

Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder: Marlowe 3.0 analysis

*Following is the Marlowe analysis of Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder by Joanne Fluke. We've combined all the sections of the report into a single PDF **for demo purposes only** — the analysis for each manuscript is located in the Author Dashboard by Authors A.I. at <https://authors.ai/author-dashboard>. You'll find the dashboard much more useful in refining your manuscript than a static report.*

Premise

A baker in small-town Minnesota becomes an amateur sleuth when she discovers two murder victims connected to a local dairy owner's shady loan practices.

Genre & story type

Cozy Mystery. The story also contains elements of the following:

- Amateur sleuth
- Small town setting
- Culinary mystery
- Light romance
- Family drama
- Police procedural elements
- Contemporary women's fiction

Overall assessment

This is a well-crafted Cozy Mystery that follows baker Hannah Swensen as she investigates murders in the fictional town of Lake Eden, Minnesota, while managing family relationships and romantic entanglements. The story will appeal to readers who enjoy cozy mysteries with strong female protagonists, culinary themes, and small-town settings where everyone knows everyone else's business.

The novel successfully delivers the comfort-food appeal that cozy mystery readers crave, with its blend of amateur detection, small-town gossip, family dynamics, and romantic tension. The story can become even stronger by incorporating the suggested refinements set out in this report, particularly regarding pacing in the middle sections and deepening some character relationships.

Story strengths

Here are some of the most noteworthy strengths that contribute to your story's overall effectiveness and reader appeal.

1. **Strong protagonist voice:** Hannah Swensen emerges as a relatable, intelligent amateur sleuth with clear motivations and a distinctive personality that drives the narrative forward effectively.
2. **Authentic small-town atmosphere:** The Lake Eden setting feels genuine and lived-in, with well-developed community dynamics and believable local politics that enhance the cozy mystery appeal.
3. **Well-integrated culinary elements:** The cookie recipes and baking details feel natural to the story rather than forced, creating an appealing sensory experience that distinguishes this from other cozy mysteries.
4. **Solid mystery plotting:** The investigation unfolds logically with well-planted clues and red herrings that allow readers to follow Hannah's deductive process without making the solution too obvious.
5. **Effective family dynamics:** The relationships between Hannah, Andrea, and their mother create believable tension and humor while providing emotional depth beyond the mystery plot.
6. **Balanced tone:** The story maintains the right balance between serious crime elements and the lighter, humorous aspects expected in cozy mysteries.

Chief opportunities

Following are areas that could stand to be improved and strengthened during the rewrite process:

- **Pacing inconsistencies:** Some investigative sequences, particularly in the middle chapters, slow the narrative momentum when Hannah revisits the same clues or has repetitive conversations with different characters. The story would benefit from tighter plotting that moves the investigation forward more efficiently.
- **Supporting character development:** While Hannah is well-developed, some key supporting characters like Norman and Mike could use more distinctive voices and clearer motivations to make them feel less interchangeable as romantic interests.
- **Clue revelation timing:** Several important clues emerge through convenient conversations or coincidental discoveries rather than through Hannah's active investigation, which weakens her role as the driving force of the detection.
- **Information management:** The story sometimes relies too heavily on characters providing exposition through dialogue, particularly when Hannah learns about Max Turner's business dealings through secondhand accounts.

The Dissonance section below in this report will provide specific suggestions on how to tighten the plotting, writing, and otherwise enhance the storytelling.

Word count

Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder contains about **84,987** words.

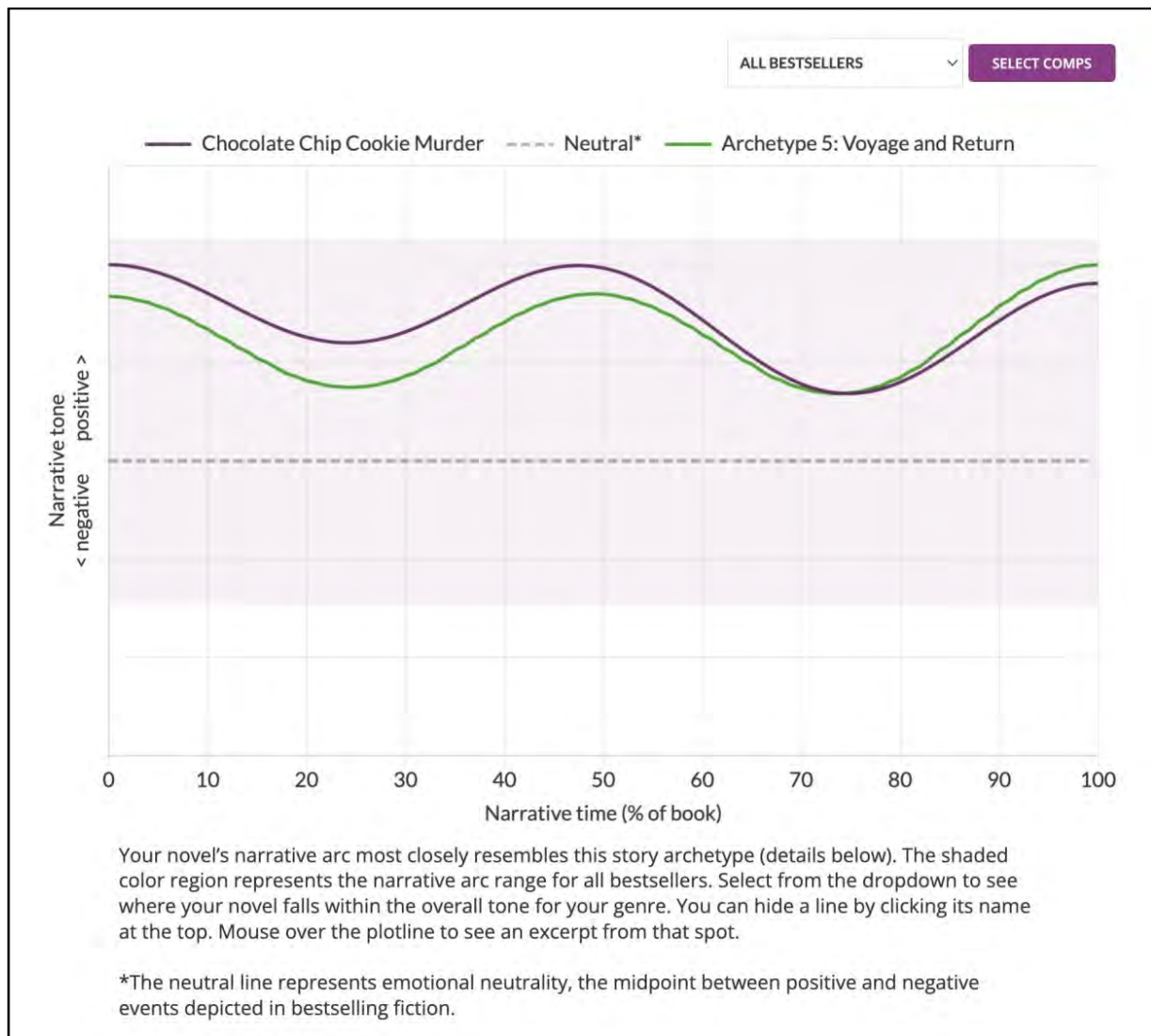
While there are no hard-and-fast rules about minimum and maximum story lengths, there are industry traditions and reader expectations. If you want to give yourself your best chance without having to fight any additional uphill battles, then writing with the word count guidelines for your genre in mind is often the wisest course. (Getting your word count right will also cut down on editing costs.)

Here's a quick reference for typical word counts by genre:

- Adult contemporary fiction: 70,000-90,000 words
- Literary fiction: 80,000-120,000 words
- Romance: 50,000-90,000 words (mostly 70,000-90,000)
- Science fiction/Fantasy: 80,000-120,000 words (longer for epic fantasy)
- Historical fiction: 80,000-120,000 words
- Mystery/Crime: 60,000-90,000 words (cozy mysteries are shorter)
- Horror: 80,000-100,000 words
- Thriller: 70,000-100,000 words
- Westerns: 50,000-80,000 words
- Young adult: 50,000-90,000 words

Are you on track with your story's word count given the genre you've chosen?

Narrative arc analysis



Marlowe has analyzed the narrative arc of *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder* and produced the graphic in the Author Dashboard. The graph depicts two key elements of your book:

1. Its major plot arc. The curved line shows the high-level “shape” of your narrative at a glance. Marlowe also compared it to a story archetype with a similar narrative arc.
2. Its overall tone. The graph includes a color tint block that shows whether your story falls within the same range of emotional tone that most bestsellers do.

A narrative arc refers to the structured progression of a story, outlining how it unfolds from

beginning to end. It typically consists of several key elements, including exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This arc maps the emotional and dramatic journey of the characters and the plot, guiding readers through the narrative's development. It doesn't capture plot turns or story beats, which are more detailed, but instead looks at the narrative's positive and negative sentiment as the plot unfolds from a high-level view.

Key components of a narrative arc

1. Exposition: Introduces characters, setting, and background information (Act 1).
2. Rising action: Builds tension through conflicts and complications (Act 2). Don't confuse rising action with the curve's rise or fall in the graph above – rising action consists of both positive and negative events and the characters' reactions to those events.
3. Climax: The turning point where the main conflict reaches its peak (Act 3). The **Story elements** section will likely show a positive or negative beat for your climax and it's often not depicted in the narrative arc.
4. Falling action: Events following the climax that lead toward resolution.
5. Resolution: Concludes the story, resolving conflicts and tying up loose ends.

See the **Story elements** section for a detailed look at where certain plot elements should fall.

Your novel's story archetype

Marlowe has determined that your story is most similar to the *Voyage and Return* story archetype.

A *story archetype* is a universal pattern or model that serves as a framework for storytelling. These archetypes manifest through recurring themes, character types, and plot structures across various cultures and genres through the ages. They provide a foundational structure that writers can use to develop their narratives.

Using archetypes allows writers to tap into shared human experiences, making their stories resonate more deeply with audiences. By understanding these patterns, authors can craft compelling narratives that feel both familiar and fresh.

The emotional tone of your story

The graph shows not just the story arc but also the overall emotional tone and major trends in tone within your story — the “emotional arc” of your book. The colored tint block shows the range in emotional tone, from positive to negative, that represents 90% of all bestsellers. In short, it tells you how light or dark your story is and how it fits within your genre. If you choose a genre or subgenre from the “All Bestsellers” dropdown, the tint block will adjust to show the range encompassing 90% of books in that specific genre.

Using the dropdown, notice that some genres and subgenres have a lighter or darker tone and a broader or narrower range than others. If the narrative arc of your story doesn't fit

comfortably within the range for your novel's genre, consider whether your story might be improved by adjusting the tone of your story arc.

How to use the data

The narrative arc graph provides a high-level overview of your story and the journey of your characters, along with the closest story archetype. You can use this information in two chief ways:

To understand your story type. It's valuable to identify the type of story you've told — say, whether it's a Rags to Riches tale or a Quest narrative. By exploring your specific archetype, you can read similar stories to see how other authors have approached the same structure. Refer to the examples provided below for books that fit your chosen archetype.

To refine your narrative. You may want to adjust your story to align more closely with archetypal conventions. Review the guidelines for the archetype identified below and consider how well your story follows these frameworks. For more detailed frameworks, see [Story structure](#).

What a narrative arc represents

A story shape represents the overall emotional journey that your characters embark on throughout your story, from positive vibes to negative vibes — or the opposite. The peaks and high points on the graph represent a section of your story when your characters' experiences are generally positive (even if there are moments of conflict mixed in.) The valleys or troughs represent an overall stretch of low points in the story in which your characters' experiences are negative (even if there are happier moments mixed in).

Based on these archetypes, Marlowe has drawn a visual representation of your book's plot shape alongside the most similar narrative archetype, Voyage and Return.

Story archetypes consist of broad generalizations. While some are more often associated with a particular genre, there are examples of each archetype in all genres. Rather than getting hung up on narrative arcs, most authors instead turn to story frameworks as a way to add structure to their novels. See the [Story structure](#) section.

Because Marlowe is tracking the sentiment or mood of the language in your novel, that sentiment usually aligns with the major positive or negative events in the story — but not always. Sometimes the language might be dark in sentiment (war) but the character's experience (saving a loved one) might be positive or brighter. But the general atmosphere of the novel in that moment will still feel darker and so the graph will likely bend that way.

Voyage and Return

Voyage and Return stories involve a protagonist who leaves his familiar world, experiences adventure in an unfamiliar place, and eventually returns home transformed. The journey to a new realm or situation exposes the protagonist to unfamiliar customs, challenges, and sometimes dangers. The protagonist's experiences during the journey lead to personal growth, and the return home often involves reintegration or a struggle to adapt to the ordinary world with newfound knowledge or insights.

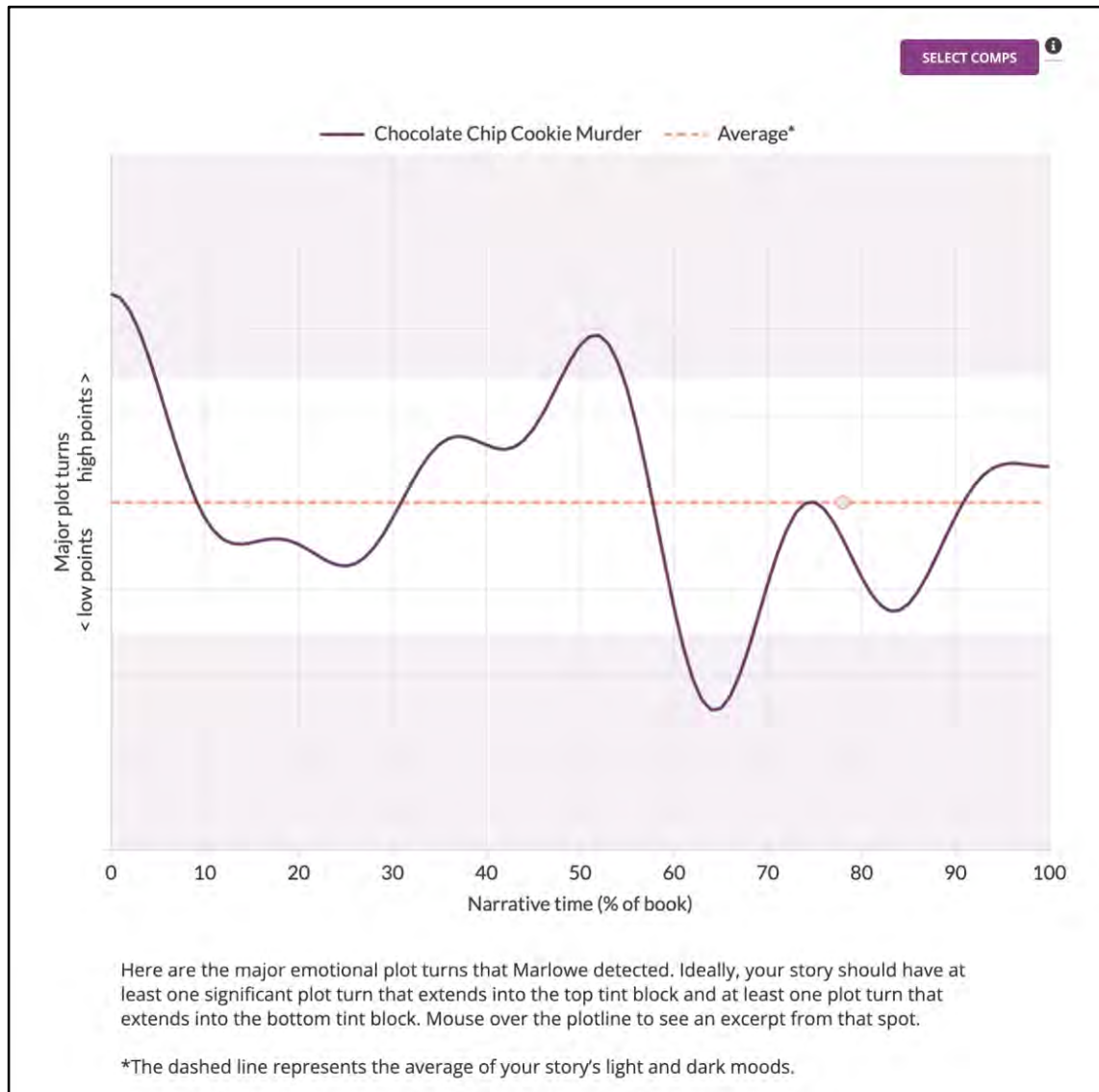
Key elements of the Voyage and Return archetype include:

- The departure: The protagonist leaves his familiar environment.
- The unfamiliar world: A new setting where the rules or norms differ significantly from what the protagonist knows.
- Trials and challenges: The protagonist encounters obstacles or conflicts in the new environment.
- The transformation: The protagonist grows, learns, or changes because of his experiences.
- The return: The protagonist comes back to the familiar world, often struggling to reconcile his new identity or knowledge with his old life.

Voyage and Return stories often explore themes of change, growth, and the clash between different worlds. Classic examples include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, where Alice must navigate the strange world of Wonderland, and *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, in which Dorothy's journey through Oz teaches her the value of home. More modern examples include:

- *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman - Coraline discovers an alternate world where everything seems perfect but soon realizes the dangers lurking there; she must navigate challenges to return home.
- *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel - A boy's voyage at sea leads to spiritual and personal growth.
- *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis - The Pevensie siblings enter the magical land of Narnia, face various challenges, and eventually return home with newfound courage and understanding.
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle - Meg Murry travels through time and space to rescue her father, facing various trials before returning home with a greater understanding of love and family.

Plot analysis



Plot overview

Baker Hannah Swensen discovers the body of Ron LaSalle, a local dairy delivery driver, shot dead in the alley behind her cookie shop in Lake Eden, Minnesota. When she investigates further with her brother-in-law Deputy Bill Todd, they uncover a connection to Max Turner, the dairy owner, who is also found murdered in his office. Hannah realizes both men were killed because Ron witnessed Max meeting with his murderer, who turned out to be Judith Woodley, the wealthy socialite wife of a local factory owner who had borrowed money from Max and was facing foreclosure on her beloved family home

Major plot turns in your story

- Hannah discovers Ron LaSalle's body in the alley behind her cookie shop
- Hannah finds evidence that a woman was with Ron the morning he died through lipstick on a coffee cup
- Hannah identifies the woman as Danielle Watson, who reveals Ron was her Gamblers Anonymous sponsor
- Hannah and Andrea discover Max Turner's body in the old dairy building safe room
- Hannah realizes the killer must have been someone Ron saw meeting with Max that morning
- Hannah discovers through photographs that the Woodley family had rented a car from the same company seen fleeing the crime scene
- Hannah confronts Judith Woodley, who confesses to both murders and attempts to kill Hannah
- Hannah subdues Judith using hot tea and escapes, leading to Judith's arrest

How to interpret the plot turns graph

Marlowe has identified the major emotional plot turns in your manuscript and has represented them in the plot turns graph above. Upward slopes in your line show your novel's moments of conflict resolution, where the story takes a hopeful or positive turn, signified by joy, excitement, love, relief. Downward dips illustrate where the story takes a darker turn or where there is a progressive complication presenting obstacles and challenges for your protagonists. The middle of the graph represents emotional neutrality. Higher peaks and deeper valleys increase the emotional intensity, and the more frequent the peaks and valleys, the more the story becomes an emotional rollercoaster for the characters — and for readers.

Think of the graph above as capturing the “emotional arc” of your story — a snapshot of your characters’ emotional journey throughout your book. While the narrative arc graph depicts the high-level overall tone of your book, this graph illustrates what Marlowe detected as the major emotional shifts in the story.

It's important to think about plot turns not just in terms of *where* and *how often* they occur, but also in terms of their *intensity*. It's fine if most of the twists and turns in your story fall within the white band, but 90% of bestsellers have at least one emotional peak that extends into the top tint block and at least one emotional valley that extends into the bottom tint block.

Note that emotional plot turns may or may not always correspond with the major plot points in your story. But chances are *that they will often align* — if something tragic happens or your characters suffer a major setback, it's likely that the emotional temperature of the scene will follow suit.

Major subplots in your story

1. Hannah's complicated relationship with her matchmaking mother Delores, who tries to set her up with Norman Rhodes, the new dentist in town, creating romantic tension and family drama throughout the story.
2. Andrea's struggle to balance her real estate career with motherhood, including her complicated relationship with her daughter Tracey and her guilt over not being a traditional stay-at-home mother.
3. Bill Todd's quest for promotion to detective in the sheriff's department, complicated by the arrival of a new detective from Minneapolis who could threaten his advancement.
4. Hannah's growing friendship and potential romance with Norman Rhodes, which develops from mutual respect into a genuine connection despite her mother's interference.
5. The abusive relationship between Coach Boyd Watson and his wife Danielle, which Hannah discovers but cannot directly address due to Danielle's refusal to seek help.

Foreshadowing in your story

The story demonstrates strong foreshadowing techniques, particularly regarding the financial motives behind the murders. Early references to Max Turner as a "loan shark" and Norman's account of his parents' near-financial ruin establish Max's predatory lending practices well before they become central to the murder motive. The author also effectively foreshadows Judith's desperation through subtle details about the expensive furnishings in her home and her obsessive attachment to maintaining her lifestyle. The rental car folder spotted in the photograph provides excellent visual foreshadowing that pays off when Hannah realizes its significance to the case.

The foreshadowing of character relationships works particularly well, with early hints about Danielle's secretive behavior and carefully concealed bruises pointing toward her abusive marriage. The author plants seeds about various characters' financial troubles throughout the story, creating a web of potential motives that keeps readers guessing while providing logical foundation for the eventual revelation.

However, some elements could benefit from stronger foreshadowing. Judith's violent capabilities aren't sufficiently established early in the story - she appears as a typical socialite without hints of the ruthless determination that drives her to commit murder. The author could strengthen this by showing earlier glimpses of Judith's obsessive attachment to her home and status, perhaps through Hannah's observations at the party or through community gossip. Additionally, Ron's role as a Gamblers Anonymous sponsor feels somewhat convenient when revealed, and could be better foreshadowed through earlier references to his community involvement or helping nature.

The technical aspects of the murders could also use better setup. The old dairy safe and Max's

business practices there could be mentioned earlier to make the crime scene feel less coincidental. Some of Hannah's investigative insights emerge too suddenly without proper groundwork - her deductions about the timeline and the rental car connections would feel more earned if readers had been given the same information earlier to draw their own conclusions alongside her.

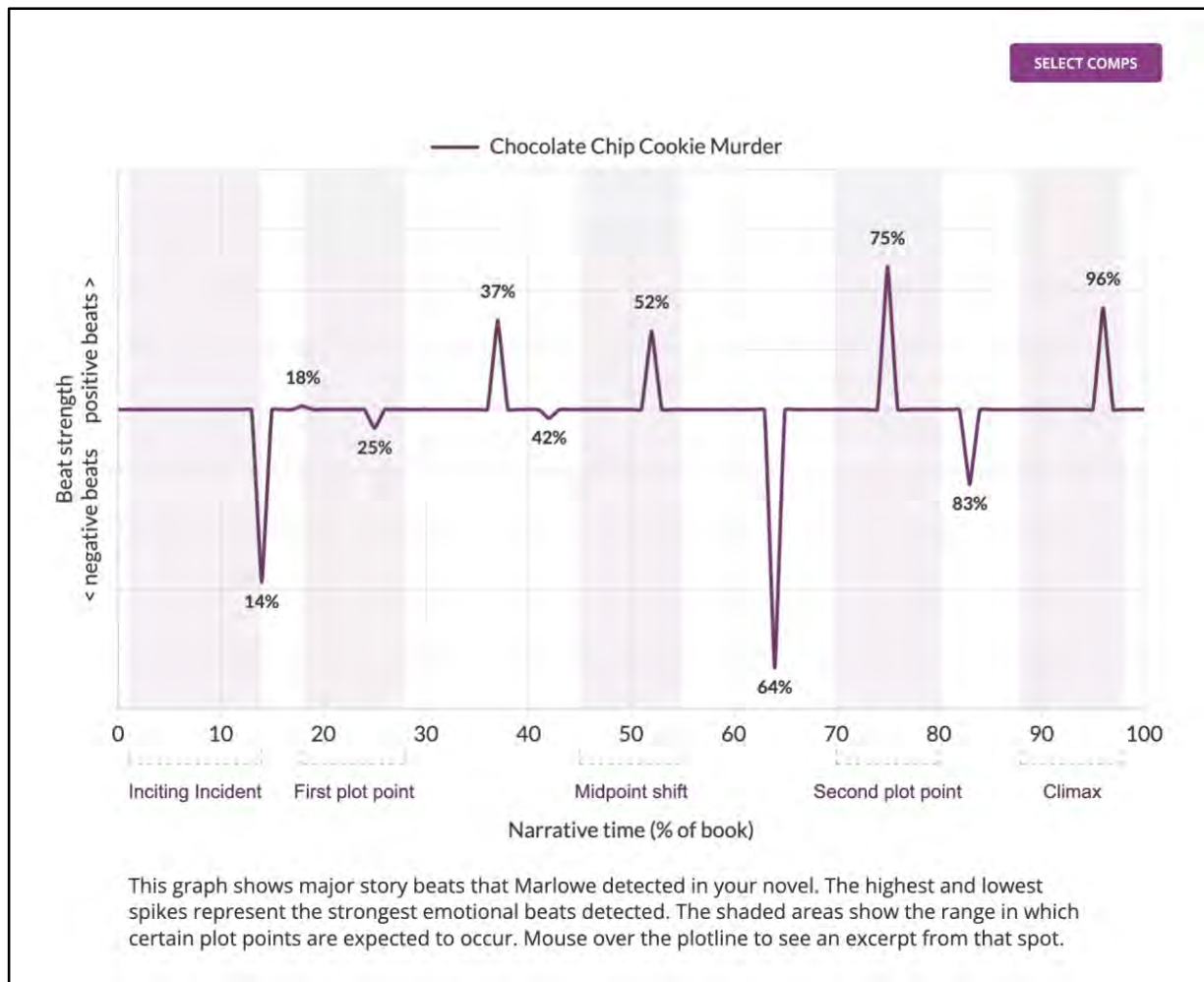
Unresolved plot threads

Unresolved plot threads are story elements or questions introduced during the narrative that remain unanswered by the end of the book. No significant unresolved plot threads were detected.

Revisions to consider

1. Strengthen the middle section by having Hannah actively discover clues rather than having information come to her through coincidental conversations - this would make her more proactive as a detective and improve pacing.
2. Add earlier scenes showing Judith's obsessive relationship with her home and social status to better foreshadow her desperate actions and violent capabilities.
3. Create more direct connections between Hannah's baking business and the investigation - perhaps Max owed money to suppliers Hannah knows, or she could discover evidence through her customer interactions.
4. Develop a stronger red herring by giving Coach Watson more suspicious behavior early on, making his elimination as a suspect more surprising and satisfying.
5. Add a scene where Hannah faces real danger or a close call earlier in the story to raise stakes and tension before the final confrontation with Judith.

Story elements



Overview

Marlowe has identified major story elements and story beats in your novel by marking the points where the tone shifts from positive to negative or vice versa. The greater the shift, indicated by peaks or valleys on the graph, the more impactful the moment in your story.

In its review of *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder*, Marlowe examined the places in your narrative where your story shifts from a generally positive tone to a more negative tone — and vice versa. These turns or emotional shifts in tone often align with key structural beats in a novel, including plot turns in the previous section, though they may not match up perfectly.

Analysis of your story's major elements

Readers of modern fiction expect stories to hit certain notes, particularly in genre fiction, that build on perennial story elements that harken back to ancient times. The following analysis examines how well this story delivers on these expectations.

Hook: The opening scene effectively hooks readers by introducing Hannah's relationship with her cat Moishe and her mother's matchmaking efforts, establishing character and tone before launching into the mystery. While not a high-action opening, it engages readers through character voice and humor.

The opening: The first two chapters successfully grab attention by establishing Hannah's world, introducing key relationships, and then shocking readers with the discovery of Ron's body. The opening balances character establishment with plot momentum effectively, though it takes some time to build to the central mystery. The story begins in the right place by grounding readers in Hannah's normal life before disrupting it with murder.

Relatable protagonist: Hannah is immediately likable and relatable through her self-deprecating humor, devotion to her cat, and realistic struggles with family expectations. Her competence as a baker and her genuine care for her community make her sympathetic without being perfect.

Inciting incident: The inciting incident in fiction creates the central conflict that drives the story forward. In this story, the inciting incident is Hannah's discovery of Ron LaSalle's murdered body, which launches her into the investigation. This incident occurs at the right time in the narrative structure, providing the hook that transforms Hannah from baker to amateur sleuth.

