

Romance She Wrote

Writing Your Best Book Yet



Craft Report

How to Write a Synopsis: (Without Turning Homicidal)

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Your Novel—in Fifty Words or Less

I've had few questions recently about writing a synopsis—most of them along the lines of “how do I condense everything that happens in my completed ninety thousand word novel into ten pages or less?”

It's a good question. But a better one is: “How do I condense everything that happens in my completed ninety thousand word novel into fifty words or less?”

Why is this a better question? It's better because if you're going to attempt the impossible you might as well give yourself at least a fighting chance of attaining it. It's far easier to craft the fifty word “essence” of your story and then expand it to become a two thousand word synopsis, than it is to take an axe to an entire novel and expect a rational result.

The first key to a killer synopsis is to find your story's centre. Its soul. Its beating heart.

There are several suggestions out there on the Web about just how to do this, and here is one that works for me. It's the “High Concept Pitch” formula:

- **Heroine**
- **Flaw**
- **Opponent**
- **Life-changing event**
- **Ally**
- **Battle**

When Lucy Monroe mentioned it at our RWNZ conference a few years ago I'd never heard of it, but this blueprint enables me to look past the minutiae of the plot to the absolute basics—the essential arc I need to elaborate on and explain in order to have my story synopsis make sense. For example:

A crusader (**Heroine**) with a heart-breaking secret (**Flaw**) is blackmailed (**Life-changing event**) by a manipulative psychotic (**Opponent**) in order to advance his criminal lifestyle . However, when an enigmatic stranger (**Ally**) offers her a chance to be free, she must make a choice which might lose her all she holds most precious (**Battle**).

That's it. At this stage I don't have to describe the “heart-breaking secret” in its lurid detail, or clarify that the opponent is (for example) a werewolf, or even try to give an impression of the world in which this happens. I only have to create—and then hone—the generic sentence.



YOUR TURN

Using the “Heroine / Flaw / Opponent / Life-changing event / Ally / Battle” method, distil the essence of your novel into fifty words. Or less. Of course you can.

Your Novel—In Four Paragraphs or Less (Aspect 1)

Okay. You've got the fifty word heart of your novel. What do you do with it? Expand it out to ten pages? No. You now use this distillation to write a three or four paragraph back-of-the-book teaser first.

There are three excellent reasons to write the teaser now.

- To look at the work as a **reader** not a writer.
- To analyze the work from the perspective of a **buyer**.
- To accentuate the work's **point of difference** in the market.

We're not going to get it all done today. In fact, it will take three sessions to complete the back-cover blurb. In this session we'll discuss the first aspect; **looking at the work as a reader not a writer**.

As readers we're familiar with back cover teasers. Our bookshelves are full of them. We know how to do one. A back cover teaser covers four basic points. It:

- 1. Introduces the heroine and her compelling need.**
- 2. Introduces the hero and his compelling need.**
- 3. Presents the external situation that causes the main characters and their agendas to clash.**
- 4. Hints at the major conflict they face in order to mesh, settle their interpersonal tensions, complete their own internal journeys, and resolve the external plot.**

Here's my example again, made slightly more specific.

A crusader (**Alexis Bradford**)

with a heart-breaking secret (**Flaw**)

is blackmailed (**Life-changing event**)

by a manipulative psychotic (**Miles Brigham**) in order to advance his criminal lifestyle.

However, when an enigmatic stranger (**Philip Knight**)

offers her a chance to be free, she must make a choice which might lose her all she holds most precious. (**Battle**)

Now, I'm going to extend that example using the four point outline above.

1. Introduces the heroine and her compelling need.

My crusading heroine, Alexis Bradford, spends her life in the public arena fighting for justice.

Her compelling need—the thing that she is prepared to go to any lengths in order to attain—is redemption (associated with her heart-breaking secret [Flaw], but we don't have to elaborate on it at this stage).

2. Introduces the hero and his compelling need.

My enigmatic hero, Philip Knight, spends his life in a private world pursuing and acquiring knowledge. His compelling need is to seek, find, and be given truth—in every area of life (a strength—and weakness—associated with his own Flaw).

3. Presents the external situation that causes the main characters and their agendas to clash.

The external situation that causes Alexis and Philip to clash—and their compelling needs and consequent flaws and fears to collide—is when Alexis discovers her own darkest truths have fallen into the hands of Miles Brigham, who is a master of manipulation...and Philip's uncle and mentor.

4. Hints at the major conflict they face in order to mesh, settle their interpersonal tensions, complete their own internal journeys, and resolve the external plot.

