

Writing the Blurb

Curriculum: NOVICE and ADVANCED

Creator: Dar Bagby

Definition: A blurb is a brief (1-4 short paragraphs) description of a book's contents used to promote the book's sales. Remember that a blurb is only long enough to present a situation that seems doomed by conflict but still gives hope because of an unforeseen twist. It presents the drama that propels the story.

NOTE: This portion of the curriculum instructs only how to write a blurb. The approach to writing short and long synopses is covered in the ADVANCED portion of the curriculum.

Goals: 1) Be able to identify the difference between a blurb and a synopsis.
2) Be able to distinguish between a good blurb and a bad one.
3) Be able to write a blurb.

Tools: 1) paper and writing utensils
2) 4-6 books, each in a different genre, in both paperback and hardbound (with jackets) forms

Ice Breaker: The 4-6 books are distributed to some of the enthusiasts. Those enthusiasts are asked to read aloud the blurb on the back cover or book jacket. The other enthusiasts are then asked if the blurb would make them want to read the book.

Lesson

- Distribute the HANDOUT.
- With the enthusiasts following along, discuss the lesson. Encourage the enthusiasts to take notes on the HANDOUT.

I. Differentiating between a blurb and a synopsis

- A. Blurbs appear on the back cover of a paperback book, the inside front flap of a hardbound book's jacket (dust cover), or online booksellers' sites.
 1. Consists of only 1-4 short paragraphs
 2. Also known as the sales pitch or the product description
 3. Does not give away the whole enchilada
 4. Used to promote/sell books
- B. Synopses (short and long) are submitted to agents or publishers or are used in reviews.
 1. Usually 3-5 pages long

2. Summarizes the entire book—beginning, middle, and end—including the final solution
3. Used to obtain the sponsorship of an agent or acceptance from a publisher

II. The important aspects of a good blurb

- A. It grabs a prospective reader's attention.
 1. The book cover is the first attraction for a shopper; it's the surface appeal.
 2. It inspires interest.
- B. It compels the reader to buy it.
 1. It *quickly* convinces readers that spending a few hours reading your book will be time well spent.
 2. It arouses curiosity.
 3. Blurbs for fiction must convince a prospective reader that he/she cannot live without knowing the outcome.
 4. Nonfiction blurbs must convince a prospective reader that he/she desperately needs the information within in the book.
- C. It serves as an essential part of your platform.
 1. It may be needed for the person introducing you at a speaking engagement.
 2. You may need to provide it to a journalist for an article being written about you.
 3. You will need it as part of the submission to a publisher.
 4. If you (or your media consultant) want to present your book on a blog site, a web page, or in a catalog.
 5. It will be needed as part of your submission for literary competitions.

III. Preparation for writing a killer blurb

- A. It's never too early to start thinking about your blurb.
- B. Do plenty of research.
- C. Understand your genre.
 1. Determine the market for your story and know what *your* readers want.
 2. Gear the blurb specifically to *your* genre.
 3. Read as many blurbs as you can for your genre and take notes about the ones you like.

IV. Writing the blurb

- A. Choose a style.
 1. Should be written in the same style and voice as the book.
 2. Use the same language as you did in the book.
- B. Keep it short.
 1. Remember that "less is more."
 2. Include only the core of the story with what is at stake for the protagonist(s).
 3. Omit subplots.
 4. Mention only the characters who are the most important—the one(s) who have the most at stake
 5. Include place and time only if they are of major importance or can be used to lure the reader into wanting to buy the book.

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II. The important aspects of a good blurb

- A. It grabs a prospective reader's attention.
 - 1. The book cover is the first attraction for a shopper; it's the surface appeal.
 - a. on average, shoppers view a book's cover for four to six seconds
 - b. following their interest (or disinterest) in the cover, they either turn it over to view/read the blurb, or they leave the book sitting on the shelf
 - 2. It inspires interest.
 - a. shows the prospective buyer that it has far more than surface appeal
 - b. a way to get yourself noticed, as well as your book
- B. It compels the reader to buy it.
 - 1. It *quickly* convinces readers that spending a few hours reading your book will be time well spent.
 - 2. It arouses curiosity.
 - 3. Blurbs for fiction must convince a prospective reader that he/she cannot live without knowing the outcome.
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 2. Gear the blurb specifically to *your* genre.
 3. Read as many blurbs as you can for your genre and take notes about the ones you like.
 - a. length
 - b. style
 - c. layout (placement on the cover/jacket)
 - d. general appearance (font, color of text, size of text, etc.)
 - e. number of paragraphs
 - f. amount of information revealed to the reader
 - g. words that pique your interest
 - h. the tone or spirit of the story
 - i. emotions you can expect to experience
 - j. why it makes you want to read the book (or not)

IV. Writing the blurb

- A. Choose a style.
 1. Should be written in the same style and voice as the book.
 2. Use the same language as you did in the book.
 - a. dialect
 - b. conversational or literary
 - c. the right font and size (same as in the book; readable and professional)
- B. Keep it short.
 1. Remember that "less is more."
 2. Include only the core of the story with what is at stake for the protagonist(s).
 3. Omit subplots.
 4. Mention only the characters who are the most important—the one(s) who have the most at stake
 - a. usually the protagonist(s) and the antagonist(s)—the heroes and the villains or the "good guys" and the "bad guys"
 - b. what the main character(s) are fighting against and why
 5. Include place and time only if they are of major importance or can be used to lure the reader into wanting to buy the book.
 6. Use short sentences to create tension, mystery, and drama.
 7. Think of it as an "elevator pitch" (Imagine you have gotten on an elevator with a publisher who gives you 30 seconds to sell your book to her/him.)
- C. Hook line (Yes, your blurb must have one that is at least as good as, if not better than, the one you used for the first sentence of your story.)
 1. Clever, engaging, new

2. Avoid being flippant with it, but still draw attention to the story.
3. Be honest, not misleading.
 - a. readers expect to read what the blurb says the book is about
 - b. readers will only last so long before saying, “This isn’t what I thought it was going to be;” they will toss your book aside—and probably you, as an author, as well

D. Buzz words and clues

1. Buzz words are eye-catchers and attention-getters serve to compel the prospective reader to buy your book.
 - a. in a mystery you might use such words as killer, deadly, murder, betrayal, hidden, hot mess
 - b. in sci-fi you could use alien, other worldly, threat, powers, sub-space, planet, destruction, terrifying
 - c. in romance you might want to include such words as manipulate, emotional, marriage, prenuptial agreement, scandalous
2. Clues are used to give the prospective reader a taste of what is to come without disclosing the solution

E. Focus on your character.

1. Offer a brief description, but only if it’s pertinent.
2. Present each in their most interesting light.
3. Reveal what is at stake for him/her/them.
 - a. it is difficult to step back and view your story from the outside (you have been so close to it and the characters for so long during the writing process)
 - b. ask a friend who has read the book to help you condense the story

F. Mention only the core topic and conflict; leave the rest inside the book!

G. Every word counts.

1. Delete all of the “fluff.”
2. Avoid clichés.
3. Condense, condense, condense.

H. Answer the right questions, but only tell the readers what they NEED to know.

I. You could end it with a question.

J. Read it aloud to yourself.

1. Print it out in a large font size with different margins
2. Read it aloud again, and amazingly it will sound different to you.
3. Read it to a friend (someone who has not read the book) and get that person’s opinion
 - a. make sure you have chosen someone who will be totally honest about it
 - b. don’t be upset if he/she offers constructive criticism

K. Rework and rewrite.