

I have a love hate relationship with research when it comes to writing. I love learning small minute details I can slip in for the reader and wonder if they'll catch them. I take great pleasure in wondering if they know a word was chosen for the exact correlation to a scene, or if the tiniest detail I worked in is one they will notice.

On the other hand, I hate, which is such a strong word, when I realize I've spent eight hours looking for the perfect hair color chart. In case you're wondering, no such thing exists. I'm convinced of that now. I've researched eye colors, saved, and subsequently lost, the same chart so many times I've given up keeping track. And then there's all those fantastic little bunny trails I end up on, like, "Where can I obtain a merino guinea pig?"

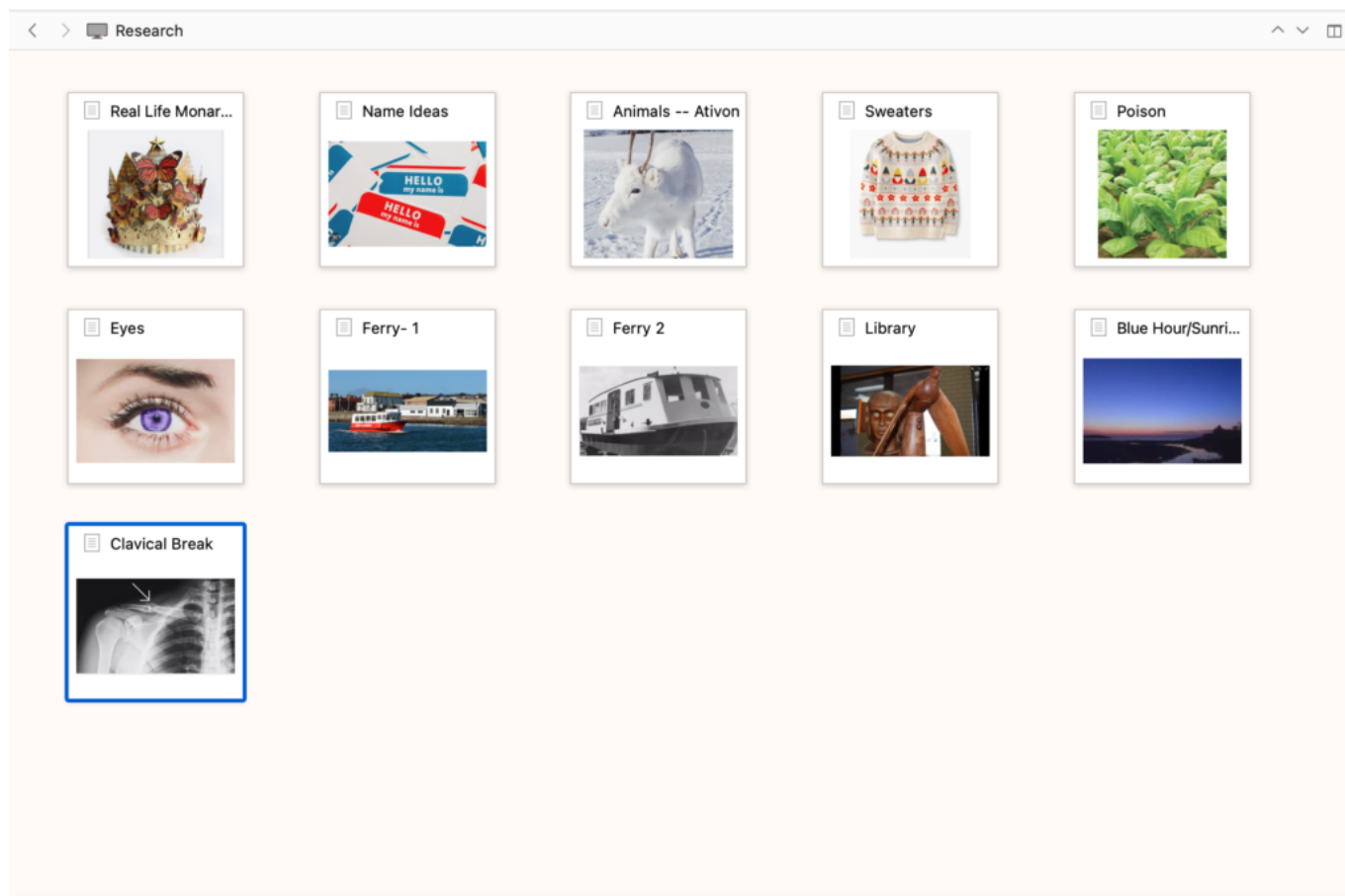
I read a quote once about writing that went a little something like this:

