

THE BLURB & PITCH WORKBOOK



A Practical Guide to Selling Your Story (Without the Guesswork)

Because "it's really good, you should read it" is not a marketing strategy.

Sarah Waterman, editor & indie author

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook will help you write the marketing materials you actually need—whether you're querying agents or self-publishing. You'll create hooks, blurbs, synopses, and pitches that do their job: make someone want to read your book.

How this works: Each section builds on the last. Start with the foundation work, then move through each format. You'll end up with a full set of marketing materials tailored to your story.

Short answers work best. If you're writing paragraphs in the blanks, you're overthinking it. These aren't literary exercises—they're sales copy.



SECTION 1: Before You Start (Foundation Work)

You can't write a compelling blurb if you don't know what your story is about. This isn't about themes or deep meaning—it's about the basic narrative bones that make a reader care.

This section grounds you in the essentials. If you can't answer these questions clearly, your blurb won't be clear either.

Your Story's Genre

Primary Genre: _____

Subgenre (if applicable): _____

Why this matters: Genre determines reader expectations. A romance blurb needs chemistry and emotional stakes. A thriller needs tension and stakes. Fantasy needs a compelling world hook without info-dumping. Know what you're writing so you know what to emphasize.

The Protagonist

Who is your main character? (their role, not their name—"a burned-out detective," "a teenage witch," "a divorced accountant"): _____

What do they want? (external goal—solve the murder, save the kingdom, get the promotion): _____

What's standing in their way? (the main obstacle/antagonist): _____

SECTION 1, continued

The Stakes

What happens if the protagonist fails?: _____

Why should a reader care? (personal stakes, emotional investment): _____

The Hook

What makes this story different from others in the genre?: _____

Now watch those answers stack into a hook:

Veterinarian Dana Mercer has spent three years perfecting an ordinary life under witness protection. When her handler goes silent and a face from her past walks into her clinic, she has to decide: disappear again, or fight to keep the first life that's ever felt like home.

That's it. Protagonist, want, obstacle—one clean sentence, ready to expand into a query or blurb.

Editor reality check: "It's a fantasy about a chosen one" is not a hook. "It's a fantasy where the chosen one refuses the call and has to live with the consequences" is a hook.

If you want to do a complete character deep-dive, check out my Character Arc Workbook. It can be found at www.a3weditorial.com/resources

SECTION 2: Genre Expectations & Comp Titles

Different genres require different approaches to blurbs and pitches. This section helps you identify what readers in your genre expect to see.

Genre Checklist

Check all that apply to your story's genre:

Romance:

- ☐ Chemistry between leads must be front and center
- ☐ Emotional stakes matter more than plot stakes
- ☐ The relationship is the plot, not a subplot
- ☐ Tropes should be visible (enemies-to-lovers, second chance, etc.)

Thriller/Mystery:

- ☐ Tension and urgency are essential
- ☐ The central mystery/threat should be clear
- ☐ Time pressure or escalating danger
- ☐ What's at stake must be immediate and high

Fantasy/Science Fiction:

- ☐ World building hook without info-dumping
- ☐ Magic system/tech should be intriguing but not explained
- ☐ High stakes (usually world-ending or life-altering)
- ☐ Unique premise that distinguishes it from similar books

Literary Fiction:

- ☐ Voice and character interiority matter more than plot
- ☐ Emotional or psychological journey is the focus
- ☐ Theme and atmosphere over high-stakes action
- ☐ Beautiful or distinctive prose should be hinted at

Horror:

- ☐ The threat/monster should be clear and creepy
- ☐ Atmosphere and dread matter
- ☐ What's being threatened (safety, sanity, survival)
- ☐ The unique horror element (what makes this scary?)



SECTION 2, continued

Comp Titles

Comp titles help position your book. Use them in pitches and query letters. Choose books published in the last 3-5 years that share your story's tone, genre, or audience. Not a 1:1 like match. Think about where on the shelf your book would sit and why.

