

Detective Noir Plot Outline

For more information about plot outlines, go to: <https://www.novel-software.com/genrestorytemplates>

Act 1

Start low	The protagonist of a detective noir is often an anti-hero. An outcast, often someone who held a heroic position in the past, such as a police officer or soldier, but who has fallen from grace. A sense of alienation should be established and maintained throughout the story.	+
The siren walks in	A client will appear, seeking help with a case - usually a murder or missing person. They may appear vulnerable or wanting to help, but they will have a deep, dark secret that is bound to get the protagonist into hot water. Although the femme fatale trope is common, there is no requirement for the siren to be female, or sexy, and in fact mixing it up may make your story more refreshing.	+
Initial investigation	The protagonist begins their investigations, searching for clues. This will often be done at night, and in the shadows. Throughout the investigation, there should be a healthy amount of red herrings.	+

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Act 2



Uncover conspiracy	In the course of searching for clues for the original case, the protagonist begins to uncover hints that a much larger conspiracy is going on. The first crime is just the tip of the iceberg, and the criminals involved are very serious people indeed. Speaking of which...	+
Knocked out	The detective will very often find themselves beaten up and knocked out halfway through the novel. This could be warning by the bad guys, or perhaps it turns out to be someone more unexpected. Even if they are not physically unconscious, this is a good place to challenge the morals and integrity of the protagonist, at least knocking them sideways. Now that their own safety has been threatened, the hero must decide whether to press on with the case and help victims / justice, or whether to just return to their miserable existence in safety.	+
Throw in the towel	And because this is noir and the protagonist is no natural hero, they will likely decide that it's simply not worth the effort, and is way above their pay grade. They will very probably try to drown their sorrows in a bottle or similar, and may dwell on old failures and losses.	+
On the run	An internal or external trigger will turn things around, and the anti-hero will pick themselves up and go after the bad guys like a dog with a bone, or they or something important to them will be put under direct threat and they will have no choice but to act. The detective isn't necessarily on the run themselves, but there should be a sense of increased pace, action and a race towards the finish line.	+

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Act 3

Final conflict	There will be a final dramatic confrontation between the anti-hero and the bad guys, during which the anti-hero may become quite badly injured, but will find at least limited victory by using her or his wit and cunning. They may even have laid a trap for the bag guys that even the readers were unaware of (though clues and hints will have been in place).	 
Back to the office	In noir, it's normal for the story to ultimately end in tragedy, underlining the sense of fatalism and nihilism. The detective may have solved the small case that was initially brought to them, but the larger situation of a hostile world run by immoral people is largely unchanged. The detective themselves in particular should be in no better position than they were before. However, if you're writing more hardboiled than noir, then you could offer a glimmer of hope...	