

# AUTHOR Essentials

## Synopsis Builder Toolkit



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## Introduction

A synopsis is a concise narrative summary of your novel, capturing the story's main arc, the central characters and their motivations, the core conflict, and the resolution. It is a professional tool used in query letters, pitches, marketing materials and as a planning document. A clear and well-structured synopsis allows agents, editors, and readers to quickly understand the essence of your story and assess whether it matches their interests. It also helps you, the author, to refine your story's structure and ensure it holds together from beginning to end.

Many writers find the process of condensing their novel daunting because reducing a complex plot into a few paragraphs can seem reductive. However, producing a strong synopsis can reveal weak spots in the narrative and provide clarity on character arcs and themes. This guide is designed to walk you through the process step by step, providing guidance and practical exercises to help you create a polished, professional synopsis in UK English.

## The Five Purposes of a Strong Synopsis

A synopsis serves multiple roles at different stages of a book's life cycle. Understanding these purposes will inform the tone and depth of your own synopsis.

- 1) Planning** – During early drafting, a synopsis acts as a map, helping you organise the major beats and keep sight of the narrative arc.
- 2) Querying** – Literary agents and publishers often request a synopsis as part of a submission package. A clear and professional synopsis demonstrates your writing skills and your story's potential.
- 3) Editing** – When revising, summarising the plot forces you to identify pacing issues and plot holes. It highlights where the stakes drop or the arc falters.
- 4) Marketing** – A strong synopsis provides the raw material for jacket copy and sales descriptions, ensuring consistency in messaging.
- 5) Structural Clarity** – Condensing your story clarifies cause and effect and ensures that each major event arises logically from the last.

## Core Elements of a Compelling Synopsis

A compelling synopsis must cover the key elements of your story without becoming a dry list of events. Aim for clarity and flow. The following elements should be present:

**Protagonist Goal** – State clearly what your protagonist wants. This goal drives the narrative and provides a central thread for the synopsis.

**Stakes** – Explain why achieving or failing to achieve the goal matters. Stakes give the story urgency and show what's at risk.

**Conflict** – Identify the main obstacles and antagonists that hinder your protagonist. This includes external conflicts and internal struggles.

**Emotional Movement** – Show how the characters' emotions change throughout the story. A synopsis should reflect the journey's highs and lows.

**Resolution** – Reveal how the central conflict is resolved. Agents and editors expect to see the ending, even if the synopsis will later be adapted for marketing.

**Cause and Effect** – Ensure that events flow logically. Each turning point should follow from the previous one, showing how decisions lead to consequences.



# Step-by-Step Synopsis Blueprint

This blueprint outlines how to structure a synopsis from beginning to end. Each stage includes a description, guidance and prompts for your own story.

## Opening Orientation

Begin by grounding the reader: set the scene, introduce your protagonist, and hint at the central conflict. Identify the genre and time period and convey the tone. Don't overload this section with backstory.

### Guidance:

- Present the protagonist's current life and main motivation.
- Name the setting and time frame succinctly.
- Include a hook: a brief hint of the story's tension.

## Inciting Event

Describe the event that disrupts the protagonist's ordinary world and propels them into the main story. The inciting event should occur early in the plot.

### Guidance:

- Explain how this event introduces the central problem.
- Show how it changes the protagonist's circumstances.
- Keep this section concise but clear.

## Rising Complications

Cover the significant developments that raise the stakes and deepen the conflict. These might include twists, subplots, and the escalation of obstacles.

### Guidance:

- Group related events, focusing on cause and effect rather than listing every scene.
- Highlight turning points where the protagonist makes important decisions.
- Maintain clarity about how each complication builds towards the climax.

## Midpoint Shift

The midpoint is a major turning point, often involving a reversal, revelation, or shift in goals. It alters the direction or tone of the story.

### Guidance:

- Describe the event that marks this change.
- Explain how it affects the protagonist's strategy or goal.
- Indicate any shifts in alliances, stakes or understanding.

## Crisis and Climax

Describe the highest point of tension where the protagonist faces their greatest challenge. This section should demonstrate the culmination of the conflict and the decisions that determine the outcome.