Comp Title 1: _____

Why it's similar: _____

Comp Title 2: _____

Why it's similar: _____

How to use these: "[Your title] will appeal to readers who loved [Comp 1]'s [specific element] and [Comp 2]'s [specific element]."

Example: "MIDNIGHT HEIR will appeal to readers who loved THE PRIORY OF THE ORANGE TREE's political intrigue and THE POPPY WAR's morally gray protagonist."

SECTION 3: The One-Sentence Hook (Logline)

This is your story in one sentence. It's the answer to "What's your book about?" and it should make someone want to know more. A good logline includes: protagonist + goal + obstacle + stakes.

Formula:

When [inciting incident], [protagonist] must [goal] or else [stakes].

OR: [Protagonist] wants [goal], but [obstacle] stands in the way.

Examples by Genre:

Romance: When a workaholic wedding planner is forced to collaborate with her chaotic ex-boyfriend on her best friend's wedding, she must decide if some things are worth a second chance.

Thriller: A cybersecurity expert discovers her company is trafficking data to a terrorist organization, and she has 48 hours to expose them before she becomes the next target.

Fantasy: When the kingdom's only necromancer is framed for the prince's murder, she must use the very magic that condemned her to find the real killer.

Literary: After her mother's death, a middle-aged woman returns to her childhood home and confronts the secrets that shaped her family's silence.

Your One-Sentence Hook (hint: go back to part 1)

Draft 1: _____

Draft 2 (refine it): _____

Checklist:

- ☐ Includes protagonist (include role in addition to name)
- ☐ States the goal or conflict
- ☐ Shows what's at stake
- ☐ Fits in one readable sentence
- ☐ Makes you want to know what happens next

SECTION 4: The Elevator Pitch (30-Second Verbal Pitch)

This is your one-sentence hook expanded slightly for conversation. You have about 30 seconds to convey the essence of your story when someone asks what you're working on. Keep it casual, compelling, and conversational.

Formula:

Hook sentence + one intriguing complication + genre/tone.

Examples:

Romance: "It's about a wedding planner who has to work with her chaotic ex on her best friend's wedding—except he's suddenly grown up and she's realizing she hasn't. It's a second-chance romance with a lot of banter."

Thriller: "A cybersecurity expert discovers her company is selling data to terrorists, and she has two days to expose them without getting killed. Think corporate espionage meets THE FIRM."

Fantasy: "The kingdom's only necromancer gets framed for murdering the prince, so she has to use illegal magic to clear her name before they execute her. It's dark fantasy with a morally gray protagonist."

Your Elevator Pitch

Draft: _____

Read it out loud. Does it sound natural? Would you actually say this at a party? Or a book event?

SECTION 5: The Short Blurb (100-150 Words)

This is what goes on Amazon, Goodreads, the back of your book, and anywhere a reader is deciding whether to click "buy" or keep scrolling. It's sales copy. Its only job is to make someone want to read more.

What to include:

1. Protagonist introduction (who they are in one punchy line)
2. Inciting incident (what disrupts their world)
3. Goal or conflict (what they're trying to do/solve/survive)
4. Complication (what makes this hard/impossible/dangerous)
5. Hint at stakes (without spoiling)
6. End on a question or tension point

What NOT to include:

- Character names beyond the protagonist (maybe love interest/antagonist if essential)
- Subplots
- Backstory
- Spoilers
- Vague "life will never be the same" nonsense

Genre-Specific Examples:

Romance (Contemporary):

Emma doesn't do second chances. Not in love, not in business, and definitely not with the man who ghosted her three years ago.

But when her best friend hires her ex-boyfriend as the photographer for her destination wedding, Emma has no choice but to play nice. The problem? He's apologetic, annoyingly charming, and suddenly interested in proving he's changed.

As the wedding week unfolds, Emma has to decide: is she protecting her heart, or just afraid to let him back in?



SECTION 5, continued

Thriller:

Zoe Lin built her career exposing corporate fraud. She never expected to find it at her own company.

