

For some advice on writing a summary as opposed to a synopsis, please look at The Literary Consultancy website. Below is an extract that you may find valuable when submitting to our competition.

Writing a brief summary

Having made it your top priority to identify what type of novel you have written, you can make a start on your all-important synopsis. All good synopses should begin with a brief summary of 30–75 words, the sort of thing which appears on a book's back cover. For example, had you written *Pride and Prejudice* today:

Pride and Prejudice is a contemporary, literary romance about a woman who falls in love with a man she thinks she hates.

Or,

Pride and Prejudice, a contemporary, literary novel, tells the story of Elizabeth Bennett, a proud, intelligent woman, one of five sisters, whose mother is committed to marrying her children off as a matter of urgency. Elizabeth meets Darcy, owner of a grand estate, but considers him over proud, arrogant and undesirable. In time, she learns that he is not all that he appears to be, and revises her prejudice, before they fall deeply in love.

Both these examples, one short, one longer, serve to whet the appetite for more detail to follow.

An example of an ostensibly weak synopsis, which rambles and fails to emphasise the most important points quickly enough, might be:

Set at some point in the nineteenth century, five sisters are looking for husbands. Or is Mary, really? Anyway, their mother is a real fuss pot and annoys everybody. Outside their house there are lots of fields and it is sometimes raining. The girls' father is gentle and kind, with grey hair but not good at standing up to his wife always. Mr Bingley is an important character who is very handsome, but is he as handsome as Mr Darcy? It is hard to tell! ...

Hopefully you can see the clear differences between the two.

Writing a detailed synopsis

Following the brief summary should be a more detailed synopsis of 350–450 words. Literary agents do not want a detailed chapter-by-chapter breakdown (if they do, they'll ask for one) as reading them can be tiresome and difficult to follow. The main aim of the longer synopsis is to give a detailed overview which clearly and concisely conveys how the story flows and unfolds, and (very importantly) what is interesting

about it. The longer synopsis should also reconfirm when the story is set (i.e. is it contemporary or historical?); the setting or background (e.g. is Thatcher's government in its last throes or are we in a quiet Devonshire village where nothing ever happens, but there is a sense of impending doom?); inform the reader about the central character (i.e. what is interesting about them and what happens on their journey), as well as giving brief reference to other characters that are directly pivotal to the plot. The longer synopsis should also highlight the dramatic turning points and tell the reader of any other salient information which will help convey what kind of work it is, how well imagined are the characters involved and how well thought through and alluring is the plot.