### Guidance:

- Show how the protagonist confronts the antagonist or main obstacle.
- Clarify what will be gained or lost.
- Indicate the emotional stakes alongside the plot stakes.

## Resolution

Explain how the central conflict is resolved and what changes as a result. This section should tie up the main plot, but can hint at future developments if relevant to your genre.

### Guidance:

- Provide a clear outcome, including how the protagonist's internal struggle is resolved.
- Suggest the state of the world after the story's end.
- Avoid new subplots; maintain focus on wrapping up the established arc.

## Workbook Section

The following templates are designed to help you gather information and organise your synopsis. Use them to prepare your content before writing the final synopsis.

### Character Motivation Sheet

- Protagonist Name:
- Age / Occupation:
- Primary Goal:
- Motivation / Why do they want it?:
- Internal Conflict:
- Key Relationships:

### Plot Arc Worksheet

Story Stage	Description	Your Notes
<b>Opening Orientation</b>	Introduce protagonist, setting, tone	
<b>Inciting Event</b>	Disrupts status quo, introduces problem	
<b>Rising Complications</b>	Series of obstacles, escalating stakes	
<b>Midpoint Shift</b>	Major twist or reversal	
<b>Crisis and Climax</b>	Highest tension, decisive confrontation	
<b>Resolution</b>	Conflict resolution and aftermath	

## Conflict Mapping

List the main conflicts: internal and external, and note how they interact.

Conflict / Interaction	Description	Notes
<b>External Conflict 1</b>	Who or what opposes the protagonist? How?	
<b>External Conflict 2</b>	Additional antagonist or obstacle.	
<b>Internal Conflict</b>	The protagonist's internal struggle.	
<b>Interaction</b>	How do these conflicts influence each other?	

## Turning Point Grid

Record key turning points and their effects.

Turning Point	Cause	Effect on Protagonist	Effect on stakes
<b>Inciting Event</b>			
<b>First Plot Point</b>			
<b>Midpoint</b>			
<b>Darkest Moment</b>			
<b>Climax</b>			

## Stakes and Consequences Sheet

- **What is at stake if the protagonist succeeds?**

- **What is at stake if they fail?:**

- **How do the stakes increase?:**

- **What sacrifices are required?:**

## Synopsis Templates

Use the following templates to draft your synopses. Fill the blanks and refine the prose to ensure it flows smoothly.

### One-Page Synopsis Template

1. Introduce the protagonist and setting.
2. Present the inciting event.
3. Summarise major complications and turning points.
4. Describe the crisis and climax.
5. Conclude with the resolution and character growth.

### Three-Length Synopsis Template

- **Short Synopsis** (150–200 words): Write one paragraph summarising the main plot, key characters, conflict and resolution.
- **Standard Synopsis** (350–500 words): Write two or three paragraphs covering the full arc with clear cause and effect, stakes and resolution.
- **Extended Synopsis** (up to 1,000 words): Write multiple paragraphs describing each stage of the plot in greater detail.

## Practical Examples

To demonstrate how a synopsis condenses a story, consider a simple narrative about a young herbalist who enters a dangerous competition to secure the medicine her village needs.

### Original Story Outline (rough):

Lydia lives in a remote valley where a rare illness threatens her people. When a travelling merchant tells her of a tournament hosted by the royal court, with a supply of the cure as the prize, Lydia leaves home. She must overcome treacherous rivals and learn to trust an unlikely ally. After facing trials that test her resolve and the betrayal of a supposed friend, she reaches the final challenge. In the decisive trial she sacrifices a personal treasure, proving her worth. The judges award her the cure. She returns home with the medicine and newfound confidence.

### Short Synopsis:

Lydia, a young herbalist, enters a perilous royal tournament to win a cure for a deadly disease ravaging her village. In the capital she faces skilled rivals, deception and harsh tests. With help from an unexpected ally she overcomes trials that challenge her courage and ingenuity. In the final challenge she chooses to forgo her cherished heirloom to save another contestant, impressing the judges and proving her selflessness. Her sacrifice earns her the prize, and she returns home with the medicine and a deeper sense of purpose.

