guy

This isn't some kind of corny, old police term, either. Police everywhere use "**bad guy**" as part of their lingo. It's used far more often than "**suspect**" or "**perp**." Feel free to use "bad guy" in your crime writing, but I think it should appear in dialogue rather than in narrative.

Tip #59 — Make Names Memorable

Names have to suit people, but don't conjure up something too weird or unpronounceable. I see this all the time, even from some big-named authors. Which sounds better? The Jack Reacher series? Or the Debhora Trichniewicz series? (I went to school with a girl by that name—we called her Deb Turns Tricks.

Don't do that to your protagonist, unless you're targeting a Polish audience. There are gobs of sources for names. I pull from my experience, but you can flip through the phone book, use the obituaries, or simply Google. I found an actual State Trooper online named Brad Justis. Now how good is that? My all-time favorite is Nurse Ratched (wretched, ratchet, rat-shit) from *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. Perfect.

Tip #60 — Have Them Lie, Cheat, and Steal

Don't create a goodie two-shoes antagonist or protagonist. People will do the most unpredictable shit if it suits their purpose. As long as a person can justify it in his mind, and it's in his interest, he'll do it. The trick is to understand what's going on in his mind. It's the raw principle of interrogation. Get creative and get him conniving. It's cause and effect. Have him cause something and then suffer the consequences (effect).

Tip #61 — Profile Your People

Physical. Psychological. Sociological. Create character profiles of your people using their birthdate, description, residence, family status, education, financial state, hobbies, likes, dislikes, friends, and foes. This will get you to understand your character intimately, so their actions automatically come alive on the pages. Use a Word Doc, Excel, or hand-written index cards to sketch their life.

Tip #62 — What Would Dick Head Do?

To bring your bad guy—aka Dick Head—to life, you need to know what he'd do in every situation. Ask yourself this: "What would Dick really do in this predicament?" You need to know Dick intimately so he comes across naturally to your reader. She'll catch on fairly quickly if Dick does something out-of-character. By your knowing all about Dick, his personality will ooze through your writing, and your reader won't be able to resist him.

Tip #63 — Make a Matrix for People

You must know how each person connects with the others. The best way to do this is by using a matrix on graph paper or Excel spreadsheet, listing each person along the top and again in the left margin. By Xing the crossing points, you'll have a clear picture of who's connected to whom. It's vital—absolutely vital—not to screw up people's connections.

PART SIX — PEOPLE TALK TO EACH OTHER

Tip #64 — Dialogue Is The Key Device

Nothing holds your reader's attention like dialogue. She wants to be the fly on the wall. Hear the dirt. Listen to what's goin' down. Try to balance your dialogue with narrative.

Tip #65 — Dialogue Is Edited Speech

I've been complimented on writing dialogue and it's because *I've spent hundreds of hours proofing transcripts of police interviews and wiretap intercepts*. Now that's pure dialogue. But real speech is full of "Ahs," "Umms," "Hmms," and "Okays," as well as overriding and/or cutting each other off. The trick is to write how people speak in real life, and the edit out the fluff.

Tip #66 — Know Your People

Everyone has a unique speech pattern. Crooks and cops. Teachers and Terrorists. Priests and Pundits. It's our word choice. Our mannerisms, tone, accent, education, background, and pet phrases. In wiretaps, you can easily pick out the speaker from the first few words. It's no different for readers. If you first develop real people/entities in your mind, their speech will jump out in print. Let the people be themselves. Trust your reader to know who they are.

Tip #67 — Speech Attributes / Dialogue Tags

The golden rule is “**he said/she said**” and it’s frickin’ gospel! “He said/she said” disappears into the white noise, yet keeps the reader oriented as to who’s speaking. The shorter the tags, and the fewer the tags, the better. Use only as many speech attributes as necessary to keep your reader grounded. No more. Rarely use a character’s name in place of “he/she” (unless there are more than two in the conversation) and let them refer to each other as they naturally would.