When a routine security audit uncovers encrypted files linking her firm to a known terrorist network, Zoe has forty-eight hours to gather evidence before the trail goes cold—or she does. Her bosses are watching. Her colleagues can't be trusted. And someone is making sure she doesn't leave the building alive.

The truth will cost her everything. Staying silent will cost her more.

Fantasy:

In a kingdom where necromancy is punishable by death, Mira Thorne is the only one keeping the dead in their graves.

When the crown prince is murdered and dark magic is found at the scene, Mira becomes the obvious suspect. With the Royal Guard hunting her and a ruthless inquisitor on her trail, she has days to prove her innocence—using the very magic that condemned her.

But the real killer is still out there. And they're not done yet.

Literary Fiction:

After her mother's funeral, Claire returns to the coastal house where she grew up and hasn't visited in twenty years.

The rooms are full of objects her mother never explained: a locked diary, a photograph of a woman Claire doesn't recognize, a wedding ring that isn't her father's. As Claire sifts through the remnants of her mother's secret life, she's forced to confront the silence that defined her family—and the choices that shaped her own.

Some inheritances can't be refused.



SECTION 5, continued

Your Short Blurb Template

Paragraph 1: Protagonist + Inciting Incident

Paragraph 2: Complication + Escalation

Paragraph 3: Stakes + Tension Closer

Snarky Note: If your blurb could describe fifteen other books in your genre, it's not specific enough. Add the detail that makes YOUR story different.

Short Blurb Checklist:

- ☐ 100-150 words (no more, or you'll lose them)
- ☐ Focused on the main character and central conflict
- ☐ No spoilers
- ☐ Ends on tension or a question
- ☐ Genre-appropriate tone
- ☐ Makes you want to know what happens next

SECTION 6: Back Cover Copy (200-250 Words)

This is your short blurb expanded slightly—used for print books, press releases, or marketing materials where you have a bit more room. It's still sales copy, but you can include one subplot tease or a secondary character if it strengthens the hook.

Structure: Same as short blurb, but with:

- Slightly more room for voice/atmosphere
- One additional complication or subplot tease
- A bit more detail on the stakes

Back Cover Copy Template

Opening Hook (1-2 sentences): _____

Protagonist + Situation (2-3 sentences): _____

Conflict/Complication (3-4 sentences): _____

Secondary tension or subplot tease (optional, 1-2 sentences): _____

Stakes + Closer (2-3 sentences): _____

Back Cover Copy Checklist:

- ☐ 200-250 words
- ☐ Builds on short blurb with additional detail
- ☐ Still focused and punchy (not wandering)
- ☐ Genre-appropriate voice
- ☐ Ends with tension

SECTION 7: The Synopsis

This is for agent submissions. It's not marketing copy—it's a factual, beat-by-beat summary of your entire plot, including the ending. Yes, you spoil everything. That's the point.

What it includes:

- Protagonist introduction
- Inciting incident
- Major plot beats (rising action)
- Midpoint turn
- Climax
- Resolution

What it does NOT include:

- Flowery language
- Every subplot
- Minor characters (unless essential to main plot)
- Backstory dumps

Formatting:

- Single-spaced or 1.5-spaced
- 500-600 words max
- Present tense, third person (even if your book isn't)
- Character names in ALL CAPS on first mention

One-Page Synopsis Template

Opening (Protagonist + Inciting Incident):_____



SECTION 7, continued

Rising Action (Major beats leading to midpoint):

Midpoint Turn (Major shift or revelation):

Escalation (Complications, rising stakes):

SECTION 7, continued

Climax (The big confrontation/choice):_____

Resolution (How it ends):_____

One-Page Synopsis Checklist:

- ☐ Covers the entire plot including the ending
- ☐ 500-600 words
- ☐ Focus on main character's journey
- ☐ Clear cause-and-effect between beats
- ☐ No subplots unless they directly affect the main plot
- ☐ Present tense, third person

Editor Reality Check: Agents read these to see if your plot makes sense and has a satisfying arc. Don't try to be clever or coy. Just tell them what happens. And if every beat is connected with “and then this happens” you need to go back and look at your character agency and cause/effect.