Alexis is attracted to Philip but she has a lot to lose—and even more to hide. She can't allow herself to love a man who lives to uncover secrets and expects her to be absolutely honest with him. She also isn't sure if he's involved in his uncle's plans for her or not. Although Philip is attracted to Alexis he senses she isn't being honest in her dealings with him. He fights against once again falling for a woman who could betray him, and reveal his family's mysterious history. But he knows she's in trouble and needs help. And his uncle's attitude towards Alexis is worrying.

This is not the finished blurb. It's merely the first step towards creating it.

**YOUR TURN**

Take your fifty words and, under each of the four headings above, create your own main points. One paragraph per heading. Don't get frustrated with yourself or your work, and don't expect it to be easy. Just take it slow, and don't panic.

Your Novel—In Four Paragraphs or Less (Aspect 2)

Today we're going to go on to the second part of writing your blurb; **analyzing your work from the perspective of a buyer.**

Your back-of-the-book blurb is a filter, an advertisement, a need generator. It filters out the people who won't read your genre or sub-genre. If it mentions dragons, werewolves or time-travel then someone who only reads contemporary cozy mysteries probably won't read any further. On the other hand she might, if you make it interesting enough.

When a buyer picks up your book you have about five seconds before she decides to put it down again. Five seconds to make her want to read the next paragraph, never mind open the book itself. She's looking for excitement, emotion, and mystery.

Both buyers and readers are much like cats. They are intensely curious. They're also discerning, have distinct tastes that they won't compromise, and they like a good time—by their own definition.

So how do you capitalize on these traits?

You present your four paragraphs in such a way as to:

- stimulate her curiosity about the story
- stir her emotions towards the plight of the heroine and hero
- arouse her excitement by the hints you give as to their journey

You also present the blurb in a way that assures her you're catering to her tastes, and offers her an opportunity to enjoy herself in a secure and familiar environment. In other words, if you're writing paranormal romantic suspense then the hero, heroine, external situation, and hint of major conflicts have to be presented in the light of all three elements of the sub-genre : the paranormal, the romantic, and the suspense.

If you're writing Historical romance, then your presentation of the hero, heroine, external situation, and hint of major conflicts must be slanted to reflect the world a buyer of Regency / Victorian / Medieval romances would expect.

You do this in the same way you wrote your novel—by your choice of words, by the tone of your “voice”, by your use of literary props (swords, dragons, magnesium bombs, Prinny, etc) to place your work in a buyer's mental bookshelf.

So, my blurb for my paranormal romantic suspense at the Part 2 stage would look something like this:

While she doesn't expect winning to be easy, high profile lawyer ALEXIS BRADFORD does expect to win—both in the courtroom and in her personal life. But when a serial killer calling himself “The Sphinx” begins to send her cryptic messages about her buried

past, and taunts her to either solve a riddle before midnight on her birthday, or die, winning might just take second place to survival.

In the eyes of the world, PHILIP KNIGHT is an amusing enigma; an attractive, wealthy eccentric who would rather spend his nights studying dead languages than dating beautiful women. But when a killer calling himself “The Sphinx” appears, Philip’s investigations into the past may be the only thing that will prevent a bloodbath.

It’s a good start, but I haven’t completed it yet, because I’ve only put in the suspense aspect. I’ll continue with the romance and paranormal aspects next time, along with Aspect 3 ‘accentuating your book’s point of difference in the market’.

**YOUR TURN**

Look at your four points / paragraphs from a buyer’s perspective. How can you fashion them into something that stimulates curiosity, stirs emotion, and arouses excitement? You won’t get it perfect first time. Choose somewhere—hero, heroine, wherever—and start.

Your Novel—In Four Paragraphs or Less (Aspect 3)

Today we're moving to the third part of writing your blurb; **accentuating your book's point of difference in the market.**

The point of difference is the single thing that makes your product different from competing products in its niche; its unique selling feature.

Even in a market gulping down books about angels, demons, vampires, and shape shifters with the enthusiasm of five-year-olds scarfing chocolate cake at a birthday party, simply coming up with another coffin-sleeping, fang-dripping bloodsucker with a fetish for hair-gel and opera cloaks is not going to bring your manuscript to the top of any editor's wish list. There has to be something in the character or the plot—preferably both—that **sets your work above the rest**, and it needs to be **stated in an intriguing manner** to stimulate curiosity.