Tip #68 — Use Action to Show Who’s Speaking

In place of dialogue tags, use action attributes. Example:

“Hey, wake up.” Garry smacked the reader upside his head. “I’m tryin’ to get my point across here.”

Tip #69 — Kill Most Adjectives and Adverbs

This is a common piece of advice. Some of the great writers feel the road to hell is paved with adjectives and adverbs. Reality is, there’s a time and place for the little buggers, but you should always try to go with strong verbs and nouns instead. Let them do the work. And never invent cutesy crap like “she moaned cunnilingusly” or “he suddenly knew laxatively.”

Tip #70 — Pay Attention to Movies & TV Shows

Story in film is mostly carried by dialogue. I’ll never be a screenwriter, but I appreciate that there’s some brilliant talk-masters out there writing script. Watch ***The Big Bang Theory***. It’s out-of-this-world good.

Tip #71 — Beats

Beats are separations between dialogue blocks. They give a sense of place, point of view, further the story, and set the pace, as well as giving zip to the conversation. Spend as much time tweaking beats as scripting dialogue. Here’s an example of a beat from a scene in my novel, ***No Life Until Death***.

“Whadda ya want?” A gnarly voice busted the silence. A woman who looked like a big ol’ Mother Goose sat on the steps of the unit next door. She wore pink sweat pants and a Canucks hockey jersey that had seen more defeats than the team itself. An oxygen tube was clipped to her nose and a cigarette hung out of her mouth.

“Trying to cut through.” Grizz slurred his words.

Tip #72 — Foul Language

Swearing is a fact of life. Especially in the crime world. It makes sense that a NYU PhD would speak differently than a Hell’s Angel, and it’s crucial—**absolutely vital**—to be true to your person.

If you can’t handle obscenities, you have no business reading crime thrillers, let alone writing them.

A friend recently recommended a Harlan Coban novel. Partway into it, I sensed something was wrong. Coban’s protagonist had to use the F-word—no way around it—and Coban wrote “F@#!”

I’m serious! He didn’t have the balls to put it in print. He lost me, so I put the book down and went the fuck to sleep.

Tip #73 — Regional Accents (Patois)

Careful on this. It’s a balance between giving the person an identity and pissing off your reader. A little goes a long way in using “Y’all” or “Eh”. Mark Twain got away with it, but we mortals best be careful.

PART SEVEN — SELF-MUTILATION (EDITING)

Tip #74 — Read It Out Loud (ROL)

The most important editing move you can make. **Read. Out. Loud.** Or get a friend to read it out loud. Or use the voice memo on your smart phone to listen to yourself. Or the narrator built into Word. Or get software that converts your manuscript into computerized speech. **Read. Out. Loud.**

Read it out loud and listen to the words, to the rhythm of your sentences, to the flow of your paragraphs. Do they evoke the emotions you're relating on the page? It has to sound real. Real for your people.

Tip #75 — Leave Out The Boring Parts

This comes from Elmore Leonard when asked how he makes his writing so riveting. Nuff said.

Tip #76 — Leave Out Everything Irrelevant

If it doesn't further the story, it doesn't go in. No matter how much you want to keep that passage you're in love with, if it doesn't move the story forward, it must go. Kill your darlings!

Tip #77 — Don't Let Your Editor Steal Your Book

It's your story. Your voice. An editor is a resource. She's an ally who can catch a lot of things and really improve your craft, but she should be working for what's best for **your** story. It has to stay your story—what you want it to be. Not what some editor thinks it should be. Sorry for the cliché, but the tail cannot wag the dog.

“Careful here, Garry,” said Sue Coletta, my crime writing buddy who edited this guide. ***“You need to distinguish between whether you're traditionally published or self-published. As an indie, your editor is technically a subcontractor who works for you. If you're traditionally published, the publishing house will appoint you an editor. We don't want to have trad-pubbed authors telling their editors to go to hell.”***

Sue's right. I stand corrected.

