

Step by Step Instructions and Rules for Murder Happens: party games of mystery

You are about to put on a really fun murder mystery party. These are step-by-step instructions that will guide you through to a very successful party game. Everyone will have a great time, so take a breath and relax. You are in good hands (this makes no sense to me in this context).

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Introduction

Eight players will take on individual roles of one of the suspects in this murder mystery story. One of them is the murderer; they will know this as soon as they start playing the game. The other players will try to deduce who the guilty player is by analyzing the clues and cross-examining the other suspects about what they know. The murderer will try to trip up the other players by utilizing whatever means they think of to make it to the end of the game undetected.

You can play this game with full costumes, props, backdrops, and over-the-top acting and have a great deal of fun doing that. You can also just sit around a table and play with just the material provided and that will be fun too. The story and materials are rich and immersive. All players, both outgoing and reticent, will make their own contribution and will all enjoy themselves. The way the game has been designed will draw them all into the drama. You'll see.

The game is designed to bring people together, to generate conversation and create laughter. Strangers and best friends alike will feel comfortable and have a good time while playing.

Inviting the guests

You will need to get eight committed players together. Start early, contact ten to twelve, or more, people you think would like to play the game. Don't hesitate to invite friends of friends. Begin discussing dates and sending out suggestions until you all can agree on a date and time and location that works for everyone. You should aim for at least ten players. Email is great for this.

Human nature is such that extra people might show up, but you are also likely to have last minute cancellations. The game is designed to accommodate these changes.

Once the date, time and location are arranged you can assign characters to each guest. Character descriptions can be found by clicking the "More Info" button under the game on the home page. There is also an auxiliary character Narrative that can be played by several guests. They will play the game just like the main character players, but they will not be the murderer.

Preparing for the party

You can go all out with costumes, props, and a backdrop. You can plan an elaborate meal or even hire a caterer. You can also put together a music playlist of songs and ambient sound. The game will make your extra effort worthwhile. You can also just play around the kitchen table with a group of friends. The writing and graphic materials, police report, Crime Scene Photos, Map, Narratives and Clue Cards are all designed to be immersive. This is theatre of the mind. Costumes and props help to get players into the spirit of the story but, are not necessary. Once the story starts revealing itself, the characters' actions and schemes will become apparent, the accusations will fly and everyone will get upset, or shocked, or suspicious. Then it becomes a game of the mind and it will draw the players together into an intense tight circle towards the end that is rewarding.

If you serve dinner, plan to use the 2 hours and 45 minutes time limit. The meal will encourage conversation and getting to know each other better but it takes up time. If you are just serving snacks then you can use the 1 hour and 45 minute time limit. Keep in mind that the innocent characters would like extra time to solve the crime, but the murderer is on pins and needles at the end trying to run down the clock before they are found out. These time limits have proven to yield about a fifty-fifty chance for both. In the end everyone will vote on who they think is the murderer. If the majority are correct then they win, if not then the murderer wins. Even if you are wrong you will feel like you almost had it figured out in the end.

Make name tags for each player and also provide a pencil and a piece of paper to keep track of clues with.

Setting up the game

Less than eight players:

You may have some last minute cancellations. At the top of the game there is an envelope with four characters that can go without a player. Open packet 1 if you have seven players, packet 2 if you have six players, etc. When you set up the playing pieces of the game for perusal, the Narratives for the characters without designated players are made available for everyone to read. Don't worry about guests having to change their characters, it will all work out.

The game can be played with four people, but eight is always best.

More than eight players:

If you have more than eight players then assign a guest to each main character role and the rest can read the generic character (the Narrative with no name on it). Don't worry though, they will have access to all the evidence and be able to cross-examine the suspects just like the main character players.

Preliminary playing pieces:

Put the box on a central table but leave most of the playing pieces in it.

Take out the Introduction and the two pages of Witness Statements (on top)

Then settle the group down and read the rules aloud.