'Some days are for writing, some days are for research, some are for reading, and some are for daydreaming.'

I feel this quote right down to the depth of my soul. There are days when I sit down to write, look up and realize I should have started dinner half an hour ago. Other days I'm lost in a warren of rabbit holes researching the perfect word, place, flower, animal, you name it... I'm just looking for that "perfect" thing.

I once spent two days looking for the perfect name. Yep, really. And the funniest part about the whole scenario, is that when I'm writing a character out a name often pops into my mind and I just roll with it. But that day was different.

It's for a story I'm writing that takes place in the real world, but also in two made up countries that exist within the real world. I didn't want the name to evoke thoughts of any particular country, and I wanted to have a secret meaning behind another character's name. A small clue to the reader if they were to notice that finer detail.



Please note that not all my stories have names that offer a clue to anything. Most of the time they are just randomly chosen names that came to mind while I was typing at breakneck speed. Although my family still giggles over the time I named two main characters Ben and Bill. All was going fine until I wrote [Bill and Ben](#), and instantly the catch-phrase lyric from the [older Australian tv show](#) came to mind: *the flowerpot men*. I had to make an immediate name change for the sake of my sanity.

When it comes to deeper dives with research, it often catches me off guard in most unexpected ways. I'm the kind of person who likes to get the story down on paper as quickly as possible, if I don't the characters keep me up into the wee hours of the morning, and distract me from every task I'm supposed to be tending to. So dumping the story out on paper is pretty important. Then I can highlight areas where I know I need to do some research to add realism and depth.

Other times, though, I can be in the middle of a [Sprint](#), and be led astray. A Sprint is the term

used when you set a timer, and write as much as you can in that time frame. My local writing group holds these all the time. And one day, I came up short on my word count. Short is relative, because there's no set amount of words one has to write during a Sprint. At the same time, we each have an average word amount we usually get, and when I fell short people asked if I was okay.


As it turned out, I was. Unfortunately, one of my characters had led me astray on a probing question about penguins. Yes, penguins. And in another Sprint, the same character led me astray over squirrels. I was longing, at that moment, for the old [DK Animal Encyclopedia](#) my kids used to pour over when they were younger. Sadly, it's packed in a large box of books currently in our storage unit because our small, temporary home doesn't have quite enough room to fit our entire library in. Thus, it was the ol' search engine to the rescue.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a document titled "The Big Freeze 1963". The document text includes the following:

the year with no frost anywhere in Britain.

Did the Thames freeze over?

Yes! Incredible pictures from 1963 show people skating across London's river and – [according to BBC London meteorologist Peter Cockcroft](#) – the Thames saw its first car rally on the ice. But it wasn't the only body of water to freeze. The River Dee in Chester turned to ice, as did the River Humber and River Medway, and in Kent and Dunkirk the sea itself froze over. Meanwhile, in Trafalgar Square...



14th January 1963 in Trafalgar Square, Giffy, SL.

The browser interface shows a sidebar with a list of documents, including "The Big Freeze 1963". The document is displayed in a text editor with a font of Helvetica, Regular, size 14. The status bar at the bottom indicates "3,151 words".