NYT best-selling author Nalini Singh has done this brilliantly with her Guild Hunter series. You have a vampire hunter, you have vampires, you have angels, you have Archangels. But, in the alternative earth Singh has created, vampires aren't made by other vampires. They are "Made" by their angelic sires after a careful screening process, and then bonded to their maker for a given length of time. The vampire hunters hunt vampires for the angels when the vampires decide to renege on the deal. This **point of difference** is an **intriguing twist on the vampire myth.**

USA Today bestselling author Janet Chapman has also crafted several interesting points of difference in her series about the magical, time-traveling MacKeage family. In her SECRETS OF THE HIGHLANDER the back cover blurb goes like this:

He is the father of her child, but the secrets they are hiding are tearing them apart... Megan MacKeage escaped the smothering protectiveness of the Highland MacKeage clan to work as a scientist on the Canadian tundra. But when fellow researcher Wayne Ferris breaks her heart by rejecting her, Megan returns to Maine alone. Then she meets the town's new police chief, Jack Stone—the man she knew as Wayne Ferris. Instead of the quiet scholar he posed as, he's an aggressive private eye who's willing to fight for what he wants, just like all the overbearing men in her clan. So why is Megan still feeling a dangerous attraction? And though Jack claims he followed her here because he loves her, can she ever trust a man with so many secrets?

In my opinion, the **point of difference** would be found in this sentence: *Then she meets the town's new police chief, Jack Stone—the man she knew as Wayne Ferris.* To lift the common pregnant, single mother story up a notch or two **the intriguing twist** is that Jack is in a position of authority, but has two identities.

One of the reasons I didn't complete my example blurb last time was because I wanted to use the romance and paranormal aspects of it to illustrate today's point.

Below is the example with the **romance** and **paranormal** aspects added.

In the eyes of the world, PHILIP KNIGHT is an amusing enigma; an attractive, wealthy eccentric who would rather focus his energy on the study of dead languages than apply himself to the **city's glamorous dating scene**. But for Philip, **prince of a hidden and fading civilization**, the truth is far more complex. Far more terrifying. Because, while **shared passion with a human is an acceptable diversion among his people**, **to fall in love—to lose one's heart—is to condemn the beloved to an horrific death**.

While she doesn't expect victory to be easy, high profile lawyer ALEXIS BRADFORD does expect to win—both in the courtroom and in her personal life. However, when a serial killer calling himself “The Sphinx” begins to send her cryptic messages about her buried past, and challenges her to either solve a riddle before midnight on her birthday, or die, winning might just take second place to survival. **Her only hope appears to lie with the enigmatic Dr Philip Knight and his knowledge of ancient lore**.

But wisdom is not the only thing Philip teaches her, and Alexis soon learns **there is a penalty for knowledge, a price for love**...and victory can be a two-edged sword.

Now these additions are merely hints of what is going to happen. I reversed my initial order from heroine first to hero first because the paranormal aspect comes primarily from the hero's side and therefore the presentation flows better by establishing that first.

The **point of difference** is found in the hidden civilization that Philip rules, and in the fatal consequences of falling in love. The **intriguing twist** here is how are they going to have a successful love life if the penalty is death? I haven't spelled it out in detail yet, but there are enough facts for a reader and a buyer to know the kind of book they're looking at, and enough mystery to make them want to move from the back cover to the inside of the book.



YOUR TURN

Go back to the blurb you wrote from your initial four paragraphs. Re-read it looking specifically for the point of difference; the one thing you can emphasize in an intriguing way that makes your book different to others in your genre. If you haven't spelled it out because it will give the plot away, then that's okay. Hint at it. Just make sure you know what it is. You'll need it when you write the rest of your synopses.

The Single Page Synopsis (Part 1)

A mistake many writers make is imagining that a synopsis is merely a summary of their story. It's one of the aspects, sure, but it's far more than that. A synopsis is actually a marketing tool, and if you adjust your mindset to think of it that way then the whole thing becomes a lot easier to write.

According to agent Nathan Bransford, a synopsis needs to do the following things: cover all major characters, cover all major plot points, make the work come alive, and reveal the ending.

Give away the ending?? (Gasp!) Absolutely. Remember, it's a marketing tool. People in the publishing business want to know what they're buying. Because it's the vehicle through which you sell your story to an agent or editor not your target reader, the synopsis of any story is the ultimate spoiler and must reveal all.

There are two types of synopsis. A plot-based synopsis focuses primarily on how the external plot situations and events work out, and is used to best effect in action-based genres. A character-based synopsis focuses on the growth of character, and how character actions and reactions affect plot. This is used in genres / subgenres where romance is a major element. Because we're talking about Romance here, let's go with the character based one.

We're going to take Mr Bransford's requirements and implement them in ten points:

1. The hook
2. The heroine, her backstory, and internal conflict
3. The hero, his backstory and internal conflict
4. The external conflict
5. First stage co-operation
6. Intimacy
7. Reversion
8. Second stage co-operation
9. Black moment
10. Resolution

It sounds a lot for a single page but remember, if you've done the first few exercises in this series, you've already got most of numbers 1 through 4 in short form.

Now, because it will be easier to synopsise a story with which we're all familiar I'm changing my synopsis from my previous story to something tried and true. Sort of. **We're going to synopsise Little Red Riding Hood, told as a paranormal romantic suspense.**



Reminder:

Don't forget that everything we do here, from High Concept through to the finished synopsis (regardless of length) is written in the present tense. This gives it urgency and immediacy.