Tip #78 — Grammar Don't Wear No Coat 'n Tie

Proper grammar is for literary fiction. It's delusional to expect Joe Crimewriter to win a Pulitzer Prize in English Lit, so don't be afraid to experiment with fragmented sentences and run-ons. ***(Rules are meant to be broken. What matters is that you know the rules so when you break them, you realize what you're doing and it's intentional.)***

It's sure to get you in conflict with your editor. But, then, remember that good stories are all about...conflict. Besides, a really good editor will know when you're using fragments and run-ons to enhance the emotion on the page. If they don't, that's a huge red flag that you might be working with the wrong editor for you.

Tip #79 — Write a Shitty First Draft

This comes from Anne Lamott. It's okay to be rough in your first draft. It's far more important to get words on the page than worrying about stellar writing. You'll need to edit later, anyway.

Tip #80 — Writing And Rewriting

Writing is cooking up words. Editing is taking out trash. Rewriting is not bad. Rewriting is good, and you should love every minute of it. Spend twice as much time rewriting as writing.

Tip #81 — Read More Than You Write

Successful authors agree that you must write every day to improve, and they're right. What they don't often say—with the exception of Steven King—is that you'll learn more about writing by reading other works than if you just numbly peck away. To get good, shoot for writing 1,500 – 2,000 words per day. 2,500 – 3,000 is excellent. Also, shoot for reading 8 - 10,000 words per day. And read like a writer—study techniques, craft, how they string words together, etc.

Tip #82 — Exclamation Marks

Use them sparingly! And then only in dialogue!! Almost never in narrative!!! Let your nouns and verbs exclaim.

Tip #83 — Commas

Don't get your shit in a knot over commas. A comma is there for a break in a sentence. I favor the Oxford comma and love this example of why it's necessary. "***The highlights of our tour included meeting Nelson Mandela, a ninety-year old parachutist and a dildo collector.***"

See how important it is to get it right? There are rules to the Oxford comma. Word has a great program that polices it for you. Generally, though, just apply common sense and see commas as a natural pause, like you would in speaking and breathing.

PART EIGHT — WRITERS ARE ORGANIZED AND DISCIPLINED

Tip #84 — Bomb Your TV and Nuke Facebook

Or at least shut them off while writing. Or use an app that won't allow you to connect until after your writing time. Discipline yourself. Focus on your work and don't get distracted by these time vampires. Your productivity will increase if you simply put your attention solely on your reading and writing.

There is no excuse for lack of discipline.

None.

Tip #85 — Pantsters vs Plotters

Some writers outline their story. Some fly by the seat of their pants. I can't imagine writing an entire novel without knowing where it's going, but I also allow leeway to change as the words flow. I think it's a flex of both, but you've got to have a plan.

I took the *James Patterson Masterclass on Writing* and he's a huge advocate of outlining your entire novel before starting any serious writing. Stephen King is a pantster, stating he just writes and lets the story unfold. But, as this is a big but, King inherently knows structure, which is why he's able to do it. Patterson is an outline Nazi.

Regardless of approach, they've both made a shit-load of money.

Tip #86 — The “*Tip*” System

Most homicide investigations are organized on a “*Tip*” system, where each lead is assigned its own file and given a priority by the case manager. Try this with your novel. You can tip each chapter, each person, each location. Whatever works for you. Just be organized.

I'm old school. I use manual index cards, 11x17 paper to graph the story, and a whiteboard to plot point. Sue uses index cards and an Excel spreadsheet. That's our process. That's what works for us. You need to do what works for you.

Tip #87 — Timelines

Homicide investigations are also time-lined. A lineal chart is developed with every piece of information laid out in chronological order. This is invaluable for your novel. Do it on long paper, a whiteboard, in Excel, on index cards, on 11x17's, or use Post-It notes on a corkboard. Make it visual. You'll be amazed by how clearly you can blend backstory.

Tip #88 — Scrivener

You may prefer to use a program like **Scrivener**. Many writers do and swear by it. I got a free demo of Scrivener and spent a day playing around with it. When I realized that you still have to resort to Word for a final manuscript, I thought the only real value was in its digital index cards which are kind of cool.