There have been other times when the amount of information can be quite overwhelming. For a project that has yet to see much daylight, I once watched a documentary on The Big Freeze. It was fascinating to hear and see all that happened. To learn that the freeze wasn't the issue as much as the thaw, refreeze, and second thaw. Sadly, the version I watched is no

longer up on [YouTube](#), which makes me glad that I take copious notes and put them in [Scrivener](#) so I don't lose my research.

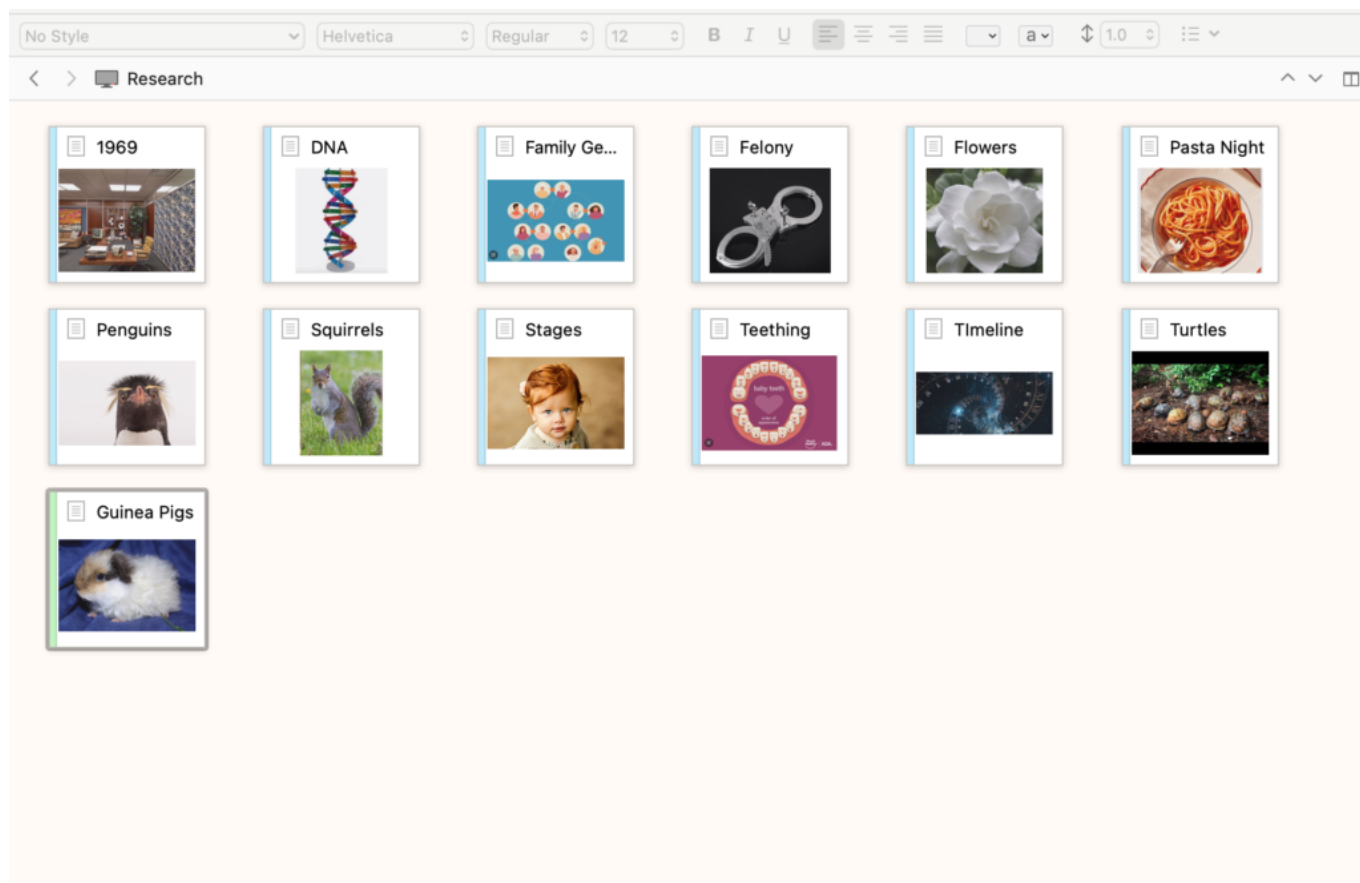
Recently, I was researching flowers. It was one of those moments where I was writing away, and a random plant pot appeared in the scene. It has its merits, but I needed a plant for the pot. And off I went, researching plants. Or more specifically, flowers.

