

10 Rules for Writing a Sherlockian Pastiche

By Derrick Belanger

As part of your Junior Sherlockian Training, you may write a pastiche as an extension task. A Sherlock Holmes pastiche is a short story written in a similar style to the Sherlock Holmes stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. To write your pastiche, there are 10 rules you should follow:

1. You are writing a mystery. Your story needs a full plot with a client bringing Sherlock Holmes a problem to solve. You need to have clues along the way as Holmes investigates. You need to have a resolution where Holmes solves the mystery. You can't do that in a few paragraphs. Take your time to tell your tale.
2. You need to read the original Sherlock Holmes stories. You can't write a pastiche if you don't know who you are imitating. Pay attention to how Doyle introduces Holmes, how the mystery begins, how his characters interact. Note that Watson calls Sherlock Holmes by his last name, "Holmes" not "Sherlock". The closer you are to Doyle, the better.
3. Sherlock Holmes is The Great Detective. Sherlock Holmes is the world's greatest detective. You have to show the reader that Holmes is great, don't just tell us. Have Holmes look at a client and tell their life story simply from their clothing. Have Holmes solve a mystery that does not seem solvable. Prove to the reader that Holmes is the best.
4. Dr. Watson is Holmes's biographer. Almost all of Doyle's stories are told by Dr. Watson. It is through his eyes that we see Holmes at work; it is through his ears that we hear the client's story. While you don't necessarily have to tell the story from Watson's point of view, he should, at the very least, be an important part of your narrative.
5. The setting of your story is vitally important. Sherlock Holmes lives at 221b Baker street with Dr. Watson. They reside in Victorian (late 19th Century) London. Show us the setting. Have them dine at the Criterion, visit the Strand, stroll through Westminster, hear the chimes of Big Ben. The more we are immersed in the Victorian time period, the better.

6. Characters make the story fun. Part of the fun of reading Sherlock Holmes stories is the rich, diverse characters. You have the Baker Street Irregulars, the children who help gather information for Sherlock Holmes. You have the landlady, Mrs. Hudson, who not only delivers tea to Holmes and Watson but actually helps them catch a dangerous criminal in “The Empty House”. You have Jabez Wilson, the pawn shop owner tricked into joining the Red Headed League. These side characters are unique; they are memorable and make the story more interesting to read.
7. We learn much from dialogue in a Sherlock Holmes story. Use dialogue both to move the plot forward and to let us get to know the personalities of the characters. The client always tells Holmes the problem they need him to solve. Holmes asks questions of the client and we learn about the mystery. We also learn much about the client from how they approach Holmes. From her dialogue, we learn that Mary Stoner is nervous and fearing for her life in “The Speckled Band”. In “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor,” we learn of Lord St. Simon’s befuddlement at the disappearance of his fiance from his story. Make sure we learn about the characters in your story from their dialogue.
8. Know your ending. You have created a client who has brought Holmes a mystery to solve. You have to have Holmes solve the mystery to bring your story to a conclusion, and the ending must be believable. I find that authors who don’t know the ending to their story in advance tend to get lost in the plot and often abandon their story. My advice is to know your ending before you write your story. If you know how the story will end then you can set up the clues along the way to help you reach your conclusion and make it satisfying to your readers.
9. Know your Facts. Even though you are writing a fictional story, you still need to do a lot of research. No one writing a pastiche today lived in Victorian London. You need to make certain you don’t have Holmes chase a suspect down a street that did not exist until 1921 or say a modern slang expression. Holmes never said, “Yo, Watson, What up!” Get to know the history of Victorian London. Know the fashion of the day (Watson would never wear jeans and a t-shirt). Know the train routes. Use an etymology guide to make sure your

language matches the time period. Fortunately, you have the internet to help you along the way.

10. Writing a Pastiche is Hard Work. Don't be intimidated by writing a Sherlock Holmes story. You will probably need to revise your story several times before it is complete. Have your friends, a teacher, a sibling and/or a parent read your drafts along the way. Have them tell you parts that they like and parts that need improvement. Don't be upset if they find a big mistake in your text. When you make the correction, your story will be better. In the end, you want your story to be the best Sherlock Holmes story it possibly can be.