Here's my High Concept for [drum roll, please] HOODED JUSTICE

A kick-ass courier (**Heroine**)
whose protective instincts lead her into trouble (**Flaw**)
has to confront her own nightmares and fears (**Opponent**)
when she discovers a gruesome murder. (**Life Changing Event**)
Now, with her only help a man who isn't what he seems, (**Ally**)
she has to find the killer before the killer finds her. (**Battle**)

Here's the back of the book Blurb:

Working as a courier in her family's business by day and as a bouncer at a bar by night, R.R. Hood meets more than her share of alpha males. But Ripley's learned the hard way not to trust a smooth tongue or handsome face on a man, and not one raises her heart rate—even when she's tossing him into the street. Until she meets Mac Conin.

Mac has never encountered a female who is able to look him in the eye, let alone punch him in it. An alpha werewolf tasked with keeping his people under the humans' radar, he doesn't need the extra complication that comes bundled with Ripley's very human package. Even if something inside him howls otherwise. Mac's got enough problems—like finding a gang of rogue weres who are targeting pensioners with an investment scam.

But things turn from white-collar crime to blood-red murder when Ripley discovers an elderly client's gruesome remains, and Mac learns the same old woman has recently invested a large sum of money in a bogus venture. When a second almost identical killing occurs, the stakes suddenly become a whole lot higher. Now Mac and Ripley have to bury their mistrust, and find a way to unmask a predator without exposing the secrets of a world that could destroy them both.



With the exceptions of points 1 through 3, what I've found works is to take each step from both the hero's and the heroine's point of view, and build the story like that. (And yes, with a little bit of sleight of computer my synopsis below does fit onto a A4 page)

Now, here's the Single Page Synopsis of HOODED JUSTICE as an example for you.

- 1. The Hook**—a sentence or concept designed to grab the reader's attention and set the scene for the plot and tone of the book.

When the International Werewolf Council sends a covert agent to bring down a fraudulent investment scheme, they don't expect him to be taken down himself. But then, they'd never met Ms R.R. Hood.

- 2. Heroine, her backstory, and her internal conflict.** What happened in the heroine's past (in an external, physical sense) to bring her to the psychological / emotional point she's currently at? Look at this in terms of both physical placement and emotional conflict.

RIPLEY ROSAMUNDE HOOD finally gives up trying to return to normal when she takes a night job as a bouncer at the local biker bar. She can get through her days driving for her family's courier company without much trouble. But since the home invasion that destroyed her peace of mind, the silent dark brings sleeplessness and painful memories. She'd rather be under bright lights, with loud music and even louder drunks. There, at least, she can see what's coming at her.

- 3. Hero, his backstory, and internal conflict.** Same as for the heroine. Point of Difference in bold.

MAC CONIN, special agent for the IWC, is an alpha werewolf with a mission: to find and stop a gang of rogue weres targeting pensioners with an investment scam. Undercover work is his area of expertise. Courtesy of a genetic inheritance, Mac—while all werewolf on the inside—is a throwback to something far more acceptable to humans. A black St Bernard, the size of a small horse. But while acceptable to humans, it's far from acceptable to Mac's family or the upper echelons of werewolf society. To them, Mac's usefulness to the Council is the only reason he is allowed to live.

I'm only going this far today. We'll pick it up from here in the next blog.



YOUR TURN

Working from your "marketing documents" (High Concept and Blurb) begin to lay your story out, starting with the first three points above. The next few sessions are not easy, so don't expect everything to fall into place without some severe coffee and chocolate intake. Oh, and a couple of bottles of Bundaberg Diet Lemon, Lime and Bitters don't hurt either! At least, they work for me.

The Single Page Synopsis (Part 2)

Today we're continuing with our ten point implementation of the requirements for a character-based synopsis. These are:

1. The hook
2. The heroine, her backstory, and internal conflict
3. The hero, his backstory and internal conflict
4. The external conflict
5. First stage co-operation
6. Intimacy
7. Reversion
8. Second stage co-operation
9. Black moment
10. Resolution

Remember this is only a one pager. You don't have the space to go into huge detail.

In the two pager you begin to elaborate on the hints and nuances you've crafted here.

Last time, we tackled points one through three. Let's go on, from point 4.

- 4. The External Conflict.** What happens to bring the main characters together. The main points for the main characters. If there are subplots don't bring them in here.

Following a line of enquiry Mac visits a local bar. While he doesn't learn anything about his case, he learns something about his own future, and the very human female destined to share it.

Although unimpressed by their first encounter, when Rip meets Mac on the doorstep of one of her elderly clients, and then discovers the old lady has been brutally murdered, she's initially grateful for his presence and help. But when the same thing happens again, she begins to wonder if Mac is more than he seems.

