

What I Learned Writing My First Synopsis by Kristen Painter

That's right, I said it. Synopsis. That torturous bit of prose full of spoilers and lacking all the fabulous detail we work so hard to perfect. As it turns out, it's not that awful. Once it's done.

The synopsis really can be a valuable tool, even to a pantsler like me. Sure I know my opening, some events along the way and the happily ever after but what assurance does that give me that my plot is strong? Will there be holes? A sagging middle? Too little conflict? I have since learned writing a synopsis can answer those questions.

A synopsis is really like a map. It guides you through your story. Of course, you will probably deviate from it a bit (who hasn't taken a side road because you saw a sign for some interesting little shop?) and that's okay. Ultimately, it gets you where you're going.

Boiled down, your story's flaws and features become clear. Your consistency or lack of continuity also shows through. If your hero and heroine are on a ship in chapter two that turns into a train in chapter three, you'll probably notice that when doing your synopsis. If you don't, take your glasses off and give them a good cleaning.

In writing and reading my synopsis, I found ways to make my story stronger, parts I could cut painlessly and places to add a few nuances that increased my conflict.

As I chopped and cut and deleted, I discovered the heart of my story. I also looked at my manuscript with fresh eyes. Did it further the story? No? Then it had to go. Suddenly, I became my own best editor, slashing wordy phrases and unnecessary descriptions, relishing my new economical approach to writing.

Who knew writing the synopsis could be such a life-changing event? I have a feeling one of my critique partners did as she gently nudged me along.

What I learned writing my first synopsis changed my mind about them, which surprised me because I had always considered the synopsis a "must do" not a "need to". From now on I will attempt to write at least a bare bones version before I start writing my story.

Are my days as a pantsler number? Nah, I'm just a pantsler who's learned that although I hate writing the synopsis, it's a useful part of pulling the story together and a guideline to making all your story elements work out. So the more I can get done before the story is finished the better because the synopsis is also one of the necessary evils required for submission, my other favorite torture.