### Standard Synopsis:

When a mysterious illness sweeps through Lydia's mountain village, the young herbalist's remedies are not enough. A travelling merchant tells her of a tournament at the royal court that offers the rare cure as a prize. Lydia journeys to the capital, determined to save her people. The tournament's trials are brutal: she must navigate an obstacle course, solve complex herbal puzzles and face off against seasoned competitors. Along the way she befriends Marcus, a fellow contestant who knows palace politics. As Lydia progresses, she realises that the organiser intends to rig the outcome for a favoured noble. When Marcus is injured, Lydia risks her own standing to help him, placing compassion above victory. In the final trial she sacrifices her most prized possession – a family amulet – to complete a healing ritual for a rival. The judges, moved by her courage and integrity, award her the cure. Lydia returns to her village with the medicine, having grown from a timid healer into a confident advocate for her people.

### Extended Synopsis:

Lydia, an eighteen-year-old herbalist, lives a quiet life in the isolated valley of Elden Brook. When a strange fever strikes her village, her usual remedies fail. As panic grows, a travelling merchant arrives with a rumour of a royal competition in the capital city. The victor will receive a chest of rare medicines, including the elusive blossom needed to cure the fever. Lydia's father is sceptical, but Lydia resolves to go, knowing that without the blossom her village faces devastation. She crosses mountains to reach the city.

At the royal court Lydia learns that the tournament consists of a series of tasks designed to test knowledge, bravery and loyalty. Competitors include nobles, healers and warriors. In the first trial, they must create an antidote for a poisoned noble using only the herbs provided. Lydia's practical skills allow her to save the noble when others hesitate. This success draws the attention of Marcus, a cynical palace apprentice, who offers to share insider knowledge if she teaches him her craft.

The second trial is a treacherous race through a labyrinthine garden filled with toxic plants. Lydia struggles but uses her knowledge to neutralise hazards and help Marcus when he is attacked by another contestant. This act forms a bond of trust. However, they soon discover that the organiser, Lord Halver, plans to ensure his nephew wins. After Marcus overhears a plot to sabotage the contestants, Lydia must decide whether to expose the cheating and risk disqualification or stay silent to improve her chances. She confronts Lord Halver publicly, forcing the king to intervene and promise a fair competition.

In the penultimate trial Lydia and the others face moral dilemmas staged to test their values. She is given the choice between saving her father's cherished amulet, which she carries as a token, or rescuing a child from a trap. She chooses to save the child, losing the amulet but earning the admiration of onlookers. Lord Halver's nephew, angered by her popularity, sabotages the final challenge by stealing ingredients. Lydia and Marcus improvise using alternative herbs and complete the challenge through teamwork.

During the final trial, a healing ritual, Lydia sacrifices her own chance to rest when she sees another contestant collapse. She applies a remedy she devised in secret, reviving them but exhausting herself. The judges are moved by her compassion and ingenuity, awarding her the victory. With the chest of medicines she returns to Elden Brook. The rare blossom cures the fever, and Lydia's journey transforms her from a timid herbalist into a resourceful leader who understands her own worth.

## Common Synopsis Mistakes and How to Fix Them

- **Listing events without connection** – Avoid summarising scenes as though writing a shopping list. Instead, link events with phrases such as “as a result” and “because” to show cause and effect.
- **Excessive backstory** – You only need enough background to understand the story. Resist the temptation to explain every character's past. Focus on the plot.
- **Vague language** – Words like “things happen” or “they face challenges” weaken a synopsis. Be specific about the nature of obstacles and decisions.
- **Hiding the ending** – Agents and editors expect to see how the story resolves. Do not tease; reveal the outcome and how it is achieved.
- **Understating stakes** – If the stakes are unclear, the story feels flat. State what is at risk if the protagonist fails, both externally and emotionally.

# AI Master Prompt

AI can help to provide the ultimate synopsis for your book. Simply copy the master prompt below in grey font and paste it into ChatGPT or your preferred AI tool. Answer the questions when prompted and be amazed with the output.