Rip isn't the only one to see a connection. Mac, determined to protect his wounded warrior from herself, decides he needs to get a whole lot closer. But Rip doesn't want a relationship and she still can't trust anyone enough to let them inside her home...until on her night off, a huge, hairy, goofball of a dog turns up on her porch demanding to be let in. And won't take no for an answer.

- 5. First Stage Co-operation.** This is where the armed truce between the hero and heroine begins to move towards something less distant. It often reaches the intimacy stage via a major turning point or a "Gray" moment—which isn't as dark as a "Black" Moment, but can still be a lot of fun to write.

As a new—if reluctant—pet owner, Rip's life takes on another dimension. Shadows in her mind begin to heal. But "Bear" seems to sense Mac doesn't like dogs. He's never there when Mac is.

A few days later, walking in on what appears to be an animal attack on an elderly man, Rip watches in disbelief as her friendly mutt morphs into a killing machine and attacks

the creature. The fight is fast and furious, but the creature escapes. Realizing there is more to this situation than the Council told him, Mac cannot risk remaining in his badly injured canine form. He calls on his genetic inheritance for instant healing, and changes back to human. In front of Ripley.

- 6. Intimacy.** While this may or may not include sex, it's a definite step forward in the closeness of the relationship. In a character-based synopsis you can spend more time here and explore the nuances of the internal conflicts as they affect your main characters. In a one pager though, you still only have a few lines, so make the words count.

Even terrified, shocked, and furious at his betrayal, Rip handles his explanations better than he'd hoped, and agrees to his suggestion that they work together to capture the rogue. As they investigate Ripley's deceased clients—and the interesting habits of the local pensioner community—a pattern emerges.

- 7. Reversion.** (aka "Happily Ever After Till Breakfast Time") This is where all the fears your hero or heroine have squashed in order to get to the intimacy stage suddenly get triggered—whether by an internal source or an external stimulus—and he or she reverts to the default condition. Sometimes this is where the relationship falls apart. Other times it's where there's a huge struggle and a measure of progress. But not a complete victory. You need that later.

When Ripley discovers Mac has learned secrets that mean he's now on the IWC hit list, she has to choose whether to stay with him and risk a repeat of her past trauma. She struggles. Loses. Struggles again. And decides to stay.

- 8. Second Stage Co-operation.** Whereas First Stage is a distant armed truce, Second Stage is a genuine working together. It might not be perfect—"perfect" only really happens after the Black Moment, but it's close enough and with enough emotional investment on both sides that the Black Moment, when it comes, is a gut-wrenching, heart-ripping experience. Just allude to it here. We're going to flesh it out more in the longer synopses.

With the clock ticking for Mac and with the connivance of Ripley's feisty grandmother they set a trap that no self-respecting wolf can resist.

- 9. Black Moment**

Mac doesn't want Ripley anywhere near danger but he knows she needs to prove something to herself so she can finally move on. Forcing herself to confront her fears of being helpless in the dark, Ripley chooses to trust Mac to keep her safe as she offers herself as bait to the killer. Just as it seems the rogue has out-foxed them both and Ripley is dead meat, the trap is sprung, and Mac takes him down.

10. Resolution

Unfortunately Ripley's grandmother has her own agenda and exacts payback with the help of an axe before Mac and Rip can get all the information they need to solve his case completely. But they get enough to keep the IWC in line, satisfy the human police, and figure out that, for them, true love means dog hair on the duvet cover.



YOUR TURN

Working from your “marketing documents” (High Concept and Blurb) lay your story out using the ten points above.

The Two Page Synopsis (Part 1)

In the Single Page synopsis we presented the story's essential detail. In the Two Pager we take those primary details, elaborate a little on them, and introduce some secondary detail. In the Single Page we deal only with the main characters. In the Two Pager we take those main characters and flesh out their back-stories and internal conflicts. We delve a little deeper into the external conflict and the other points we've been exploring.

But the idea here is not merely to bloat the Single Page until it takes up twice the room. We don't just add words. We add intensity. We add conflict. We add secondary characters and subplot interaction. The intention is always to increase the reader's curiosity and stimulate her desire to read the whole book.

We're still using our ten points to hang the synopsis on. However, some will need very little expansion and some will need a lot.

The key here is to ask yourself questions about what you have already put into the synopsis. Why did you put *[that particular thing]* in? Because there was a reason you considered it important to include. What was the reason? I'm going to walk you through my process here. The journalist's question starters—What, Where, Why, When, Who, and How—are great assets.

1. The Hook—At this stage I'm quite happy with my hook, so I'm not going to waste space extending it.

When the International Werewolf Council sends a covert agent to bring down a fraudulent investment scheme, they don't expect him to be taken down himself. But then, they'd never met Ms R.R. Hood.

