

Writing and Formatting a synopsis

A synopsis is a short rundown of your story, and gives an agent or editor an idea of what the manuscript is about without reading the entire thing.

The synopsis should include the main plot points and the conclusion. Use the same format, font type and size, etc, as the manuscript. You should, however, start at the top of the page. (If you have an agent, their info, in addition to your own, should be on the synopsis.)

Synopsis points:

It's great to get some of your voice in the synopsis if possible, though the shorter the synopsis, the less likely it is that you can accomplish this. The synopsis should reflect whether the story is humorous, or literary, a mystery, etc.

Tell, don't show. A synopsis is the opposite of the story. You want to briefly tell what happens.

Use present tense. This gives the story immediacy.

Omit unimportant details.

Include backstory as necessary to give the editor necessary information about the character's motives.

Don't keep secrets. Tell what happened as specifically as possible.

Don't end with a "you have to read the book to find out what happened." Editors hate that.

Spell out the story, including the ending.

Only list the main characters' names. There are exceptions, but you probably want to limit the names mentioned to four to five. I capitalize the first use of the name, (so if the editor is confused by who a character is, they can quickly find the first place that character was mentioned) and I will only use first names if that is possible. If a character is only mentioned once or twice, you probably don't need to mention their name, but can just call them a friend or her mother, etc.

Length—various agents/editors want different length synopses. Some want it to be complete, and expect it to be four to five pages. Others want no more than one double-spaced page.

That's extreme. I would suggest writing one longer (four double-spaced pages) and one short (one single-spaced page.) That should cover whatever you need. I single-space a one-page synopsis (with space between paragraphs) and double-space longer synopses.

What to include in a synopsis:

The main character's goal (both physical and emotional)

The main character's motivation (both physical and emotional)

The main character's conflict (both physical and emotional)

A hint at the tone of the novel

Indication of the setting (can be a simple timeline at the top of the synopsis: *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July, 1939*)

Character's Growth—how the character grows and changes, what he learns.

Pivotal Scenes—the points that take the plot in a dramatic new direction.

Climax—when the action reaches its zenith and sends the character headlong into what he's been avoiding.

Satisfying Ending

