

SYNOPSIS

Synopsis : a brief summary of the plot of a novel.

The synopsis is your sales pitch, as such it is the most important part of your submission package, it has to be developed and sweated over and polished with the same attention you devoted to the novel itself. Write it as though you're trying to entice a casual bookshop browser to buy the novel and read it.

Along with the cover letter, the synopsis is what sells the editor on the manuscript. If they don't see anything they like in the synopsis, they won't even glance at your chapter samples.

When is the best time to write the synopsis – before or after the book is written?

Either time can work. You can write your synopsis first, before you even begin to write the book. This will help you with your plotting and the synopsis can be a guide for you while you write.

It is also much easier to write a synopsis before you write the book. You don't get bogged down in all the details, mainly because you aren't aware of them yet. Once the book is finished you will probably need to go back and change your synopsis as the book will probably have taken on a life of its own and there is no reason you have to follow your initial synopsis exactly (or even inexactly). But you might find the rewrite much easier when you have an initial synopsis to work with.

Another reason to write a synopsis before you write the book: once you have an agent and are discussing future projects, you can present your ideas in a one-page synopsis format for your agent to look at and give their opinion on.

What is a synopsis?

A synopsis is a narrative summary of your book :

- With feeling
- Written in the present tense
- Written in the third person
- Written in the same style of writing your book is written in

It must :

- Introduces your main characters and their main conflicts, all woven together in the narrative, (it does not list your characters).
- Give a clear idea as to what your book is about, what characters we will care about (or dislike), what is at stake for your heroes, what they stand to lose, and how it all turns out.

- Include the conclusion to your novel (even if you don't completely know it yet). Agents and editors want to know that you know how to successfully conclude your story.

Synopsis Length

Guidelines vary, but in general two to ten pages. The preferred length seems to be two pages is ideal, five pages at most.

General points

- The first time you use a character's name in the synopsis, type it in CAPITAL letters. Do this only the first time.
- Avoid confusion by referring to a character the same way throughout.
- It's advisable to identify which character(s) is the point of view character by typing "(POV)" after the first instance of the character's name.

Synopsis Format

In the upper left hand corner you should have the following information:

- Synopsis of "Title"
- Genre:
- Word count:
- By _____

A one page synopsis can be single spaced. Two pages or more it is advisable to double-space.

Paragraphs are usually indented, with no spaces between paragraphs. Do not use a cover page or any fancy headings or fonts.

Synopsis Checklist:

- Does the opening paragraph have a hook to keep the reader reading?
- Are your main characters' conflicts clearly defined?
- Are your characters sympathetic?
- Can the reader relate to them and worry about them?
- Have you avoided all grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes?
- Have you hit on the major scenes, the major plot points of your book?
- Did you resolve all important conflicts?
- Did you use third person and present tense?