2. Heroine, her backstory, and her internal conflict. *[My questions to myself are in brackets]*

RIPLEY ROSAMUNDE HOOD finally gives up trying to return to normal [how was she trying to return to normal, what was she doing?] when she takes a night job as a bouncer at the local biker bar. [why?] She can get through her days driving for her family's courier company without much trouble. But since the home invasion [need to know more about it] that destroyed her peace of mind, [how did it destroy her peace of mind?] the silent dark brings sleeplessness and painful memories. [what are they] She'd rather be under bright lights, with loud music and even louder drunks. [what makes this her choice?] There she can, at least, see what's coming at her.

There are about seventy words in the Single Page section 2. Now here's the section with the questions above answered.

Last New Year's Eve, RIPLEY ROSAMUNDE HOOD was a confident media consultant with an apartment in New York, a loving fiancé, and an exciting future. But by New Year's

Day, thanks to a stranger's insane vendetta, she'd lost it all. Now, a year later, she's back in her childhood home of Forest Hill, and driving for her mother's courier company, "Hood's Goods".

However, Rip's not doing so well. While she manages to maintain a mask of normality during daylight hours, that ability ends at sundown. The night haunts her. Smothers her. Takes her back to the past. Makes her feel blind. Drugged. Helpless. And guilty for being alive when those she'd loved were dead.

Her family's concern for her emotional state drives her crazy, her old friends make her edgy and strangers cause her stress. The only situation in which Rip feels like her old self—and safe—is in the adrenaline-fueled rush of a knock-down, drag-out fight. Which is why she's started moonlighting as a bouncer at 'The Woodcutter's Arms', Forest Hill's bar of choice for bikers, bitches, and bad boys.

There are about one hundred and eighty words in the Two Pager, section 2. This doesn't mean you have to write twice as many words or increase the size of every section significantly. There are places that won't need much, and other places—like, in this story, sections 6 through 10—that will need considerable elaboration because of the secondary characters and subplots.

You'll also notice I haven't merely recycled the Single Page section and padded it out. I've rewritten the whole thing. As I've said before, the synopsis is a story in its own right. We have to make it interesting and fun to read.



YOUR TURN

Take your first THREE points in your Single Page synopsis.
Ask yourself why you've chosen to write what you have.
Write down what else you need to know about things you've alluded to.
Don't be afraid to REWRITE rather than recycle, but if something works then leave it alone.

The Two Page Synopsis (Part 2)

As we close the posts on the Two Page Synopsis I'll show you how you can expand a couple of other sections so that you can do the same for the remaining points and complete your Two Payer on your own.

Last time, we expanded our Heroine's backstory and internal conflict, which gave an example of how to increase the depth of character and show character growth. This time we're going to look at First stage Co-operation and Intimacy, and talk about how to show the growth of Co-operation into Intimacy through the outworking of plot and subplot.

As I've said before, First Stage Co-operation begins as an armed truce and moves through several sub-stages into Intimacy. Intimacy can be anything from first kiss to full-on sex—depending on what kind of subgenre you're writing. But that movement to Intimacy is based on character choice; character action and reaction that initiates, directs, and/or re-directs external action or plot. If you want an excellent study in the natural progression and growth of Intimacy, then Mary Buckham's Lecture Packet on "Sex Between the Pages: Understanding and Writing Sexual Tension" is a great place to start.

Your hero and heroine have a problem that's been shown to them, or dumped on them, or they've fallen into through no fault of their own. They each have a goal—their own personal goal. Now what you're doing here is forcing each of them to evaluate the priority of their own goal in the light of new information. The new information is that this other person has some sort of stake in the deal as well; how is that going to affect what each does?

In my case, Rip has to deal with her peaceful town suddenly becoming as violent as the city she left, and there's this guy who always seems to be around when it happens. She's torn about whether he's the cause, or the effect. Mac knows he's not the cause, but he also knows that Ripley is in the right place at the wrong time more often than can be random, and it worries him. He knows she's his mate. She hasn't the first clue. Then he sees her with her dead neighbor's dog, watches how she relaxes with it, talks to it, soothes it...and he gets the idea how he can make sure she's protected.

This is the beginning of Co-operation, even though, in this case Rip doesn't know she's co-operating. She's just suddenly adopted by a mutt with paws the size of a Clydesdale's hooves, and a brain permanently set on "Play". The Co-operation and Intimacy grow through a back and forth relationship between Ripley and Mac (in his human form) as they take the first tentative steps toward each other, and Ripley and "Bear" (Mac in his canine form) as they do the same. The growth in one relationship parallels the growth in the other.



YOUR TURN

Pick one or two things from your story to illustrate the growth in co-operation between your main characters, and weave them into this section of the synopsis.