After all, I could work a flower into the story far easier than a plant, right? One of my characters was given some heavy news that rocked their world, and I thought I could sneak in a flower that might bring about some form of closure. Don't read too deeply into that statement, I've yet to give the poor character any form of closure, or do anything more than research flowers.

The catch is, the type of flower mattered because flowers can signify specific meanings. And, if you didn't know, not only can each flower signify a particular meaning, it can change based on the color of the flower, too. Then I had to add in the location of where this story was taking place, a totally made up town but in my mind it's set in a real place in the USA.

By the time I was done, I'd enlisted the help of anyone in my local writing group crazy enough to help me. I say crazy, they say kind, enthused, happy to help. Either way, I'm grateful. In the end we landed on two flowers both of which could convey the same thing, but one's meaning was far richer.

This may seem a tad obsessive, but there's another rule for writers that goes something like, "everything matters, and if it doesn't, cull it." Meaning, that everything we write in the story should have a purpose, including the random flower pot. If it doesn't, it's probably not moving the story along and should become a cutscene. One that may live on in your mind, that I might share on this platform some day, but in short won't make the book.



One of my favorite things to research, though, is location. Even locations I'm familiar with take some time to research. For instance, I've found myself looking up temperatures for specific times of the year, as well as sunrise and sunset. There's also knowing what's in bloom when, and if a certain animal, insect, or bird is actually supposed to be in that location. Or how you're suddenly not sure you can perfectly describe the call of the birds you grew up watching flit around your yard.

everything we write in the story should have a purpose,

The story I'm working on with two made-up countries has taken a lot of time to put together. Blob maps. Climate, flora and fauna research, and then piecing it all together. There was even a hurried email off to a library, only to discover that a family member had done the same thing!

I researched broken bones for a story, two actually. And then, while out on my morning bike ride and having to break hard for two deer that jumped across my path, I was reminded that the most common break for cyclists is the clavicle. It gave me pause to wonder if the deer could have cleared my head if I hadn't braked. And thus traveled my thoughts for the rest of my bike ride.

The oddest thing I've ever researched, to date, is poison. Really. I'm not writing a "who done it" story, but there is always an element of mystery in the larger stories I write. I'm hesitant to say more on that topic, because the story is in a raw mangled mess at the moment. Still, it's an intricate part of the story I'm writing, finding the right poison that will do exactly what I need it to do without causing any illwanted side effects. I must confess there is something very satisfying about finding that one little detail that makes what you're writing sing.



Author's Note:

Dear Reader,

Don't think too highly of me. There are times I delegate research to other people. [The Googler](#) is fantastic for that, because researching things and garnering more knowledge is his foray. I can ask him to find me a couple of fantastic links about a topic, and before the day is over he'll have a dozen.

Remember how I said I watched a documentary about the Big Freeze? It was for a NaNo project I worked on back in 2019. While writing that I was wondering about the weather from other times in England, and my husband emailed people who could give us those details. I'm still in awe of the fact that someone, somewhere out there, can look up such details.

You'd think with all the research I do, I'd be a whiz at trivia. I'm not despite all that I learn. Apparently, I only retain that which applies directly to what I'm writing... or injuries a cyclist can acquire.

The Reluctant Author:

