

Conquering the Dreaded Synopsis: A Series of Ten Lectures

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Lecture Eight: The Long Synopsis

The long synopsis is generally 10-15 pages long. Some publishers and agents will request a long synopsis up front. Others want you to start with a query letter and short synopsis. If they like that package, they will then invite you to submit the first three chapters of your manuscript accompanied by a long synopsis. Of course submission requirements/policies vary by house, so make sure you do your homework up front, and always follow the instructions an editor gives you for additional submissions.

The long synopsis and short synopsis are similar in many respects. First, they share the same goal—to grab an editor’s attention and make her interested in your full manuscript. Second, they both require a writer to utilize a strong opening and offer a concise distillation of a long, complex novel. Essentially, they offer the writer the same challenges, so all of our lectures on the short synopsis also apply to the long synopsis.

The key difference between a short and long synopsis, however, is that a long synopsis *must* reveal voice. In a short synopsis, you have an excuse for why you end up telling about the story—not enough space. In a long synopsis, however, that excuse is gone. With ten to fifteen pages at your disposal, you truly can *show* the story.

Think of the long synopsis as a mini novel. You follow the same outline as a short synopsis. Introduce characters and relevant backstory; provide the premise; summarize the major plot points and major turning points; and describe the black moment and resolution.

In a short synopsis, however, you have only one paragraph to spend on each element, whereas in a long synopsis, you can spend one page. Thus you can draw upon many creative writing techniques to jazz up your proposal. For example, you can include dialogue, create mini-scenes, and utilize multiple POVs. You want to make the editor feel as if she’s reading a short story, learning about characters and plot as she goes along.

One common mistake in a long synopsis is that now you have more room, you throw in more scenes. Remember, it's still only core story elements that matter—the major plot points and character development issues. Using your extra space to summarize additional book scenes still risks “laundry list” syndrome. You're including more detail, but not more entertaining detail.

Better is to maintain the tight focus of a short synopsis, but now flesh out those critical moments to demonstrate your writing talent. Don't just say hero and heroine meet and sparks fly. Craft that scene in four paragraphs, drawing from your book. Use dialogue, letting the characters spit and holler and scream if necessary. In the long synopsis, you want your characters to do the talking, not you.

At its best, the long synopsis covers the key elements of your story *and* vividly demonstrates your writing voice.

A General Outline

1-2 pages: Introduce characters and backstory. Establish mood/tone of novel.

1 page: First meeting/set up scene. Capture emotional tone of scene

Next 3-10 pages: Spend one page on each key plot development and relationship complication. Describe what brings the characters together, then how they are ripped apart. You probably have two main turning points and two main romantic complications (first kiss, first sex scene.) The plot points, turning points, and romance complications form the heart of your long synopsis, just as they formed the heart of your short synopsis.

1 page: Build tension, summarizing the plot complications that move the story toward the black moment.

1 page: Black moment. Delve into the big emotional issues that must be overcome and show the emotional triumph of the hero and heroine.

1 page: Resolution. Tie up major plot, secondary plot and romance. End with a nice summary paragraph that gives editor sense of relief.

Conclusion

For the long synopsis, *voice* is the key. You don't need to include more elements, but instead use the additional pages to artistically flesh out the core story elements you have already identified. You can definitely have some fun in the long synopsis. Show snippets of witty dialogue, build moments of fear, and let your characters sparkle. By the time the editor is done reading your synopsis, she should have a clear idea of your writing style. And of course, she'll be impressed!

Next up—the full submission package.