



## Information Sheet:

# What is a synopsis?

A synopsis is a summary of your entire novel.

It explains who the main characters are, where and when the action takes place, details the major conflicts, turning points and action, and, perhaps most importantly, reveals what happens at the end.

Publishers ask for a synopsis to get a sense of your ability to plot, to determine if it's something they might be interested in, to judge your storytelling abilities or even to see if it's in an identifiable genre and form that they publish. Your first three chapters will reveal if you can write. Your synopsis will give a prospective publisher a hint about your ability to tell and sustain a story over the course of a whole book.

## How long is a synopsis?

Some agents or publishers will ask for a one-page synopsis, some for a two-pager.

Check the agent's/publisher's website for submission guidelines. Generally speaking, the more succinct your synopsis, the better. It can be very difficult to distil your book into one page. Rewrite and rewrite until you get it right.

Importantly, look at the publisher's submission guidelines. Don't shrink the font to 8pt just to fit everything on to one page. They will notice.

## What kind of language should I use in my synopsis?

The synopsis is the only place you are allowed to use clichés. This is because they form a kind of shorthand for anyone reading it. Clichés in this context can describe your story fast.

For instance, "This is a fish out of water story featuring a secret pregnancy." Or, "My book is a galactic space opera with flesh-eating aliens on the loose on Mars."

Use short sentences and simple language. Synopsis writing is more art than science. It should be



halfway between a sales pitch and a summary of the story. It's not just a blow by blow description of what happens, but also a legend to the book's themes and characters, and a showcase of the author's ability to hook a reader's attention and tell a compelling story.

The other thing to keep in mind is that your synopsis is an opportunity to present your writing style as well as the story itself. Make sure you show your writing at its best, and capture the voice and tone of your book.

Synopses that are written in a dry "this happens, then this happens" style are unlikely to engage an agent's/publisher's attention. The synopsis should capture the same energy and emotional timbre of the novel, so if you've written a crime thriller, use the language of a crime thriller in your synopsis to capture the suspense and danger of your plot. If you've written a romantic saga set in the Outback, the synopsis should capture the sweeping landscape, the sense of possibility, the emotional stakes of the romance between the love interests.

## **Do I reveal the ending in my synopsis?**

Yes, you do. The synopsis is the encapsulation of your novel – an agent or publisher is going to want to know how it ends. Why? Because they need to know that you can sustain your plot and that you know how the story ends.

## **What form should the synopsis take?**

Try to condense the beginning, middle and end of your novel into two paragraphs each, i.e. two paragraphs for the beginning, etc. It is an excellent discipline to practise being succinct. Finish off with a concluding paragraph, which contains the length of the novel, the genre it's in and possibly a comparison to the work of other authors.

For example, "This is a literary crime thriller 90,000 words in length, which will appeal to readers of Di Morrissey and Gabrielle Lord". This also shows that you know who your audience is, and will help an agent/publisher to decide whether you are right for their list.

## **Blurbs, taglines, hooks and pitches**

You'll hear these terms and sometimes they can be interchangeable.

### **What is a cover blurb?**

A blurb is the description of the story that appears on the back of a book. It outlines the main points of the novel, introduces the characters, foreshadows the conflicts, sets the location, and leaves readers wanting more. Read the cover blurbs from some of your favourite books and you'll get a sense of how to write your own.



## **Elevator pitch**

"What's your book about?" That question shouldn't send you running for the hills. The best thing to do is be prepared for it and work on a response.

- My book is a study of an extinct species of caterpillar on the Galapagos Islands.

Sure, it seems a little easier in non-fiction, doesn't it?

If you're writing fiction, think about what you'll tell someone when they turn to you and ask you that question: "What's your book about?"

It can help to think about the basics of your plot - and try to pin it down to the description of a movie or TV show that has to fit on screen or in a TV guide in the newspaper.

Here are some which might help you.

- Two cowboys struggle with loneliness, marriage and their romantic feelings for each other.
- A relationship expert can't make her own relationship work.
- A murder in a small Australian town sets all the residents against each other as they try to find the killer.

## **What is a tagline?**

A tagline is what you might see on a movie promo poster: it's a short, sharp teaser. You can grab someone's attention if you can distil your story into a tagline.

Here are some examples from movies which might help you.

- Blade Runner: "Man has made his match ... now it's his problem."
- Angel Heart: "Harry Angel is searching for the truth... Pray he doesn't find it."
- The Matrix: "Reality is a thing of the past."