

Conquering the Dreaded Synopsis: A Series of Ten Lectures

By Lisa Gardner

Lecture Nine: Full Submission

Once your targeted editor reads your brilliant cover letter and synopsis, she will request the full manuscript. Mission accomplished, at last! Like all things in publishing, however, even submitting a full manuscript has some minor roadblocks. First you must be aware of proper formatting for your manuscript. Next, you must learn to endure the painful cycle of waiting, waiting, waiting for the editor to read your manuscript. Remember, publishing is a business, and as with all things, professionalism is the key.

Submitting a Manuscript

Cover Page: On top of your manuscript should be a cover page. The title of your work should appear in the center in large font. Most importantly, in the bottom left hand corner should be your name, address, and phone number, followed by the number of pages and word count of your manuscript. For example:

Suzie Author
666 Writer's Way
Nirvana, CA 66666
555-555-1212
Pages: 452
Word Count: 100,000

Manuscript Formatting: The manuscript should follow the same professional format as your synopsis, 1-inch margins, standard 12-pt font, and double-spaced text. You want to include a header with the book title in the upper left hand corner, and your last name and page number in the upper right hand corner. (Review Lecture Three on proper format of the short synopsis for an example.)

Binding: NEVER BIND a manuscript. Use rubber bands only, with the cover page being the first page of the manuscript.

Cover Letter: Include a cover letter with the completed manuscript. Remind the editor of her request for your full manuscript, and state that you are looking forward to her reply.

Mail: Preferably with a company who can track your manuscript and let you know it has arrived. Some people include a self-addressed stamped post card for the editor to mail back confirming arrival. Not a bad policy, but some editors take so long to open packages it could still be weeks/months before you receive confirmation. Don't panic.

Wait.

Follow up Protocol

Publishing is a constant exercise in hurry up and wait. Nothing happens fast, particularly in this day and age when junior editors are notoriously overworked and can have literally hundreds of manuscripts awaiting their attention. Having an agent send in your manuscript will generally speed up the reading cycle, but even then, nothing happens fast in this business.

So what can you do? Wait patiently, and follow up professionally. Here are some general rules of thumb:

1. Give an editor at least three months before following up. They are busy people and three months isn't bad in this business.
2. First follow up by post card/letter. Send a friendly note reminding the editor of your submission and that you hope to hear from her shortly. If you have any other news, maybe you've placed in a contest since you sent in the manuscript, etc., include that in the letter.
3. Then follow up by phone. It is not a "bad thing" to call a publisher or editor. I did it three times while I waited a year and half to hear about my first manuscript. The trick is to remain professional. Don't probe or browbeat. Just mention that you are following up on a submission. Mostly likely the editor will say she hasn't read it yet. Remain polite. Assure her that you understand she's very busy. When might she read it? Wonderful. You hope to hear more then. Thank her for her time. Mark the date on your calendar. Resume waiting.
4. Do not call back until the editor is at least one month past her new "deadline." Once again be polite. Remember, publishing is slow, everyone gets to wait, and no news is good news. Eventually you will hear back.

Conclusion

Writing the query letter and synopsis is only the first step in the long, involved submission process. The name of the game is to get your manuscript through the door. If

your query letter and synopsis generate requests for your full manuscript, then you have done an excellent job.

Your next task is to focus on submitting a polished manuscript, and then follow up on that manuscript. Never lose your cool and try not to get emotional. It's very common to wait a year and a half only to hear bad news. Rejection is also part of this business. By always conducting yourself as a professional, however, you'll keep the door open for either resubmitting a revised manuscript, or for sending in your next work. This business is small. Don't do anything that will slam doors in your face, not even in the heat of the moment.

As long as you are writing, you have a chance of selling. So keep writing and always focus on improving your work. You can survive this process, and there is nothing quite as magical as seeing your first book on the shelves.

Next up—our final lecture with a summary of do's and don'ts to guide you through the submission process. If you don't want to wade through fifty pages of lectures again, you can consider this the cheat sheet.