SECTION 8: The Two-Page Synopsis

Same as the one-page, but for agents/publishers who allow a little more word count, which leaves room for:

- One major subplot (if it's essential)
- Slightly more detail on character motivation
- Key secondary characters

This is still a plot summary. You're not writing the book again. You're just giving a slightly fuller picture.

Formatting:

- Single-spaced or 1.5-spaced
- 1000-1200 words max
- Same tense/POV rules as one-page

Two-Page Synopsis Expansion Points

What subplot will you include (if any)? _____

Which secondary character is essential to mention? _____

What additional detail strengthens the arc? _____

Two-Page Synopsis Checklist:

- ☐ 1000-1200 words
- ☐ Includes one major subplot if relevant
- ☐ Still focused on main plot
- ☐ Same clear, factual tone as one-page version



SECTION 9: Comp Titles (How to Use Them)

You touched on this earlier, but here's how to actually deploy comp titles in queries and pitches.

The Formula:

[Your book] will appeal to fans of [Comp 1]'s [specific element] and [Comp 2]'s [specific element].

Example:

"SHADOW HEIR will appeal to fans of THE PRIORY OF THE ORANGE TREE's intricate political world-building and THE POPPY WAR's morally complex protagonist."

Your Comp Title Statement: _____

Comp Title Rules:

- ☐ Published within the last 3-5 years
- ☐ Similar audience/genre
- ☐ Successful but not TOO successful (do not comp to bestsellers)
- ☐ Be specific about WHY they're similar

SECTION 10: Taglines

A tagline is a single punchy sentence that captures the essence or mood of your book. Think movie posters. This is optional but fun for marketing materials.

Examples:

- "Some promises are worth breaking." (Fantasy)
- "Love isn't always the answer. Sometimes it's the problem."
(Romance)
- "The truth will bury you." (Thriller)

Your Tagline: _____

SECTION 11: Common Blurb/Pitch Red Flags

Check any that apply to your drafts. Each one is a revision flag.

- ☐ Blurb is **vague** ("a journey of self-discovery" or "she'll lose everything")
- ☐ Uses **clichés** ("life will never be the same," "little did she know")
- ☐ Doesn't mention the protagonist's **goal**
- ☐ No clear **stakes**
- ☐ Sounds like **every other book** in the genre
- ☐ **Spoils the ending** in the blurb (save that for the synopsis)
- ☐ Too much **backstory**, not enough conflict
- ☐ Reads like a **summary** instead of a hook

If you checked more than two, go back and tighten your blurb with specifics.

SECTION 12: Final Reality Check

Read your blurb, pitch, and synopsis out loud. Then answer:

Does the blurb make you want to read this book?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Honestly, no

Would you pick this up in a bookstore based on the back cover copy?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Does the synopsis clearly show the plot from start to finish?

- ☐ Yes ☐ It's still confusing

If you answered "no" or "not yet" to any of these, go back to the section that needs work. You're close.



A Note From The Editor

Blurbs and pitches are hard because you're condensing months (or years!) of work into a few sentences. It feels reductive. It feels like you're losing all the nuance and beauty of your story.

You are.

But that's the job. A blurb isn't your book—it's an invitation to your book. It doesn't need to contain everything. It needs to make someone want to know more.

If you've worked through this workbook, you now have a toolkit of marketing materials. Use them. Refine them. Test them on readers and see what hooks them.

Your book deserves to be read. These materials are what get it into readers' hands.

Now go sell your story.

If you found this workbook helpful, check out my other resources:

- *Fix the Right Thing First*—Full self-revision book, available wherever books are sold.
- The Character Arc Workbook—Diagnose and strengthen character growth. Available on our website.
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