

How to Write a Synopsis for Querying



FAST ORBIT
P R E S S

What a Synopsis Is

A synopsis is a short, complete summary of your novel's plot, written to show an agent that you can deliver a cohesive story from beginning to end. It is not marketing copy. It is not a back-cover blurb. It is proof that the story holds together.

The Big Mindset Shift

A synopsis prioritizes clarity over voice. Your job is to make the plot easy to follow by clearly showing who the story is about, what happens, why it matters, and how it ends.

How Long Should It Be

Agents vary, but common expectations are one page (most common), sometimes two pages, or occasionally a set word count such as 500 or 1,000 words. Always follow the agent's guidelines. When in doubt, aim for one page.

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How to Approach It

Write the synopsis as a chain of cause and effect. It should read as: because this happens, the character does this, which causes this, leading to this. This keeps the synopsis from becoming a disconnected list of events.

Use Character Names, Not Mystery

In a synopsis, you do not tease. Clearly state the protagonist's goal, the antagonist or main obstacle, the major turning points, and the resolution. If there is a twist, include it.

Focus on the Main Plot

A synopsis is not the place for every subplot. Include only the central conflict, the key relationships that drive decisions, and the final confrontation or choice. If a subplot changes the ending, include it. If not, cut it.

Limit Worldbuilding

Worldbuilding should appear only when it directly impacts the plot. Include it only if it creates conflict, blocks the character, raises the stakes, or forces the final choice. One clean sentence is usually enough.

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Reveal the Ending

A strong synopsis includes the ending. Agents want to know the final choice, what the character sacrifices, how the conflict resolves, and what changes. Avoiding the ending makes the synopsis feel incomplete.

Core Story Beats to Include

A complete synopsis usually covers the setup, inciting incident, rising conflict, midpoint shift, crisis, climax, and resolution. You do not need to label these beats, but they should be present.

Style Guidelines

Write in third person, present tense. Keep sentences direct. Use names consistently. Limit the cast to major characters only. Avoid hype language and rhetorical questions. Emphasize choice and consequence.

Common Mistakes

Agents often reject synopses that read like scene lists, include too many names or subplots, over-explain the world, rely on vague language, hide the ending, or try to function as teaser trailers.

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Self-Check Before Sending

Ask yourself whether a stranger could retell the story from this synopsis, whether the protagonist's goal is clear, whether stakes escalate logically, whether the ending feels earned and specific, and whether you explain why events happen, not just that they happen.

Bottom Line

A synopsis is not about beautiful language. It is about proving the story works: clear goals, clear turns, real consequences, and a real ending.