## MASTER PROMPT: Synopsis Builder

### ROLE

You are my Professional Story Development Partner. Your task is to help me create a clear, engaging, structured synopsis for my novel. You will guide the process, ask intelligent questions, and shape the synopsis into a format suitable for query letters, book descriptions, or planning documents.

### GOAL

To produce a polished, accurate synopsis that captures the full narrative arc, character motivations, central conflict, and resolution. The synopsis should be concise, compelling, and aligned with my genre.

### STYLE RULES

• Use UK English • Keep the tone confident, professional, and accessible • No clichés • No em dashes • No filler or vague statements • Focus on clarity, story movement, and stakes • Maintain a natural flow without listing events mechanically • Present the synopsis in clean prose paragraphs

### WHAT YOU MUST DO

Ask me the following questions one by one. Wait for my answers before continuing.

#### A. Book Information

1. What is your book title
2. What is the genre
3. What is the setting or time period
4. What is the target age range

B. Main Character 5. Who is the protagonist 6. What do they want 7. What stands in their way 8. What is their internal struggle

C. Plot Structure 9. What is the inciting event 10. What major turning points shape the story 11. Who or what is the antagonist 12. What is at stake if the protagonist fails 13. How is the central conflict resolved 14. What changes in the protagonist by the end

After all answers are provided, create: • A Short Synopsis (150 to 200 words) • A Standard Synopsis (350 to 500 words) • An Extended Synopsis (up to 1,000 words) suitable for planning or editors • A Logline (one sentence) • A Hook Paragraph suitable for a query letter

Ensure the synopsis: • Covers the full plot including the ending • Highlights key emotional shifts • Shows cause and effect • Identifies the protagonist's growth • States the consequences of failure • Matches the book's tone and genre

Present all outputs cleanly with headings.

At the end, provide an optional Refinement Section, inviting me to request: • A darker or lighter tone • More emotional depth • A version focused on theme • A version focused on plot • A version suitable for marketing copy • A version structured for Amazon listing

### CONSTRAINTS

Do not invent characters, events, or locations. If any detail is missing or unclear, ask for clarification first. Keep language grounded, confident, and precise.

### FINAL STEP

After delivering the completed synopsis set, provide: • A list of suggested improvements to the story arc • A list of possible title alternatives • A list of theme descriptors that could be used for marketing • A genre fit confirmation

## Author Self-Review Checklist

Use the following checklist to evaluate your final synopsis. Tick each item when you have addressed it satisfactorily.

- Have I clearly stated the protagonist's goal?
- Are the stakes explicit and escalating?
- Does the synopsis show cause and effect between events?
- Have I revealed the ending and how the conflict is resolved?
- Is the protagonist's internal journey evident?
- Is the tone reflective of my book's genre and style?
- Is the language precise and free of clichés and vague phrases?
- Have I kept the synopsis within the required length?
- Does the synopsis read smoothly, without abrupt jumps?
- Have I removed unnecessary subplots and characters?

## Final Reflection and Improvement Options

Writing a synopsis is as much about understanding your story as it is about presenting it to others. Once you have completed your synopsis, reflect on the following:

**Narrative Clarity:** Does your story have a clear beginning, middle and end? If not, consider whether you need to adjust the plot or pacing.

**Character Depth:** Do the protagonist's motivations and growth feel authentic? Strengthen their arc if it seems thin.

**Stakes and Tension:** Are the stakes compelling enough? Raising the stakes or clarifying the consequences can heighten interest.

**Theme and Tone:** Does the synopsis convey the themes you intend and match the tone of the novel? Adjust word choice and emphasis to align them.

**Market Fit:** Consider how your synopsis positions your story within its genre. If necessary, tweak elements to better meet reader expectations while staying true to your vision.

Finally, consider inviting a trusted reader or writing partner to review your synopsis. Fresh eyes can spot gaps and ambiguities you may have missed.

This toolkit is designed to support your writing journey. Use the worksheets, templates and checklist to refine your synopsis and build a compelling summary that showcases your novel to agents, editors and readers.