

Your **cover** and **blurb** are your book's most important marketing materials. Nailing both will increase your organic sales, while also dramatically improving the efficacy of your promotional efforts, from PPC to your personal newsletter. If you have limited time and marketing dollars, your focus should first go here.

Blurb Essentials

1. **Tone:** this should reflect the tone of the book/reading experience.
2. **Style:** short sentences. Aim for a 4th – 7th grade reading level. Fragments are okay and can help the rhythm.
3. **Formatting:** a splash of bold (particularly for the tagline) can give a professional flair. Don't be afraid of the return key to create white space—it's your friend.
4. **Proper names/nouns:** avoid unfamiliar ones. Only mention the protagonist and antagonist—or the male/female leads in a romance.
5. **Avoid clichés:** trouble is, problem is, only thing is, can he get the girl/save the world?
6. **Hook/tagline:** the most important part of your blurb. Must have a rhythm/snap/musicality to it and pique serious curiosity in less than 15 words.
7. **First few sentences:** The area “above the fold” on Amazon totals less than 90 words. Most readers will only see this.
8. **Setting:** try to seamlessly incorporate it within the first or second sentence, especially if your book is a fantasy/sci-fi book that is heavily reliant on setting.
9. **Length:** typically no longer than 200 - 250 words.
10. **Specific:** show what makes your story/characters strong + unique. Note that this is *not* the fancy names you came up for your fictional fantasy realm. It's about the *feeling* and *experience* you're going to provide. Don't be overly general. Be clear about the stakes.
11. **Audience:** you can select the audience by including the genre, or similar authors—this can be done as a question a la “do you like strong heroines?” or statement such as “an adrenaline packed treasure hunt for fans of Dan Brown.” Usually used as the tagline/hook at the top of the blurb.
12. **Snapper:** end with a “snapper”—a rhythmic, pithy line that hooks the reader's attention and forces them to either purchase or check out a sample. Alternative is a simple cliffhanger, which works the same way as it does within the book.

Blurb Practice Checklist

- Find 5 blurbs in your sub-genre's Top 20 list that make you want to read the actual book
- Find 5 blurbs in your sub-genre from NYT Bestsellers that make you want to read the actual book. These are generally written by pro copywriters.
- Copy these 10 blurbs into a document. This is known in copywriting as a “swipe file.”

- ❑ Read the reviews for these 5 books in your genre—what did readers consistently hate/like the most? Did the blurb mention these elements? Add 10 commonly mentioned tropes/themes/subjects to your swipe file.
- ❑ Copy the blurbs from your swipe file out word-for-word by hand. This gets the feeling in your bones. Consider what phrases, words and structural techniques were most effective in grabbing your attention and evoking an emotional response.
- ❑ Write the blurb using one of the formulas below.
- ❑ Let it sit for a day or two (or at least a few hours), then come back. **Read it aloud.**
- ❑ Try to cut the blurb by 50% without losing any meaning. Ruthlessly chop superfluous words and un compelling phrases. This will leave only the punchiest, most exciting parts.

If you copy 1 – 3 blurbs a day and write 1 blurb a day (use the formulas below), 5 days a week, you'll be a great blurb writer in a month. It just takes practice.

Formulas

I don't take credit for these formulas. Any errors in replication or interpretation are my own. If you're struggling with blurbs, check the links provided; each of these authors has books and resources that will help you craft better blurbs.

Hero's Journey ([Libby Hawker](#)): Your protagonist (1) wants something (2) but an obstacle is in the way (3) causing the character to struggle against that force (4) and either succeed or fail (5 – e.g. the stakes/risk). Then add enough details to make it unique, without overloading your reader with world-building info.

Standard (my amalgamation from numerous sources):

1. Start with a hook/tagline (e.g. "The world's burning. And only a demon can save it.") or a hooky review quote/bestseller accolade etc. (note that using excerpts from Amazon reviews is not allowed in the TOS).
2. Then introduce the main character/plot hook (e.g. he's a demon with a conscience). This should be powerful enough to sell the book on its own—one sentence, or maybe two short ones. It must be above the fold.
3. Follow that up with the stakes/main story question. This will introduce the antagonist or threat to the world. This should be a "snapper" or a cliffhanger a la what you would have at the end of a chapter. The reader should be so interested that they have no choice but to buy the book to find out the answer.
4. (optional) End with a hard sell (e.g. "for fans of Sookie Stackhouse and Anita Blake" or "a pulse-pounding international thriller, *Spies & Lies* will keep you on the edge of your seat").

5. Sprinkle in the tropes/themes to flesh out the details. The optional hard sell is a great place to clearly state the genre, or allude to it (“full of bloodthirsty vampires and brooding alpha werewolves”).

