

A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing the Fiction Synopsis

Workshop Handouts

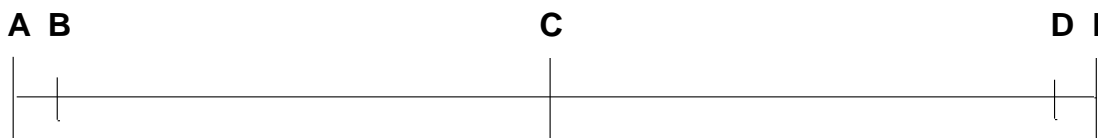
by Pam McCutcheon

INTRODUCTION

- Why write a synopsis?
- What is a synopsis?
- What's the difference between:
 - Outline
 - Working Synopsis
 - Selling Synopsis

INGREDIENTS THAT GO INTO A SYNOPSIS

- Character GMCR (partially from Debra Dixon's *GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict*):
 - Goal (G): what she wants
 - Motivation (M): why she wants it
 - Conflict (C): what's stopping her from achieving the goal
 - Growth/Resolution (R): how she changes as a result of the story
- Plot Points (partially from Syd Field's *Screenplay*):



- A = The Ordinary World
- B = The Trigger Event
- C = The Change of Plans
- D = The Black Moment
- E = The Resolution

- List of Scenes

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- Development of the romance

- Meeting
- Attraction
- First kiss
- Making love
- Commitment
- All stages in between

- Optional:

- Tone/Mood
- Setting
- Time Period
- Theme

BEFORE YOU START

- Know the market you plan to target

- Genre
- Word count requirement
- Publisher requirements/ guidelines
- Synopsis length

- Develop a log line that describes your story in one or two sentences

WRITING THE BEGINNING:

- Include:

- Character GMC
- Plot points A & B
- Setting, time period (optional)
- The characters' meeting and reactions

- Different types of beginnings:

- The Dive: for simpler stories, just dive write in and write the story as it happens
- The Hook: for stories with a great hook or high concept, start off with a log line that summarizes the hook/story, then dive in

-- The Map: for more complex stories where there are a lot of characters or it's necessary to explain the history or back story up front, use a map to explain the following:

BACKGROUND:

HERO:

HEROINE:

OTHER CHARACTERS AS REQUIRED:

STORY:

WRITING THE MIDDLE:

- Include:

- Plot point C
 - Scenes from point B to C and C to D
 - Character reactions to the plot and development of the romance
- Use character GMC to show how characters grow and the plot changes
- Condense less important scenes

WRITING THE ENDING:

- Include:

- Character resolution, growth, and romantic commitment
 - Plot points D & E
- Ensure your last line provides a sense of closure

AFTER THE ENDING (optional):

- Epilogue (most of the time it can be left out)
- For a series, description of other books in the series
- Author notes

TO SHORTEN

- To shorten to one or two pages, use *only* character GMCR and plot points ABCDE

DO'S AND DON'TS:

- Do:

- Edit
- Add tone/mood
- Show the development of the romance
- Show the theme
- Tell the story in order
- Use third person
- Use present tense
- Use proper format (can be single spaced if less than two pages)
- Use transitions

- Don't:

- Address the reader directly
- Tell them how to feel
- Use too many details
- Use much dialogue
- Use a lot of CAPS, underlining, or exclamation points!!!
- Use fancy fonts and pictures
- Give each scene equal weight
- Use a lot of character names
- Leave out the ending

FINAL PIECE OF ADVICE:

Write the synopsis *first*, before you write the story. That way you won't be tempted to include too many unnecessary details.