



Starting Your Synopsis

by Julie H. Ferguson

Author and professional speaker, Julie H. Ferguson leads workshops that provide aspiring authors with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to approach publishers and succeed. Her workshops are available as e-books and paperbacks through Beacon Literary Services at www.beaconlit.com, then click on Writers' Tools.

Producing long, short, and in-between synopses brings out the heebie-jeebies in many fiction writers. Synopses make non-fiction proposals for publishers seem much less intimidating. Proposals may have more pages but a 5 page synopsis can take just as long to get just right.

Are there any tricks? Any short-cuts? In a word, no! Synopses are very, very hard work. They take, not hours, but days of work to sharpen into a brilliant piece of writing that will captivate agents and editors.

Synopses are not outlines of your fiction work. Rather, **they are unique packages that generate an overwhelming desire to read the whole book by summarizing the theme, plot, and characters.** They must be character-driven, not event-driven. Synopses are marketing pitches, movie trailers, and promotional build-up all rolled into one – and that is why they are so challenging to write. You shouldn't do it alone; get as much help as you can find.

Written before the novel gets under way, most writers tackle the marketing version at submission time. Editors and agents look for seven components. Elizabeth Lyon, in *The Sell Your Novel Toolkit* (Perigee), lists them as theme, setting, plot (the core), character thumbnails, dialogue, emotional turning points, and sub-plots. If you want to excite prospective publishers, Lyon insists you also pay close attention to tense, viewpoint, nouns and verbs, length, and story chronology.

My initial advice for novelists is:

- Buy and read Lyon's book immediately, if you haven't already.
- Read sample synopses of all lengths and varieties.
- Write your long one first – it's easier to distil down from there.
- Put your long and short synopsis to your live or virtual writers' group and be receptive to their reactions and suggestions.
- Get published novelists to comment on and edit your synopsis.

Lastly, get started on yours and give it your all!