Romance ([Rosalind James](#)):

1. Tagline
2. The hero’s paragraph
3. The heroine’s paragraph
4. Closing kicker/snapper that hints at core conflict

Note: you can’t use review quotes or reference review scores on AMS. Michael/Bryan designed these for FB; I adapted the formulas for AMS. You also can’t use time-related deals. For AMS, use the general outline of these below, and adapt the words to Amazon’s guidelines.

Facebook/AMS ([Bryan Cohen](#)): capture the essence of your book in 15 – 20 words. All should follow this pattern: hooky tagline, [formula #1, #2, or #3], CTA (call-to-action).

1. **Parallel:** if you like urban fantasy, you’ll love Kalos Aeon and his snarky companions.
2. **Review excerpt:** check out the series readers are calling “incredible and without peer.”
3. **Cliffhanger:** can Kalos save the girl before a Demon King eats him for breakfast?

Facebook/AMS ([Michael Cooper](#)):

1. **Hard sell:** *Demon Rogue* by Nicholas Erik has over twenty five star reviews, with readers saying “fake quote mcfakington.” Perfect for fans of urban fantasy and lovers of Butcher’s Dresden Files or Hamilton’s Anita Blake series. So don’t miss this deal: *Demon Rogue* is just 99c, this week only.
2. **Challenge:** is Nicholas Erik the next Jim Butcher? Pick up a copy of *Demon Rogue* and find out for yourself!
 - a Better than Butcher? Buy a copy of *Demon Rogue* today to find out for yourself!
3. **Friendly:** Hey folks! Just wanted to drop a note about my latest book. It’s got vampires, a half-demon, and a talking dog. Pretty incredible, right? I thought so—but you can check *Demon Rogue* out for yourself. Hope you dig it!
4. **Plot** (men like these): Magic hides in the shadows—until an old witch and a Demon King return from a thousands years of banishment. Now, this small Texas town is going to be turned upside down. And the only person standing in their way? A half-demon and his .45.
5. **Character** (women like these): Kalos Aeon lives by a simple code. It’s how a demon survives for 7,000 years. Wandering from town to town, he now calls a tiny dust-swept

Texas hamlet home. But when old friends rise from a place worse than hell, Kalos might finally find a greater calling: his destiny.

Facebook Headlines ([Michael Cooper](#))

1. **DEAL:** Just 99 cents until August 7th / 80% off for a limited time!
2. **PLOT:** The supernatural's about to come into the light.
3. **CHARACTER:** Kalos's code is about to be tested.

Cover Essentials

1. **Clarity trumps beauty:** this is, far and away, the most important principle. Your cover must accurately convey the genre—at a thumbnail—in under one second. The title typography must be legible at a thumbnail. Many complex designs don't work on Amazon because they suck at a thumbnail.
2. **Packaging:** your cover is *not* a piece of art. It is a piece of product packaging meant to signal the reading experience inside. Its *only* goal is to attract readers of your book's subgenre.
3. **Don't skimp:** if you only have money for one thing, spend it on the cover.
4. **Emulate what works:** the Amazon Top 20 of your sub-genre is a market-tested, unbiased survey of the covers actual readers respond to. You deviate from this at your own peril.
5. **Title:** usually overlooked, but make sure it communicates the sub-genre and captures the correct feel. As with the cover, clarity trumps artistry or clever metaphors.
6. **Zag (advanced):** similar to the tropes within the book, you can “zag” away from cover expectations, incorporating certain design tropes while ignoring others or borrowing from other genres to create a unique brand that stands out—but still instantly conveys the subgenre. This is for *advanced* marketers only, as what usually happens when one tries to “zag” is a unique cover that no longer properly communicates the sub-genre. Zagging, however, is how you start developing your own instantly recognizable brand.

Cover Checklist

- Find 3 – 5 covers that you like on the Amazon Top 100 bestseller list in your subgenre.** Identify a mix of traditionally published books and indie titles.
- Find a cover artist with a portfolio matching your desired style & book genre.** Visit my [resources](#) page if you're stuck.
- Send your 3 – 5 sample covers to the designer and tell them to MAKE IT LOOK LIKE THE EXAMPLES.** Provide your designer with clear visual expectations, as text can be easily misinterpreted.
- Double-check your cover's clarity at a thumbnail.**

1. Shrink it to a height of 346 pixels (Amazon book page), 218 pixels (search results), 160 pixels (also boughts/bestseller charts) and 100 pixels (AMS sponsored products).
 2. If the sub-genre or title isn't clear at an *instant* glance, revisions are necessary.
- **Ensure typography is consistent in terms of font/placement across the same series.**
This is critical for branding and to signal that books are in the same series.