

BUSTED!

An ex-detective says procedural writers could use some schooling on police procedures.



Cop show writers, are you listening? Derek Pacifico is not impressed.

"There isn't a cop on TV I'd hire," says the former San Bernardino, California, homicide detective, now retired. "So many shows are so unrealistic and so far off the mark. For me, they lose their entertainment value."

While it may make for great drama when a TV detective grabs the crook by the throat and slams him against a wall, snarling threats, Pacifico says that behavior would end a real cop's career. "They would be brought up on charges, and a lot of the career criminals know that," he contends. "Abuse is not what happens."

So what's a TV writer to do? Possibly, sign up for Pacifico's Writers Homicide School (crimewritersconsultations.com), an intensive two-day course in which the former detective walks writers through crime scenes, criminal behavior and the real-life detective work that often leads to successful arrests and prosecutions.

Pacifico got his start as a patrol officer but soon was fascinated by the work of the homicide guys, detectives who could come onto a crime scene and, in short order, visualize what had happened with great accuracy.

"The first time I saw a detective do this, I was amazed," he says. "He came

into a kitchen and was able to tell, based on the angle of blood splatter, the position of the body and such, what happened and how it happened. I was hooked."

He served in the homicide unit for six years and eventually became an instructor for new recruits, with a focus on interrogation.

"When you walk into that room, you have to have the confidence that you're going to get that confession," he says. "Your detective work has identified this person, but some of it may not be admissible in court. You have to get the confession — otherwise the case is done."

Over the past fifteen years, Pacifico has trained nearly 1,000 detectives on everything from blood splatter angles to the finer points of criminal law. He created the Homicide School for writers after two family members writing a crime novel came asking for input. They subsequently asked him to speak to their writers' group, and interest grew from there.

And contrary to many primetime procedurals, Pacifico says interrogations often involve a lengthy game of cat and mouse. "Sure, we use good cop, bad cop sometimes," he says, "but not in the bombastic way you see on TV. No one is screaming. When I ask a perp a question, I've done my detective work. I better know the answer before he opens his mouth." —Kathleen O'Steen