Call to adventure: Hannah shows some initial reluctance to get involved in the investigation beyond reporting what she found, but her natural curiosity and desire to help Bill with his promotion quickly overcome any hesitation. Her decision to actively investigate is prompted by finding the lipstick evidence and realizing she might be able to help solve the case.

First plot point: The first plot point occurs when Hannah decides to actively investigate after finding evidence of the woman who was with Ron, transforming her from passive witness to active participant in solving the crime.

Midpoint shift: The midpoint shift is crucial for maintaining narrative momentum in the story's

second half. The midpoint shift occurs when Hannah and Andrea discover Max Turner's body, which happens at approximately 60% of the story. This revelation shifts the investigation from a single murder to a double homicide and raises the stakes considerably.

Second plot point: The second plot point involves Hannah's realization that the rental car folder in the photograph connects the Woodley family to the crime, leading directly to her confrontation with Judith.

Climax: The story's climax is essential for providing emotional and plot resolution. The climax occurs during Hannah's confrontation with Judith Woodley, where she must use her wits to survive and bring the killer to justice. This climax is satisfying because it allows Hannah to triumph through intelligence rather than physical strength.

Resolution: The story resolves with Judith's arrest and the revelation of her motives, while also tying up the romantic subplot by establishing Hannah's relationships with both Norman and Mike. All major plot threads are resolved satisfactorily.

These story elements hold together effectively within the Three Act Structure, providing a cohesive and satisfying storyline that meets cozy mystery genre expectations while developing character relationships and maintaining narrative momentum.

How to use the graph's data

Marlowe measures major story beats by identifying emotional highs and lows. The strength of a beat in the graph is marked by the rise or fall of emotional cues at key moments. Beat strength is calculated as a percentage of your book's emotional range — the difference between its highest and lowest points. For instance, a beat strength of +100% would indicate a section that starts at the lowest emotional point and rises to the highest.

Now consider the graph at the top. Are the turning points spaced out at regular intervals — say, every 10% or so — or are there large gaps without a major narrative beat? The spacing does not need to be exact, but if there are large chunks of your novel without a shift, your story may lack the dynamic pacing and emotional rollercoaster ride found in bestsellers.

In the graph above, major story beats come in two forms:

- Positive beats, representing emotional high points, are marked with peaks to designate places where the characters' emotions take a positive turn.
- Negative beats, representing emotional low points, are marked with valleys (downward spikes) where difficult emotions are more prevalent in your story.

Character analysis

Overview

Our AI has analyzed the characters in *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder* based on their agency — what they seem to be doing in your story rather than based on their descriptions or backstory. Regardless of which type of novel you're writing, the characters you create will play a crucial role in engaging the reader. Broadly speaking, there are two types of stories:

- Plot driven, in which the story is driven mainly by action — the characters serve to advance the plot. E.g., *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.
- Character driven, in which the story focuses more on character than plot — the plot is a mechanism through which to develop character. Examples: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Truman Capote, *Normal People* by Sally Rooney.

After you're finished with your draft, see what Marlowe says about the major characters and see if they need to be tweaked or some of their actions need to be reconsidered.

Analysis of your story's characters

Compelling fiction depends on three-dimensional characters who feel real through their actions, dialogue, and internal motivations. Characters should avoid falling into stereotypical archetypes and instead surprise readers while remaining true to their established personalities.

Protagonist analysis

Hannah Swensen emerges as a well-rounded protagonist whose intelligence and curiosity drive the narrative forward. She demonstrates independence through her successful bakery business and contentment with single life, while showing vulnerability in her family relationships and self-doubt about her appearance. Her investigative skills develop naturally from her observational nature and logical thinking, making her amateur sleuth role believable. Hannah's protective instincts toward her family and community provide clear motivation for her involvement in dangerous situations, while her sense of humor and self-deprecating attitude keep her relatable rather than heroic.

Antagonist analysis

Judith Woodley functions as an effective antagonist whose refined exterior masks desperate ruthlessness. Her obsessive attachment to her social status and family home provides believable motivation for murder, while her careful planning demonstrates intelligence that makes her a worthy opponent for Hannah. Judith's polite facade throughout most of the story creates genuine surprise when her true nature is revealed, though this could be strengthened with earlier hints of her desperation and capacity for violence.

Supporting characters analysis

Andrea Todd serves as Hannah's foil, representing the conventional life path Hannah rejected. Her struggles with motherhood and career create realistic family tension while showing character growth throughout the story. **Bill Todd** provides the law enforcement connection that allows Hannah's amateur investigation to feel legitimate, while his quest for promotion adds personal stakes to solving the case. **Delores Swensen** embodies the interfering mother archetype but remains sympathetic through her genuine concern for Hannah's happiness. **Norman Rhodes** represents a potential romantic interest whose kindness and stability contrast with his initially awkward social presentation. **Mike Kingston** enters late in the story as another romantic possibility, though he needs more development to feel like a distinct character rather than a plot device.

Character dynamics & character arcs

Character dynamics: The interactions between characters create believable tension and emotional investment throughout the story. Hannah's relationship with her sister Andrea evolves from somewhat strained to genuinely supportive as they work together and Andrea gains confidence. The mother-daughter dynamic between Hannah and Delores provides both humor and genuine emotion, with their conflicts feeling authentic rather than contrived. Hannah's developing friendship with Norman builds naturally through shared experiences and mutual respect, while her professional relationship with Bill creates trust that allows for their investigative partnership.

The family dynamics feel particularly strong, with each relationship having distinct patterns and growth opportunities. However, some interactions could benefit from increased emotional intensity, particularly the romantic elements which sometimes feel more obligatory than passionate.

Character arcs: Hannah's character arc shows her growing from someone who simply observes her community to someone willing to take risks to protect it. She gains confidence in her investigative abilities while learning to rely on others for support, particularly Andrea. Her arc demonstrates growth in accepting help and partnership rather than trying to handle everything alone. Andrea's arc is equally strong, showing her evolution from self-focused to family-oriented as she learns to balance career ambitions with maternal responsibilities. Bill's arc centers on proving himself worthy of promotion while learning to value his wife's contributions to his success. The other characters have less pronounced arcs, which is appropriate for their supporting roles, though Norman could benefit from a clearer journey from social awkwardness to confidence.

Character development ideas

1. **Develop Norman's backstory and personality more distinctly:** Give Norman clearer goals and conflicts beyond his dental practice to make him feel less like a generic nice guy. Perhaps explore his relationship with his parents' financial troubles or his adjustments to small-town life after living in Seattle, which would create more depth and make his romantic potential feel more substantial.
2. **Strengthen Judith's early characterization:** Add subtle hints about Judith's desperation and ruthlessness earlier in the story through her interactions at the party or through community gossip. This could include her reaction to seemingly minor social slights or her obsessive attention to maintaining appearances, which would make her later violent actions feel more earned.
3. **Give Mike Kingston more distinctive traits:** Since Mike arrives late in the story, he needs stronger characterization to distinguish him from Norman as a romantic interest. Develop his background as a big-city detective adjusting to small-town life, his grief over his wife's death, and specific personality traits that set him apart from other characters.
4. **Expand Danielle Watson's character beyond victim status:** While her abusive marriage is important to the plot, Danielle could be given more agency and personality. Show her strength in other areas of her life or her intelligence in managing her finances, which would make her a more complex character rather than simply someone things happen to.
5. **Deepen the mother-daughter relationship:** While Delores and Hannah's relationship provides good humor, it could benefit from moments of genuine emotional connection. Perhaps include a scene where Delores shows real concern for Hannah's safety or where Hannah recognizes her mother's wisdom in unexpected areas, which would add emotional depth to their dynamic.

