

Writing a Synopsis Checklist



Sometimes, after a literary agent reads your query letter, they ask you to send a synopsis. Therefore, writing an engaging and interesting synopsis is very important. Here's everything you need to know about writing a synopsis, plus a checklist to help you along the way.

For steps on how to write a synopsis, see:

[How to Write a Synopsis That Makes Agents Request Your Manuscript](#)

What is a synopsis?

A synopsis is a summary of your book that lets the literary agent or publisher understand what your book is about. It overviews main points, such as setting, characters, and stakes.

Think of a synopsis as a screening process for manuscripts. Agents don't have time to read an entire manuscript. The synopsis lets them know what the book is about. It should cover a book's main points from beginning to end in sequence.

How long should a synopsis be?

Most agents prefer the synopsis to be around 500 words. If your novel is very long, such as 120,000 words, then your synopsis could be up to five pages. Most agents like for you to keep it to one to three pages. An agent may ask for a longer synopsis if they like your proposal.

When should I send a synopsis?

Some agents prefer the synopsis to be separate from the query letter and some want it with the letter, but as a separate piece. And some agents prefer to ask for the synopsis if they're interested in reading more after reading your query letter. Be sure to follow their guidelines.

Is a synopsis the same as a blurb?

Not at all. A book blurb is much shorter and just a teaser. Whereas a book synopsis is much longer and a full overview of your book's story. It's more of a spoiler.

How do I format my synopsis?

A one-page synopsis should be typed in single space, but double-spaced between paragraphs. If it's longer than a page, then it should be double spaced. Don't get fancy—keep it standard with Times New Roman, 12-point font, and one-inch margins. Capitalize all the letters in the title and when you mention main characters' names (first and last) for the first time. You can also choose to put these in bold font, too. (JASPER CUNNINGHAM or **JASPER CUNNINGHAM**)

Checklist

Pre-writing Stage

- Story structure figured out (structure could be: exciting beginning, inciting incident, crises, climax, satisfying ending)

Writing Stage

- Header at top of page: name, email, phone number, title of book, genre, and word count
- Hook written
- Main character(s) introduced
- Major developments (inciting incidents) discussed
- Key events, challenges, and turning points outlined
- Escalating tension for the main character(s) pointed out
- Character development highlighted
- Climax revealed
- Resolution revealed

Editing Stage

- Check for and remove excess words
- Check for and remove excess phrases
- Shorten run-on sentences
- Remove irrelevant details
- Make sure it flows well (get a friend to read it if needed)
- Check for typos
- Check for grammatical errors

Formatting

- 500 words or 1-3 pages (or longer if your novel is longer)
- Single-spaced with double spaces between paragraphs for one page; double-spaced for more than one page
- Times New Roman
- 12-point font
- One-inch margins
- Main character's names in all caps and/or boldface (first mention)

Tone

- Written in a neutral business-like language, but not salesy.
- Clear and to the point.
- Written in third person.
- Written in present tense.

Bonus Tip:

Use a helpful file name to help both you and the agent find your synopsis quickly and know exactly what it is. (Ex: darknightfalling_synopsis.doc)