Like I said, whatever works for you to be organized.

Tip #89 — Think Reliability

[ThinkReliability](#) is a root-cause analysis consulting company that trains accident investigation professionals. They have a free Excel template, which you can download and bastardize to lay out your story. Take a look at their root-cause analysis demonstration on the Titanic sinking. You'll never blame the iceberg again. For the link [Click Here](#).

Tip #90 — Cause Mapping / Link Analysis

This is another standard procedure in homicide investigations, especially where a conspiracy is involved. The points of evidence are laid out in a flow chart, which links and identifies their relevance. This is a connect-the-box approach, which the [ThinkReliability](#) freebie will do for you. It works great for viewing the plot. Remember, plot is the flesh that supports the story skin and contains the theme, or heart.

Tip #91 — Person List

Prosecution briefs contain a witness list, summarizing who the players are and how they fit into the crime. This is a great tool, along with a person matrix, to keep you focused on their place in the story. I've seen Frederick Forsyth use one as part of his published story, *The Cobra*. Worked great, too.

Tip #92 — Overcoming Writer's Block

Is it—or isn't it—real? I dunno. But there's only one writing laxative in my opinion. Sit down and start writing. Who cares if it's crap? At least you get the words flowing. That's what it's all about. Write the phone book or passages from your favorite novel. Your own words will come. Just write! Write something, anything. There's time to fix it later, but no time like the present to start. When I get to a piece that's not quite coming, I type TBD (To Be Decided) and keep on going. What really matters is that you let the words flow.

Tip #93 — Practice Coopetition

See? I told you I wanted something. This is one of the best things writers can do—cross-promotion. It's called coopetition. In reading these *101 Killer Tips on Writing Deadly Crime Thrillers*, I'm betting you'll appreciate them and will refer this guide to others. Then you'll take a look at my other books, and tell your acquaintances about my writing, too. In return, I'll do the same for you. What goes around, comes around.

Tip #94 — Networking

Nobody writes alone. You might think you can lock yourself away in a mountain cabin like in *Misery*, but sooner or later, you will have to drive down the hill. Spend time on the net. Keep your blog current. Read other blogs. Twitter away—best social media tool out there, IMO. Get connected, comment, write guest posts, and promote each other. It's social karma, and it pays back three-fold.

Tip #95 — Reaching Perfection

Sue Coletta, crime writer acting as editor, disagreed with me on this point. I said, "**At some point you've got to ship it. Do everything you reasonably can to produce a first class product, but don't kill yourself over perfection. A phenomenal thing about digital writing is that you can easily go back and change it.**"

Sue said, “***You’re wrong here, Garry. Personally, I believe all we have is our name, our brand, and by putting out substandard work we’ve weakened our brand, even if we have the option to go back and change the eBook. For those of us going traditional, not making sure we have everything perfect will only bring rejection after rejection. I’ve made this mistake before, sent my manuscript out when I thought it was ‘good enough’ and regretted it afterward.***”

And, again, Sue’s right.

Tip #96 — Keep On Writin’

There’s nothin’, absolutely nothin’, that will polish your writin’ like writin’. I think a blog is a must for all writers, as it forces you to continually create something short which must be shipped. Don’t tell me you can’t think of a topic.

Tip #97 — Crime Thriller Resources

Sue and I each have website pages, listing excellent resources on the craft of writing crime thrillers and on the forensic world.

For the links on Sue’s site [Click Here](#).

For the links on Garry’s site [Click Here](#).

Tip #98 — Research The Shit Out Of It

Some say, “***Write what you know.***” I call bullshit. It’s not reasonable for writers to know all about crimes. Virtually all successful crime writers have never smelled a dead body, let alone arrested a murderer. I believe it’s “***Check what you write.***” You can get away with all the bullshit in the world as long as you don’t get caught, and nothing will trap you like getting your facts wrong.