POV analysis

Handling shifting points of view can be tricky, and many beginning authors engage in head hopping within a single chapter without inserting scene breaks. This story maintains consistent third-person limited point of view focused on Hannah throughout, which serves the mystery genre well by keeping readers in the detective's perspective. The author does an excellent job of establishing Hannah as the POV character and maintaining that perspective without confusion.

The consistent POV allows readers to experience the investigation alongside Hannah, sharing her discoveries and deductions while maintaining the mystery's suspense. This approach works particularly well for cozy mysteries where the amateur sleuth's perspective is central to the reader's experience. The author avoids the temptation to switch to other

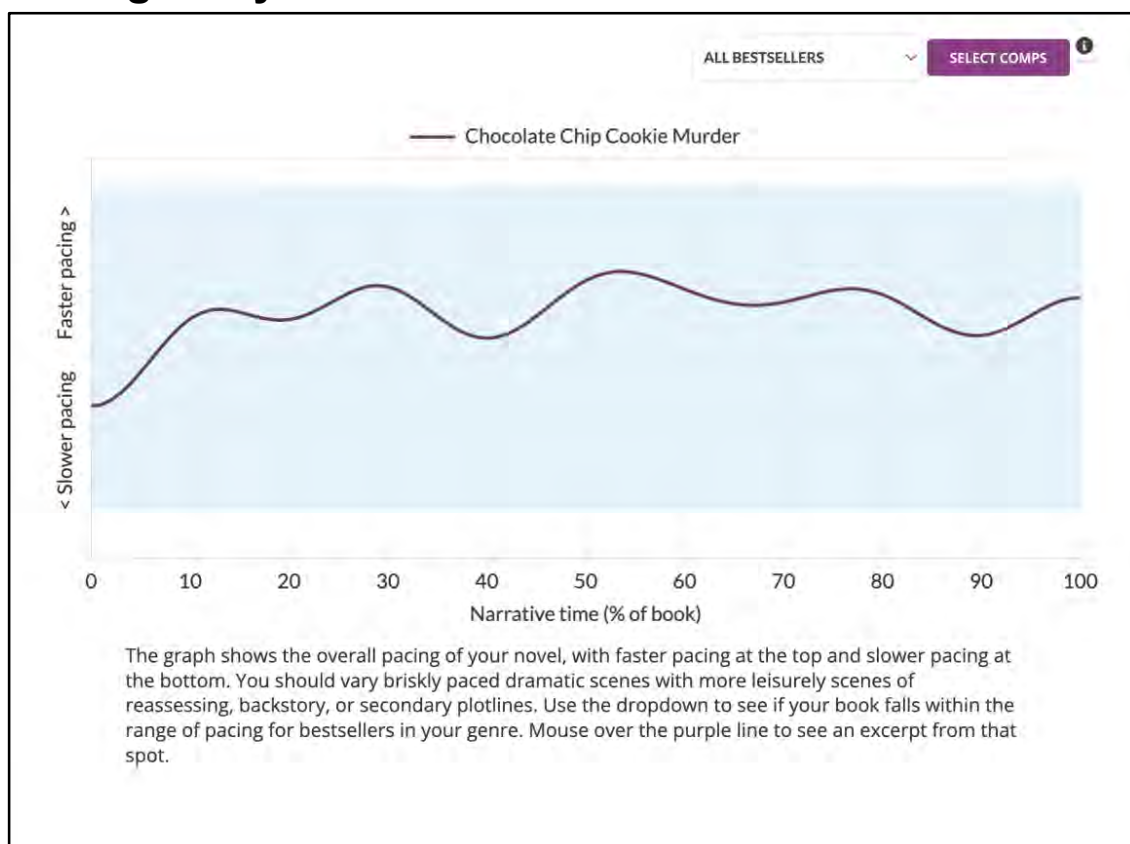
characters' viewpoints during crucial scenes, which maintains narrative focus and mystery tension.

Revisions to consider

The POV handling is strong overall, but there are a few areas where it could be enhanced. Some scenes rely heavily on dialogue to convey information that other characters know but Hannah doesn't, which occasionally feels clunky. The author could strengthen these passages by filtering information more naturally through Hannah's observations and reactions rather than having characters simply tell her what she needs to know.

Additionally, while maintaining Hannah's POV is generally effective, there might be opportunities to deepen her internal voice during crucial moments. Some of her emotional reactions and thought processes could be explored more fully to give readers greater insight into her character and motivations. This would be particularly effective during the confrontation with Judith, where Hannah's fear and determination could be rendered more viscerally through her internal experience.

Pacing analysis



Overview

In the graph above, Marlowe has charted the high-level pacing of *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder*. This pacing model simulates the experience readers have as they move through your narrative. While it doesn't show every fast-paced and slow-paced passage, the graph gives a snapshot of the parts of your story where your readers will be turning pages most quickly (peaks) as well as the slower moments (valleys) of foregrounding, scene setting, and the "sequels" that occur between action scenes. (See the [Story elements](#) section for more on sequels.)

Marlowe determines pacing by considering language used, sentence length, paragraph length, and scene length. Key changes in pace are marked by dotted vertical lines and a percentage showing where in your story the change takes place. The graph is interactive so you should be able to click on any point to see a text excerpt.

A graph that depicts narrative speed

If you see several valleys, that's not a bad thing. Readers need a break between major action scenes to assess and prepare for the next peak. A warning flag should go up if your graph shows relatively flat pacing – most bestsellers offer a joy ride of highs and lows throughout a story. However, keep in mind that while the plot turns graph shows the emotional rollercoaster ride your story takes readers on, the pacing graph above doesn't measure emotion, mood, or tone at all — it depicts the speed at which the story is moving. Note that different authors handle different scenes with their own style and voice, so you could write a slow-paced gun battle or a fast-paced romantic scene. Marlowe determines pacing by looking at the complexity of your sentences from scene to scene.

You'll notice a blue tint block. This represents the full range in pacing (from fastest to slowest) in 90% of bestsellers — and when you choose a genre from the ALL BESTSELLERS dropdown filter, it shows the range for that genre or subgenre. Whereas the narrative arc and plot turns graphs show a lavender tint block to indicate the range of tone and mood, this tint block shows how quickly readers are likely turning the pages based on what's happening in the story.

It's important to point out what Marlowe is *not* looking at: time frames. A romance, mystery, or science fiction novel might unfold over a number of weeks, months, even years. But some genres, such as thrillers, often demand a compressed time frame (you know, the ticking clock thing). Marlowe is thinking about your pacing not based on the calendar but rather on your writing. Faster-paced scenes usually contain shorter sentences, more action verbs, crisper dialogue. Slower scenes contain more description, texture, background. A mix of both is good.

Even a veteran author who has published multiple titles can benefit from a deep dive into pacing. Just keep in mind there is no ideal shape of a pacing graph, though you may want to compare yours to titles by bestselling authors you admire.

Pacing analysis of your story

Pacing controls the rhythm and flow of narrative events, determining when to accelerate action and when to slow down for character development or emotional processing. Effective pacing varies the story's tempo to maintain reader engagement while providing appropriate emphasis for important plot points. This story generally maintains good pacing through its mystery structure, but certain sections could benefit from tightening or expansion to improve overall flow.

The opening chapters establish character and setting at an appropriate pace before introducing the central mystery. The investigation sections maintain reasonable momentum through discovery and revelation, though some middle chapters slow when Hannah gathers information through multiple similar conversations. The climactic confrontation with Judith provides excellent pacing acceleration, while the resolution allows proper deceleration for emotional satisfaction.

The story effectively uses short scenes to maintain pace during investigative sequences, but occasionally lingers too long on information-gathering conversations that don't advance plot or character development significantly. Some sections would benefit from more active discovery methods rather than passive information transfer through dialogue.

Suggestions for faster pacing

- The middle investigation chapters where Hannah learns about Max's loan practices through multiple secondhand conversations could be condensed and combined to maintain better momentum while delivering the same information more efficiently.
- The scenes where Hannah eliminates various suspects could be tightened by combining revelations or having her discover information more actively rather than through extended conversations with informants.
- The party sequence at the Woodleys' could move more quickly to the crucial photograph discovery by reducing some of the social interaction and focusing more directly on the investigative elements.

Suggestions for slower pacing

- The revelation of Danielle's abusive marriage could be expanded to allow more emotional processing time and better exploration of Hannah's reaction to this disturbing discovery.
- The final confrontation between Hannah and Judith could benefit from slower pacing to build more suspense and allow readers to fully experience Hannah's fear and determination.
- The resolution scene could be expanded slightly to provide more satisfying closure for the various character relationships and romantic possibilities that have developed throughout the story.

Conflict analysis

Overview

Conflict — both external and internal — is central to effective storytelling. Used properly, conflict (when combined with character and other key elements) can propel a novel onto the bestseller list. But you can't just pile on the conflict with no let-up, even if you're writing a high-stakes thriller.

As James Scott Bell notes in *Conflict & Suspense*, our goal as authors is to keep readers engaged through tension and resolution. Bestselling plots alternate between intense conflict and quieter moments where characters regroup and move closer to their goals.

In his seminal book *Scene and Sequel*, Dwight Swain laid out the general rule that action-packed scenes should be followed by reflective moments that allow characters to process events and plan their next steps. These “sequels” could be as short as a couple of paragraphs or as long as a scene. It's a way to let the story breathe.

Fiction University founder Janice Hardy emphasizes this structure: Each scene should follow a pattern of Goal > Conflict > Result, followed by Reaction > Reflection > Decision. Have you done so in your story?

Our AI has analyzed the main sources of conflict in *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder* and has identified the main sources of conflict in the storyline and the major shifts in emotional polarity. We end with a short "brainstorming" session focusing on opportunities to enhance the narrative drive.

Conflict in your story

Conflict drives story forward by creating obstacles that characters must overcome, revealing personality traits and forcing character growth. Both external conflict (plot events) and internal conflict (character struggles) work together to maintain reader engagement and emotional investment in the outcome.

The story successfully employs multiple layers of conflict that maintain tension throughout the narrative. The central conflict involves Hannah's determination to solve the murders while facing increasing danger from the killer, creating external stakes that drive the plot forward. Internal conflict emerges through Hannah's struggle between maintaining her safe, predictable life and taking risks to help others, particularly as she becomes more involved in dangerous investigative work.

1. **Murder investigation conflict:** Hannah's pursuit of Ron and Max's killer creates immediate external stakes with life-or-death consequences.
2. **Family relationship tensions:** Hannah's conflicts with her mother over matchmaking and with Andrea over responsibility create ongoing interpersonal drama.
3. **Professional vs. personal boundaries:** Hannah's struggle to balance her business

responsibilities with her investigative activities generates realistic everyday conflict.

4. **Romantic complications:** The emerging relationships with Norman and Mike create internal conflict about Hannah's contentment with single life.
5. **Law enforcement cooperation:** Hannah's need to work with Bill while avoiding official channels creates tension about proper procedures and personal safety.

The story maintains strong conflict throughout without becoming melodramatic. The main conflict is clearly established and developed consistently, with escalating stakes as Hannah gets closer to the truth. The conflict successfully illuminates character personalities and flaws, particularly Hannah's independent nature and protective instincts. The consequences of failure are clearly defined and felt throughout the story, especially as the danger to Hannah personally increases. The conflict escalates naturally to the climax, where Hannah must use all her resources to survive her confrontation with Judith.

Narrative drive

Narrative drive is crucial for maintaining reader engagement throughout a novel. In his masterclass, James Patterson says that narrative drive is about parceling out information in such a way as to keep the reader asking questions and engaging emotionally with the protagonist. This is precisely why long passages of exposition (also known as information dumps) do not work. They reveal too much information and they do it in a way that distances readers rather than intriguing us. Character motivation must remain urgent and emotionally gripping, so that every action and decision feels inevitable yet unpredictable. Finally, questions should constantly be raised—whether through mystery, conflict, or suspense—ensuring that readers are always curious about what happens next.

This story demonstrates strong narrative drive through its mystery structure, which naturally creates questions that propel readers forward. Hannah's investigation unfolds through discovery rather than exposition, with each clue raising new questions while answering previous ones. The author effectively uses Hannah's emotional investment in protecting her community and helping Bill to maintain urgency throughout the investigation.

The pacing generally maintains good momentum, though some middle sections slow down when Hannah revisits information or has similar conversations with multiple characters. The story would benefit from more varied revelation methods and tighter scene construction to maintain consistent forward motion.

The dual murder structure provides excellent narrative drive by escalating stakes just when readers might expect resolution after the first crime. The personal danger to Hannah increases steadily, culminating in direct threat during her confrontation with Judith, which creates genuine suspense about the outcome.

The romantic subplots add another layer of narrative drive by creating questions about Hannah's personal future beyond the immediate mystery. However, these elements could be more tightly integrated with the main plot to avoid feeling like separate story threads competing for attention.

Ideas to intensify the conflict

1. **Increase early physical danger to Hannah:** Add a scene where Hannah faces direct threat earlier in the investigation, perhaps a break-in attempt at her apartment or threatening phone calls, which would raise stakes and create more immediate personal conflict throughout the story.
2. **Create professional consequences for Hannah's investigation:** Have Hannah's amateur sleuthing interfere with her business in more significant ways, such as losing important catering contracts or facing criticism from the community, which would force her to choose between safety and justice more dramatically.
3. **Develop opposition between Hannah and Mike Kingston:** Since Mike represents professional law enforcement, create more tension between his by-the-book approach and Hannah's intuitive investigation methods, which could generate conflict while building their relationship through disagreement and mutual respect.
4. **Add time pressure to the investigation:** Introduce a deadline element, such as evidence being destroyed or the killer planning to leave town, which would compress the timeline and increase urgency throughout Hannah's investigation.

The importance of narrative tension

Emotional valence shifts are crucial for maintaining dynamic storytelling, as scenes should develop narrative tension rather than simply describe a series of events. In *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, James Frey writes, 'Many books have scenes that don't shift valences. They never turn. When a scene doesn't turn, it's not a scene.' Every scene should advance either plot or emotional engagement, avoiding static filler content.

The story maintains an overall tone that balances the serious elements of murder with the lighter aspects expected in cozy mysteries. The emotional temperature shifts appropriately between tension during investigative scenes, humor during family interactions, and genuine fear during dangerous encounters. The author manages these transitions well, avoiding jarring tonal inconsistencies while providing emotional variety that keeps readers engaged.

Notable shifts in tone or emotion

1. **Discovery of Ron's body:** The shift from Hannah's routine morning to the shock of finding a murder victim creates a dramatic tonal change that launches the central conflict.
2. **Finding Max's body with Andrea:** The movement from nervous investigation to genuine horror when they discover the second victim intensifies the stakes and emotional impact.
3. **Norman's photo development revelation:** The shift from casual social interaction to the realization of crucial evidence creates sudden tension and forward momentum.
4. **Confrontation with Judith:** The dramatic shift from polite tea conversation to life-threatening danger provides the story's most intense emotional peak.
5. **Resolution and celebration:** The final shift from mortal danger to family celebration and romantic possibility provides satisfying emotional closure while opening future possibilities.

Suggestions for increased emotional polarity

1. Add more pronounced emotional shifts during Hannah's investigation by varying her discoveries between hopeful breakthroughs and discouraging dead ends, which would create more emotional ups and downs throughout the middle sections.
2. Include a scene where Hannah experiences doubt about her investigative abilities or fears for her safety, followed by renewed determination, which would add emotional depth to her character arc.
3. Create sharper contrast between the cozy small-town atmosphere and the brutal reality of murder by having Hannah struggle more with the violence she's investigating, which would add emotional complexity to her amateur sleuth role.
4. Develop more pronounced shifts in the romantic subplots by having Hannah experience clear moments of attraction followed by doubt or confusion, which would make her emotional journey feel more realistic and relatable.
5. Add a scene where Hannah's investigation causes real family conflict, perhaps endangering Andrea or disappointing Delores, followed by reconciliation that strengthens their relationships through adversity.

Theme analysis

Primary and secondary themes

The primary theme centers on the importance of community responsibility and how individuals must sometimes take personal risks to protect others. This theme develops through Hannah's decision to investigate the murders despite potential danger, driven by her commitment to helping Bill succeed and protecting her community from a killer. The story explores how personal comfort and safety must sometimes be sacrificed for the greater good.

Secondary themes include:

1. **Family obligation versus personal independence:** Hannah's struggle to maintain autonomy while meeting family expectations
2. **The corrupting influence of money and status:** Max's predatory lending and Judith's murderous desperation to maintain her lifestyle
3. **The value of authentic relationships over superficial appearances:** Contrasting genuine connections with social performance

Theme development

The major theme of community responsibility emerges early when Hannah finds Ron's body and must decide whether to simply report the crime or actively help solve it. Her choice to investigate develops throughout the story as she takes increasing risks, culminating in her direct confrontation with Judith. The theme strengthens as other characters also take risks - Andrea participating in the investigation despite her fears, Bill trusting Hannah's insights despite protocol, and even Norman providing assistance through his photography skills.

The secondary themes interact effectively with the primary theme by showing how authentic community connections motivate people to help each other while superficial status concerns lead to isolation and violence. Hannah's genuine relationships with her family and community provide the foundation for her investigative work, while Judith's obsession with maintaining appearances ultimately destroys her. The contrast between Hannah's modest but satisfied life and Judith's wealthy but desperate existence reinforces the theme that authentic relationships matter more than material success.

Revisions to consider

How to strengthen the theme

1. Add a scene where Hannah must choose between a significant business opportunity and continuing her investigation, which would more dramatically illustrate the theme of personal sacrifice for community responsibility.
2. Develop the contrast between Hannah's and Judith's approaches to problem-solving by showing Hannah seeking help from others while Judith isolates herself, reinforcing the theme about the value of authentic community connections.
3. Include more examples of other community members taking small risks to help with the investigation, such as Betty Jackson providing information despite potential job consequences, which would broaden the theme beyond Hannah's individual actions.
4. Strengthen the money and status corruption theme by showing more examples of how Max's lending practices affected the community, perhaps through flashbacks or additional character revelations that demonstrate the broader impact of his greed.
5. Add action beats that show Hannah's internal conflict about putting herself in danger, perhaps through her interactions with Moishe or conversations with herself, which would deepen the exploration of how much individuals should sacrifice for others.

Author voice

The author demonstrates strong command of the cozy mystery voice, creating an engaging narrative that balances serious crime elements with the lighter tone expected in the genre. The writing style maintains consistency throughout, with clear, accessible prose that serves the story without drawing attention to itself. Hannah's perspective comes through clearly, with a distinctive voice that combines intelligence with self-deprecating humor and genuine warmth toward her community.

The storytelling effectively transports readers to small-town Minnesota through specific details and authentic dialogue that reflects the regional setting. The author shows particular skill in balancing multiple plot threads - the investigation, family dynamics, and romantic possibilities - without losing focus on the central mystery. The writing maintains reader engagement through well-paced revelations and character interactions that feel natural rather than contrived.

The narrative voice successfully captures the cozy mystery tone that readers expect while adding enough depth and complexity to satisfy readers looking for more than simple formula fiction. The author's handling of sensitive topics like domestic abuse shows appropriate gravity without overwhelming the genre expectations.

Prose style

The prose style effectively serves the cozy mystery genre with clear, straightforward sentences that maintain good readability while providing sufficient detail to create vivid scenes and characters. The author demonstrates good instincts about when to use description and when to rely on action and dialogue to advance the story. Sentence variety is generally strong, though some passages could benefit from more rhythmic variation.

The author successfully avoids purple prose while providing enough sensory detail to make scenes feel real and immediate. The descriptions of Hannah's baking and the various food elements integrate naturally with the story rather than feeling like inserted recipe content. Character descriptions emerge organically through action and dialogue rather than static physical inventories.

The writing maintains consistent tone throughout, avoiding jarring shifts between the serious murder investigation and the lighter family and romantic elements. The author shows good judgment in balancing exposition with scene work, though some information-heavy sections could be streamlined.

Dialogue feels natural and serves multiple functions effectively - advancing plot, revealing character, and maintaining genre tone. The author generally avoids overwriting, though some passages could be tightened for better impact.

Technical writing skills are strong, with good grammar and sentence construction throughout. The author demonstrates understanding of scene structure and pacing, creating chapters that advance the story while maintaining reader engagement.

Some areas could benefit from more dynamic sentence structures, particularly during action sequences where shorter, more varied sentences might increase tension and pace. The investigative scenes sometimes rely heavily on similar sentence patterns that could be varied for better flow.

The author shows good instincts about filtering sensory details through Hannah's perspective, creating a consistent point of view that helps readers stay oriented in the story. However, some opportunities exist to deepen the sensory experience, particularly in key emotional moments.

Overall, the prose style serves the story well while demonstrating room for refinement that would elevate the writing from competent to compelling. The foundation is strong and the instincts are good, requiring primarily tightening and polishing rather than major structural changes.

Other sections

In addition to the sections above, the Author Dashboard also contains Marlowe's analysis in these sections:

- Dialogue vs. narrative (including dialogue tags)
- Readability score and complexity score
- Setting analysis
- Novelty and variations in chapter openings & closings
- Active vs. passive voice examples & suggested alternatives
- Cliches finder and Select Comps option
- Explicit language and content and Select Comps option
- Repetitive phrases finder and Select Comps option
- Repetitive adverbs
- Repetitive adjectives
- Misspellings finder
- Dissonance: Revisions to consider, inconsistent plot threads, unlikely character actions, etc.
- Story structure: Frameworks, templates, and tropes by genre
- Final review checklist

Head to <https://authors.ai/author-dashboard> for Marlowe's full analysis of your work.