When Mac (as “Bear”) fights the rogue, is hurt, and returns, in front of Ripley, to human form to heal, his action—trusting her enough to reveal what he is—and her reaction—the instant decision to protect him from the authorities and hide his dual nature—moves what was Co-operation into Intimacy. Because, even in “real life”, nothing can increase Intimacy in a relationship faster than a shared secret, and the bigger and more deadly the secret the faster Intimacy can develop, and the deeper it can reach.



YOUR TURN

What is the catalyst that moves your hero and heroine from First stage Co-operation to Intimacy?
 How have you shown this catalyst in your book?
 What are the aspects that have the greatest impact on the story?
 How AND WHERE can you show that impact most effectively in this synopsis?

You might remember that I put the sentence below into the Intimacy section in my Single Page.
As they investigate Ripley’s deceased clients—and the interesting habits of the local pensioner community—a pattern emerges.

While, for the Single Page, it was the most appropriate place for it, in the Two Pager the more appropriate place might be elsewhere; Second Stage Co-operation, for example. Don’t be afraid to move things around.

This mutual trust, even though it’s initially given out of necessity, becomes the basis of all future character growth. It’s also the thing the villain can use to try and manipulate Mac, and also to screw with Ripley’s mind.

When you’re synopsisizing your book, look to see if you’ve maximized your foundation or catalyst for Intimacy. The very thing that drew them together (in my case, trust) can be used to great effect as the stimulus to rip them apart, and create division and conflict between your main characters later on.

Have you maximized the effect of your catalyst to Intimacy?
 If not, will it make your work more saleable if you take the time to do so?



YOUR TURN

This concludes the posts on the Two Page Synopsis. Next time we will consider aspects of the Four Pager. In the meantime, please complete your own Two Pager.

The Four Page Synopsis

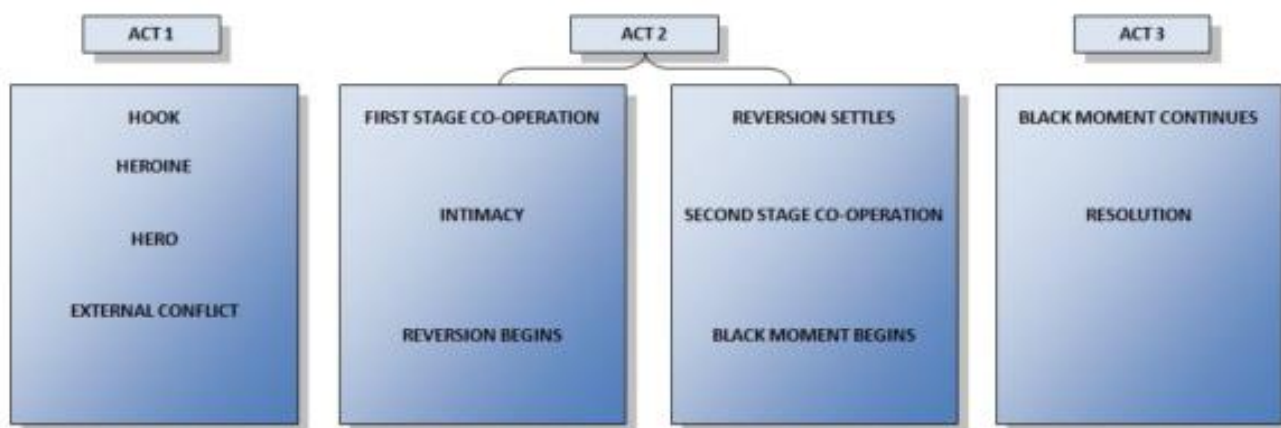
Outwardly there may not seem to be a great deal of difference between the Two Pager and the Four Pager except (obviously) two extra pages. But there is a difference in focus that might help make it easier for you to construct.

So far we've been following the Ten Point outline—making sure we cover all the major story items. Now let's look briefly at how we can relate those points to the classical Three Act Structure of a novel.

In the Three Act Structure:

- Act One is The Introduction
- Act Two is The Complication leading to Destruction
- Act Three is The Resolution

In the diagram below you'll see how I've related the Ten Point outline to this Three Act Structure.



Three Act Structure in the Four Page Synopsis

As you can see, Act One corresponds to the first twenty-five percent of the book and is therefore given the first quarter (one page) of the synopsis. It incorporates the Hook, the Heroine, the Hero, and the External Conflict that initiates the action and gets the story moving.

Act Two corresponds to the next fifty percent of the book, and thus comprises one half (two pages) of the synopsis.