Rules

1. Each player has a Narrative, it tells them what their character has seen, heard, and done at the time of the murder. You can only read your character's Narrative, you may not look at someone else's. Don't let anyone read your Narrative. You can tell anyone what is in it, you can even read aloud from it, you just can't let anyone see it.
2. Each player will get some Clue Cards, they are to be shared, passed about, and discussed. You are not allowed to hide any of them. They must be available to other players at any point in the game. They are numbered so you can tell you have seen all of them.

Frequently asked questions.

Are the clues in the game all true facts?

Not necessarily. Witnesses might be inaccurate in their observations. People will have agendas when they say things. Some police observations might be inaccurate. But, there are enough actual logical clues to solve the mystery.

Can I lie?

Yes, at no time is any player required to tell the truth. Many have something to hide and the murderer will certainly be lying constantly.

Can I read the other Narratives when the game is over and we know who the murderer is?

Yes, the game can be played only once. It is actually amusing to read the other Narratives once the game has ended.

Can there be more than one murderer?

No, only one suspect is guilty of murder.

Does the murderer know who they are?

Yes, the Narrative tells the player if they are the murderer. So once the game starts the murderer will be trying to trip up the other players.

There is so much detail, how can I possibly keep track of it all?

Don't try to keep track of the details in the beginning. Just read the Narrative and enjoy the story and your character. Read the Clues the same way as well as the Crime Scene Photos and the Map. Once you start asking each other questions the important clues will begin to emerge. This game has been thoroughly play-tested and the important information always becomes apparent.

Step-by-step game play

1. Read the rules out loud to the group.
2. Start a timer going. Set it for 2 hours and 45 minutes if you serve dinner during the game. Set it for 1 hour 45 minutes if you have just snacks or serve dinner before the game.
3. Read the Introduction out loud to the group, or play it on a computer. It is in the game details when you click the "More Info" button on murderhappens.com
4. Each player then reads their own character's Suspect Statement out loud to the group. This is what each character told Detective Thrasher they were doing at the time of the murder.
5. Pass out the Clue Cards as evenly as possible. Some players may get more than others. Don't read the Clue Cards yet.
6. Pass out the Narratives and everyone starts to read them to themselves. Allow fifteen minutes to read the Narrative. If players finish before the fifteen minutes they can read their Clue Cards, the Introduction, and the Suspect Statements.
7. Once the Narratives are read take out the remaining playing pieces, the Police Report, Map, and Crime Scene Photos and items and put them on the table. DO NOT open the Answer Sheet, leave it in the box and close the box.
8. Everyone reads the Clue Cards, ask other players about theirs, trade them and use them as a way to start talking to each other about what you know. At this point you can read all the evidence except for other players' Narratives.
9. Examine the rest of the evidence, question each other about what they know and did. All the game pieces have clues, study them and discuss them. Your time will run out sooner than you think and working together is the best way to determine who the murderer is in time.

Winning the game

When the time is up all discussion must stop. Then, on the count of three everyone points at the player that they think is the murderer. Keep pointing until all the picks are counted. If half or more of the players pick the murderer correctly the group wins. If less than half choose correctly then the murderer wins.

Once the vote has been tallied the player who is the murderer reveals themselves. This will be one of the funniest moments of the game, let everyone talk about what they experienced and share their stories.

When everyone gets done talking about the outcome open the Answer Sheet. Read out loud the murderer's story, it will give all the details the players have been anxious to find out.

Then read the Epilogue aloud. This tells what happens to all the characters after the story. It brings the game to a satisfying conclusion.

What's next?

Now is the time to go to murderhappens.com and start discussing which murder mystery party game you would like to play next. Some players may have creative ideas about how to make the game even more fun to play. They will also have thoughts about how they might play the game differently the next time. This post-game debriefing can help make everyone a better player in the next game.

There is an extra resources section on the murderhappens.com website. This has extra stuff to help you set up and play the game. This is an in progress section that will grow with time and as more games are developed.

