PICKZOX • EXCLUSIVE BONUS

The Fair-Play Clue Ledger Workbook

An exclusive Pickzox bonus for CaseBound buyers — designed to pair with CaseBound's solution-first method

Exclusive Pickzox bonus companion to the CaseBound review.

What this is: CaseBound builds your case file — the hidden truth behind the crime — and then drafts chapters around it. This workbook is where you *police* that case file as the draft grows: tracking every suspect, every clue, every red herring and every timestamp so the mystery stays fair-play solvable from chapter one.

How to use it: Copy the sheets below into a notebook, a spreadsheet, or a document — one set per novel. Fill in the Master sheets first (straight from your CaseBound case file), then update the chapter log as you review each drafted chapter.

Sheet 1: Master Suspect Sheets

Complete one row per suspect. Aim for **at least three credible suspects** (CaseBound's audit requires this — and so does the genre).

Columns: # | Name | Role / relationship to victim | Public motive (what readers see) | Secret motive (the truth) | Alibi (claimed) | Alibi (actual) | Access to means? | Knowledge of opportunity? | Guilty?

1

2

3

4

Fair-play rule: every suspect must have a *means, motive and opportunity* that the reader can discover — the culprit's must simply be better hidden.

Sheet 2: The Clue Log (genuine vs. red herring)

Log every clue the moment it appears in your CaseBound draft. The single most common mystery-writing failure is losing track of which clues are real.

Columns: # | Clue | Chapter introduced | Genuine / Red herring | Points to (suspect) | Explained by (chapter) | Status

1
2
3
4
5
6

Rules of the log:

- A red herring must point at a *credible alternative suspect*, not at nothing — dead-end clues that implicate nobody feel like cheating.
- Every genuine clue the detective uses in the reveal must appear **before** the reveal chapter. No clue may debut in the denouement.
- Aim for a ratio of roughly **2 genuine clues per 1 red herring** — enough misdirection without reader frustration.

Sheet 3: Timeline Consistency Table

Mystery plots die on timeline errors. Reconstruct the *actual* sequence of events (the truth), separate from what characters claim.

Columns: Time | Actual event (the truth) | Who claims otherwise | Claim made in chapter | Contradiction spotted?

Check: after CaseBound drafts a chapter, re-read it against this table. If a character is

somewhere the truth says they cannot be, flag it for revision before continuing.

Sheet 4: Chapter-by-Chapter Clue Placement Log

One row per chapter. Track the *reader's* information state — what a careful reader could know at each point.

Columns: Chapter | New genuine clue(s) introduced | New red herring(s) introduced | Suspect focus this chapter | Reader's likely #1 suspect | Anything the reader learns that the detective doesn't (or vice versa)?

1

2

3

Pacing rule: the reader's #1 suspect should rotate at least twice before the reveal. If the same suspect leads from chapter 3 onward with no challenge, add a red herring.

Sheet 5: The Fair-Play Audit (run before you call the draft done)

Answer honestly — this is the same spirit as CaseBound's twelve-check audit, applied by hand.

- ☐ The culprit is introduced **before the midpoint** of the book.
- ☐ Every clue used in the reveal appears **earlier** in the text (list chapter numbers above).
- ☐ At least **three suspects** have credible means, motive and opportunity.
- ☐ The culprit's motive is **understandable**, even if not sympathetic.
- ☐ No clue is introduced for the first time in the reveal chapter.
- ☐ No supernatural, coincidence-based, or "unknown twin" solutions appear without setup.
- ☐ The timeline has been checked against Sheet 3 — **zero contradictions**.

- ☐ At least one red herring genuinely misleads (ask a beta reader who they suspected).
- ☐ The detective's reasoning is shown, not just the conclusion — the reader can follow the logic.
- ☐ Re-reading the opening after knowing the ending feels *fair*, not tricked.

Scoring: 10/10 — submit to beta readers. 8–9 — fix the gaps, then submit. Below 8 — revise before anyone else reads it.

Quick-start: your first 60 minutes with this workbook

- **Minutes 0–15:** Export your CaseBound case file (culprit, suspects, motives, timeline, clues, red herrings) into Sheets 1–3.
- **Minutes 15–30:** Fill the suspect sheets completely — if any suspect lacks a credible means/motive/opportunity, go back to CaseBound and strengthen them before drafting.
- **Minutes 30–45:** Lay out the timeline table. Find one contradiction now (there is almost always one) and fix it in the case file.
- **Minutes 45–60:** Sketch the chapter log for the first five chapters — where does each clue land, and whose suspicion does it feed?

Do this once, before the draft grows, and the audit at the end becomes a confirmation instead of a rescue mission.

Created exclusively for Pickzox readers. Pair with CaseBound's Mystery Audit for a belt-and-braces approach to fair-play plotting.