Don’t say, “***The corpse was prone on its back.***” And don’t call a 9mm pistol a “***revolver.***” Your reader will see right through your BS, and your credibility will be shot. There is so much information available. If nothing else, Google it. Start with Wikipedia—first port of call on the net—but be careful with the reliability of information on Wikipedia. Consider it a jumping-off site to other informants, like newspaper search engines.

Tip #99 — Enjoy The Ride

Crime fiction writing has to be fun. You have to love inventing lies about liars. The bigger, the better. The reward really comes when your ideal reader says, “I couldn’t put it down.”

Tip #100 — Contact Us

Let Sue and I know what you think of these tips and bounce ideas off us. You can find us at any of these locations:

Sue Coletta

[Email](#) [Web/Blogsite](#) [Twitter](#) [Amazon](#) [Facebook](#) [Goodreads](#)

Garry Rodgers

[Email](#) [Web/Blogsite](#) [Twitter](#) [Amazon](#) [Facebook](#) [Goodreads](#)

Tip #101 – Read More In The No BS Crime Fiction Series

There are eight separate guides in the No BS Series on Crime Fiction Writing:

- 1. *How To Write Deadly Crime Thrillers***
- 2. *How To Self-Edit Deadly Crime Thrillers***
- 3. *How To Write Deadly Crime Scenes***
- 4. *How To Write Deadly Crime Dialogue***
- 5. *How To Write Deadly Accurate Forensics***
- 6. *How To Write Deadly Accurate Firearms***
- 7. *How To Write Deadly Accurate Autopsies***

The entire series is available in one master guide titled ***How To Write Deadly Crime Fiction — A No BS Guide With 808 Killer Tips.***

GARRY RODGERS

Crime Writer

Retired RCMP
Homicide Detective
& Forensic Coroner



Please Leave a Review

Reviews are hugely helpful in promoting a writer's work.

I hope you got decent value from ***How To Write Deadly Crime Thrillers — A No BS Guide With 101 Killer Tips.***

If you did, please take a moment to click one of these links and leave a short note to let others know what you thought of this book.

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It doesn't have to be much—just a couple brief sentences are fine. It's the thought that counts!

And if you liked this guide, please share with others. [Click Here](#) to Tweet

About Sue Coletta

Proud member of Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, and International Thriller Writers, Sue Coletta is always looking for new ways to commit murder... on the page. Her forensic articles have been published in *InSinC* and a four-thousand-word excerpt of *Marred*, a serial killer thriller, scored first placement in *Murder, USA*, an upcoming anthology.

She runs a popular crime website and blog, where she shares crime tips, police jargon, and anything and everything in between. If you search her achieves, you'll find posts from guests that work in law enforcement, forensics, coroner, undercover operatives, firearm experts... crime, crime, and more crime. If you're a writer with murder in your plot, pick up a free copy of *60 Ways To Murder Your Fictional Characters*.

For readers, she has the *Crime Lover's Lounge*, where subscribers will be the first to know about free giveaways, contests, and have inside access to deleted scenes. As an added bonus, members will get to play in the lounge. Your secret code will unlock the virtual door. Inside, like-minded folks can discuss their favorite crime novels, solve mindbender puzzles, and/or relax and chat. Most importantly, have fun.

On her bucket list is a trip to Australia to play with quokkas, the happiest animals in the world, with absolutely adorable faces, and a visit to Canada's grizzly bear viewing resort. She'd also love to take a safari in Africa, roam Paris and Italy, and ride the high seas — code for a cruise to an exotic locale.



