

Write Your Winning Synopsis the Easy Way with Christine Eaton Jones

Synopsis Simplified

– by Christine Eaton Jones

If one is to be a writer, one must eventually FACE a synopsis. Granted, to some, the synopsis is not that bad, but to many it's like having to walk across a bed of glowing coals barefoot—with fry grease slathered along the soles of your feet.

Is there absolutely one way to write a synopsis? Not really. However, some ways are better than others. In today's market, publishing houses are inundated with submissions. Due to the time constraint, editors are allotted only a few minutes with a manuscript. Long synopsis filled with complicated paragraphs about setting, characters, secondary characters, outer conflict, inner conflict, black moments entire plot sequences can cause an editor to run screaming from the room.

Below are a few suggestions to help an author condense a manuscript into a quick and enjoyable synopsis, one that gives the editor an idea of your writing style and the pacing of the story.

Developing the Synopsis

Step One: Start the synopsis with a hook. This is the theme, blurb, premise or what must be proven in your story. It is a brief statement about the story that is designed to capture the editor's interest instantly.

Step Two: Introduce the main character by name and in bold letters. This person has the most to gain in the story. Generally this introduction takes no more than one or two paragraphs. Make sure to establish the character's major goal s/he wishes to achieve.

Step Three: Introduce the second main character. Use the same procedure as in step one. This character will be at odds with the other. For example: She's an environmentalist; he build luxury condos.

Step Four: The next paragraphs become the meat of the synopsis. Here complications, final crisis/black moment, turnaround and resolution unfold.

Procedure for Steps One through Four

In order for an author to design a compelling story, using the Four step procedure, one should make use of six major questions.

Who?

Where?

When?

What?

Why?

Which?

Who, Where and When introduce the characters, and setting of the story. What and Why show the development of each character's goals, motivations and growth.

If the story is already written, ask the following questions for each chapter. If the story is still in development stage, use the same questions to assist in plotting.

Who has the most important viewpoint in this scene/chapter?

What happens in the scene/chapter that moves the story along?

Where does the scene/chapter take place?

Which character grows or changes during this time?

Why is this scene/chapter important?

Once finished with the entire story, ask the following Which questions?

Which scenes or chapters trigger the internal and/or outer conflict?

Which scenes or chapters lead to love despite conflicts?

Which scene or chapter motivates the illusion that the conflict has been resolved?

Which scene or chapter triggers the black moment?

Which scene or chapter resolves the black moment?

Which scenes are needed to tie up any loose ends or unexplained events?

Once all the questions are answered, then start mapping out the synopsis in rough draft form. Some rules to remember:

Write the synopsis in the present tense. Tell the story, don't show.

Use exciting, specific words. For example: raced instead of heading toward, Doberman instead of dog.

If the line you plan to submit to is a sensual line use wording that displays your skill with sensual imagery. If it is suspense, use words that will convey the suspense of your plot.

Match the tone of your synopsis to the voice of your book. If your story is filled with humor, construct the synopsis with humor.

Only mention topics or emotions you plan to show in the synopsis.

Be careful not to repeat information or dwell upon a single emotion.

Avoid inserting dialogue taken from manuscript. If important to the flow of the story, use sparingly.

Mention secondary characters only if vital to the plot.

Don't leave anything unclear. Make sure pronouns and verbs are precise and are not open to misinterpretation. Do not assume the editor will understand what you mean.

Remember plot is not necessarily conflict.

Avoid overused cliches.

Cut, cut and cut some more. Keep the synopsis concise and to the point.

Last but not least...Proof read, then proof read again. No one wins with a sloppy synopsis.

Formatting a Synopsis

Mechanics

Double space

Use 1 inch to 1 2 margins on all four sides.

Use white, clean paper, print on one side only.

Use a high quality printer, no dot-matrix or typewriter.

Left justify.

Do not bind papers.

Use a header with name, title and page number.

Many editors will ask for a partial submission that includes a five to ten page synopsis and your first three chapters. A longer synopsis, running up to forty pages, is generally used only with a proposal on a yet-to-be written book. With your ten-page synopsis, use plenty of active verbs and emotion-laden nouns. It should have all the punch of a back cover blurb and grab the interest of your most important reader, the editor.

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