Now, there is a good reason why Act Two is also known—if we're not careful—as “The Sagging Middle”. Fifty percent of a ninety thousand word novel is forty-five thousand words. There is a lot to sag! However, it's also where the story gets stirred up, and our heroine and hero get down and dirty together. It's the place we expand on our subplots, and deepen the emotional intensity and conflict between Heroine and Hero as they try to work through their individual

differences and come to terms with the dreadful knowledge that they actually need each other. It ends with the utter despair of the Black Moment. So it shouldn't have time to sag.

By following this kind of layout for your synopsis—whether you're planning from scratch or revising for sale—it can be easier to see where you need to bring in more physical action or emotional upheaval in your manuscript.

Act Three corresponds to the final twenty-five percent of the book, and the last quarter (one page) of the synopsis. It is, in effect, the Resolution. It carries on from the introduction of the Black Moment, and moves through to the Resolution of not only the Black Moment itself, but also of the other conflicts, motivations, and goals that have made up your story. The Heroine gets her Hero, the Villain gets his just desserts, and everything is tied up in a satisfactory manner—or left with just enough hanging that the reader can see there is going to be a series.

I've had a couple of emails asking me to explain what the Black Moment is, so let me do that now.

The Black Moment is the “Oh God, everything is over, I'm going to die, there's no way out of this mess...he/she has betrayed me, left me prisoner to my deepest fears, why did I ever think I could possibly be worthy to be loved...” moment.

It's betrayal. It's looming death and destruction. It's utter hopelessness and despair. It's the vanquishing of good and the victory of evil. It's that anguished moment when you discover everything you've ever believed in, wanted, needed, hoped for, prayed over, killed in defense of, is a lie—or lost to you forever—and there is absolutely no sane reason left for your heart to stumble to its next beat. It's the place where all the main character's internal conflicts and fears that had seemed to be “conquered”—often by love—are liberated once more, magnified a thousand-fold, and dumped like the wave of a tsunami back on her/him.

It must be clear to the reader that there is no way forward at this point. It is the pivot of the story, and the place where the Heroine or Hero has to lay down any hope of love, life, and happiness in order to become the person worthy of winning it all.

The Black Moment must not be solved by a “in two bounds he was free” sort of cliché. It must only be solved by the heroine demonstrating heroic qualities and proving to herself and the reader that she is worthy of her hero.



YOUR TURN

Take your Two Page Synopsis and, using the Three Act Structure as shown above, craft your Four Page Synopsis. This exercise should result in you looking at your manuscript through new eyes and, if this happens, you've done it right!

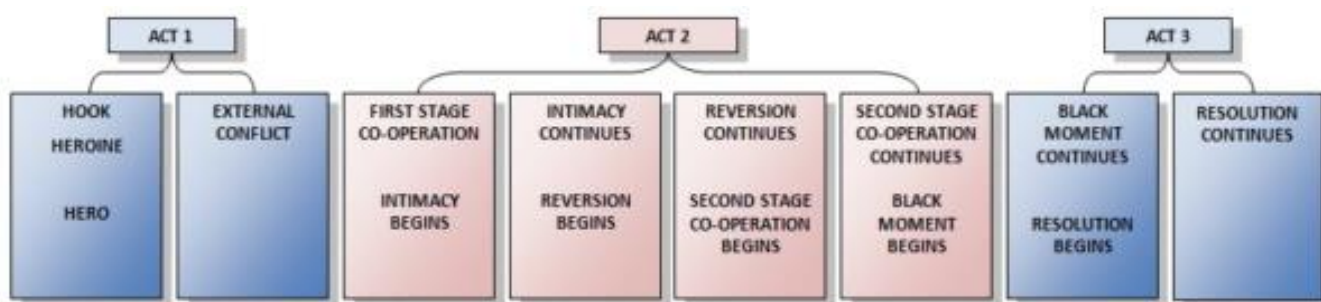
The Eight Page Synopsis

With the Eight PAGER all you're really doing is adding depth and finer detail to the Four PAGER. However, I'm adding a diagram demonstrating the layout below for those of you who haven't done one before.

Act One is still the first twenty-five percent of the book / synopsis.

Act Two is still the middle fifty percent of the book / synopsis.

Act Three is still the last twenty-five percent of the book / synopsis.



Three Act Structure in the Eight Page Synopsis

OK. That's more or less it. The rest is up to you. Please remember this; there is more than one way to make an omelette. Yes, they all require eggs, but the actual ratio of ingredients is up to personal taste.

So with the synopsis. Every synopsis requires the "eggs" of the ten points (or their equivalent), but the ratio of the ingredients to page capacity is often influenced by personal or--even more often--professional requirements.

Also remember that a synopsis is, above all, a marketing tool. Yes, in its simplest form it helps you (as a writer) to get an overview of where you want to go in your story. But done properly it can also be a stealth weapon aimed at selling your current book--and even the next one--to the publishing industry.

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