[Email](#) [Web/Blogsite](#) [Twitter](#) [Amazon](#) [Facebook](#) [Goodreads](#)

[Join Sue's Crime Lovers' Lounge Facebook Group](#)

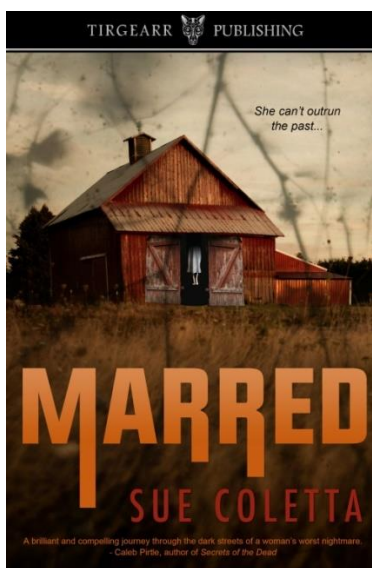
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Other Works By Sue Coletta

If you're interested in checking out what else Sue's been up to, here's the link to other books and products on her website at [Sue Coletta.com](http://SueColetta.com).

[MARRED](#) is an Amazon BestSelling psychological crime thriller.



[Sixty Ways To Murder Your Fictional Characters](#) is a **FREE** Guide on [Sue's Website](#).



About Garry Rodgers

I'm a retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police homicide detective who went on to another career as a forensic coroner for the Province of British Columbia. In my younger years, I served as a sniper on Royal Canadian Mounted Police Emergency Response Teams and was trained by the British Special Air Services (SAS). I'm also a recognized expert witness in Canadian courts on the identification and operation of firearms.

In my second retirement, I've made #5 on the Amazon Best Seller list—sandwiched between the names Stephen King and Dean Koontz—with my debut Crime Thriller novel, *No Witnesses To Nothing*. It's based on a true story where many believe paranormal intervention occurred.

I've recently completed a second novel, *No Life Until Death*, that involves international black market trafficking in human organs, and I'm working on more in the *Sharlene Bate* series. The next is *No God Without Gold*, based on the Brother XII cult story, followed by *No Guilt Without Innocence*—a legal thriller.

I have a life-long interest in the U.S. President John F. Kennedy Assassination (sorry, no conspiracy here) and I've written a true-crime book that looks at the forensic and circumstantial evidence in the highest profile, most thoroughly investigated murder case in history. That manuscript was going to be self-published as *Lone Nuts—A No BS Guide to the JFK Assassination* but is currently in proposal as *The JFK Assassination For Dummies*.

My biggest writing accomplishment, though, was being invited by the Huffington Post to join their Blog Team as one of their signature contributors. Every Saturday morning I blog on my personal site at DyingWords.net, provoking thoughts on life, death, and writing.

Outside of crime writing, I'm a certified Marine Captain and love spending time hanging around the Pacific Ocean, near my home on Vancouver Island on the west coast of Canada.



[Email](#) [Web/Blogsite](#) [Twitter](#) [Amazon](#) [Facebook](#) [Goodreads](#)

Other Works by Garry Rodgers

If you're interested in checking out what else I've been up to, here's the link to other books and products on my website at DyingWords.net.

I've got a mix of fiction, true crime, helpful guides, and lots of blog posts that provoke thoughts on life, death, and writing:

[**No Witnesses To Nothing**](#) is an Amazon Top 10 BestSelling crime thriller.



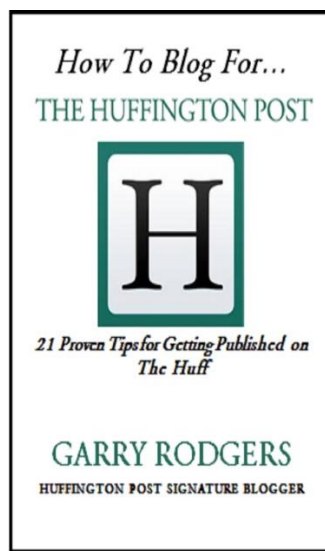
[No Life Until Death](#) is a crime thriller ready for publication.

[No God Without Gold](#) is a crime thriller at draft stage.

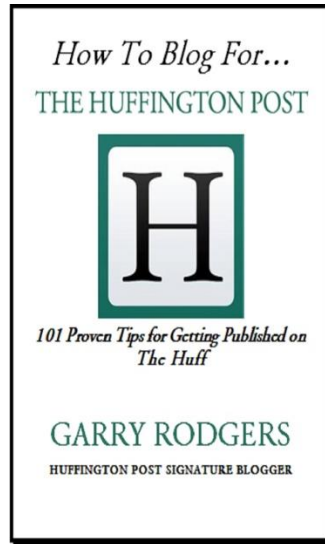
[No Guilt Without Innocence](#) is a crime thriller at the outline stage.

[Lone Nuts — A No BS Guide to the JFK Assassination](#) is waiting publication.

[How To Blog For The Huffington Post — 21 Proven Tips For Getting Published On The Huff](#)

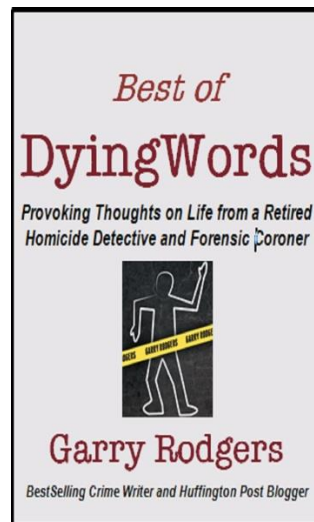


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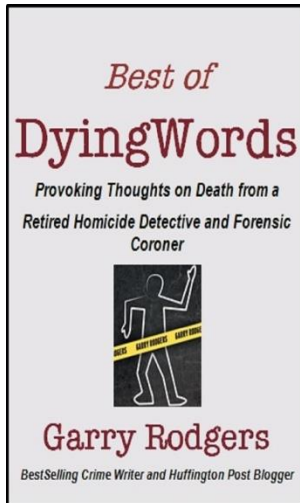


[*Best of DyingWords — Provoking Thoughts on Life, Death, and Writing*](#) is a three-part, edited collection of my most popular blog posts. Here's the links to the other shorter [*DyingWords*](#) blog post collections:

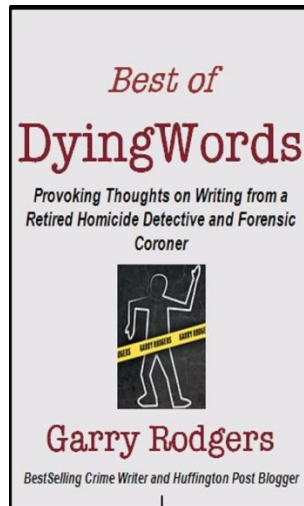
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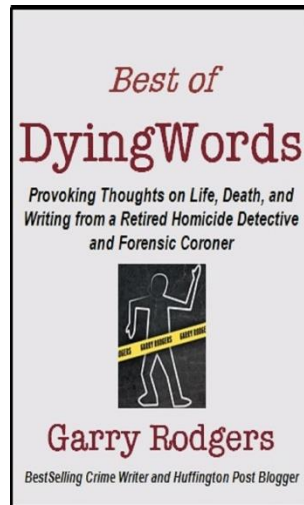
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DyingWords Thoughts on Writing



Compilation of Best Of DyingWords—Provoking Thoughts on Life, Death, and Writing



[How To Write Deadly Crime Fiction](#) is a guide series which gives 101 Killer tips on each of eight crime-writing subjects:



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[Self-Editing](#)
[Crime Scenes](#)
[Characters](#)
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And, please, feel free to count yourself onto my mailing list for updates as to what's going on at [DyingWords.net](#).

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Provoking Thoughts on Life, Death, and Writing from a BestSelling Crime Writer and Huffington Post Blogger

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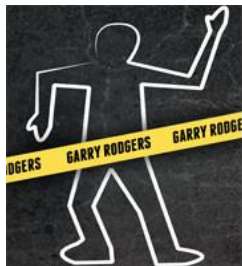
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Provoking Thoughts on Life, Death, and Writing

Website of Garry Rodgers - Retired RCMP Homicide Detective and Forensic Coroner

End