

Blurb Essentials

1. **TONE:** this should reflect the tone of the book/reading experience.
2. **STYLE:** short sentences. 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—white space is your friend, since most people will skim.
4. **READABILITY:** write the blurb at a reasonable reading level. I aim for fifth to seventh grade.
5. **CONFLICT AND TENSION:** these are the heartbeat of fiction, so you want to make sure your blurb overflows with these. If your blurb is boring, usually it doesn't have enough conflict.
6. **CURIOSITY:** “what happens next?” is the most powerful question in fiction. You can use techniques like cliffhangers to pique the reader's curiosity.
7. **CHARACTER/PLOT:** characters drive most books, although some genres (thriller/mysteries) are more plot driven. Show what makes your story/characters strong + unique. Note that is *not* about the fancy names you came up with for your fictional fantasy realm. It's about the *feeling* and emotional *experience* you're going to provide. Don't be overly general. Be clear about the stakes.
8. **SETTING:** try to seamlessly incorporate it within the first or second sentence, especially in genres (e.g. fantasy/sci-fi) heavily reliant on setting. Also holds true where region is of interest to readers (e.g. New York, London, etc.).
9. **PROPER NAMES/NOUNS:** avoid unfamiliar ones. Only mention the protagonist and antagonist—or the male/female leads in a romance.
10. **LENGTH:** typically no longer than 200 - 250 words.
11. **AUDIENCE (GENRE):** you can select the audience by using nouns common to the genre (e.g. mentioning wizards and vampires for an urban fantasy book). You can be more explicit by mentioning the genre, or similar authors—this can be done via a statement like “a magic-fueled urban fantasy romp for fans of Jim Butcher.” This type of mention is usually used as the tagline/hook at the top of the blurb or at the close.

General Blurb Format

1. **Hook/tagline:** the most important part of your blurb. Must pique serious curiosity in a very brief time frame. A hook is a high-concept idea that can be summed up in 15 words or less. Most books don't have them. Thus, you'll often rely on a snappy tagline (**Only a demon can save the world from burning**) that hits precisely the right genre notes. Not all good blurbs have taglines, but it's worth coming up with a few anyway.
2. **80 - 90 word lead:** the lead is the first few sentences of your blurb. A pithy lead combined with a strong tagline or hook can sell the book on its own. The area “above the fold” (before readers have to click read more) on Amazon totals less than 90 words (30 on mobile). Most readers will only see this, so make it engaging. Browse your genre's bestseller lists to find effective examples. You'll see how good taglines and leads not

only make you want to read the book, but also quickly communicate the underlying flavor, tone, style, and experience a reader can expect.

3. **Body:** this is where you talk establish the book's core conflict. Focus on *one* thread, rather than a myriad of subplots that distract or confuse the potential reader.
4. **Snapper/cliffhanger:** end with a “snapper” —a rhythmic, pithy line that establishes the stakes, 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. Please don’t write “scroll up and grab a copy.” This is a direct-response hard-sell call-to-action (CTA) that is out of place in fiction.

That's it: tagline, lead, body, snapper. Four parts. It's helpful to consider that a blurb is just a fractal story. A fractal is a part that resembles the whole: e.g. a puddle has the same characteristics of a lake, just on a smaller scale. The same idea applies here: a blurb is, in effect, a miniature story with a beginning, middle, and end. If you can use your storytelling chops, then you can write an effective blurb.

Blurb Practice Checklist

This is the most effective way to improve your blurbs and ad copy in 30 days.

1. **Find 5 blurbs in your sub-genre’s top 20 lists that make you want to read the actual book.** As with the covers, make sure they’re not discounted \$0.99 books enjoying a temporary promo surge. Try to locate indie books priced above \$2.99. Read + copy them over to a document. This is known in copywriting as a “swipe file.”
2. **Find 5 more blurbs—not necessarily in your genre—from NYT Bestsellers.** These are usually written by pro copywriters. Read them and copy them to your swipe file.
3. **Skim the reviews of popular books in your genre.** What did readers consistently hate/like the most? Does the blurb reference these elements? These are the tropes readers will expect to see mentioned in your blurb (and in your book)
4. For professionally written (and split-tested) copy, subscribe to BookBub’s newsletter in your genre(s) of choice. Add good ones to your swipe file.

Then, each day for the next 30 days, set a timer for 15m and:

5. **Hand copy one blurb word-for-word.** This is a classic copywriting technique and works wonders to get the feeling in your bones. Analyze what tropes the author is using, how the language flows, what encourages people to buy. Why did the writer use a certain word? Why did they leave another detail out?
6. **Then write your own blurb.** Don't focus on making things good, just write it and put it in a document on your computer.
7. **Bonus:** test your blurbs/taglines on Facebook to get direct feedback on what's working with your target audience (and what isn't). Judge the quality based on CPC.

Formula

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”).

EXAMPLE 1

***Groundhog Day* meets *The Dresden Files* in this time-looping twist on urban fantasy.**

Supernatural bounty hunter Ruby Callaway has survived for over two centuries by following a single rule: shoot first, ask questions never. Which may explain why she spent the last twenty years in jail.

But now the FBI has an offer she can’t refuse: kill a necromancer, she gets her freedom.

Only two problems.

This necromancer is unlike any creature Ruby has ever hunted.

And the FBI will never let the world’s most notorious bounty hunter roam free without serious strings...

EXAMPLE 2 (first person; this is popular in urban fantasy and romance—note that this example is pretty long, and could probably be tightened up)

I'm Kalos Aeon. I've been around for longer than you could know - and most people don't want to know me, being half-demon, and all - but right now I've got a big f'in problem.

A woman just came into my office, and I gotta say, from the photo she slipped me, someone's got a serious issue with the supernatural.

Life expectancy is looking kinda low if I don't figure out who's kidnapping magical creatures, selling their blood and trying to reveal magic's existence to the mortal world. Last time that happened it didn't end well. I'm not optimistic about this time, either.

Joke's on me, anyway, for setting up a magical salvage and retrieval business. 50% of an item's magical essence and a per diem can't cover the damages this job is gonna inflict.

Money and magic aren't of much use to a dead man. And If I didn't have a code (yes, I'm a demon with a code), then I would jet out of Texas faster than a vamp at a sorority party (you don't want to know).

But I agreed to the gig, she paid the cash, so I gotta see it through.

Did I mention the super-powerful witch - who I used to have, ahem, relations with - just returned from a long hiatus in a place worse than hell? And she's still obsessed with finding a certain god's spear that I *may or may not have*.

Seriously. This situation is code red. I'm almost willing to accept help from wizards. On second thought, no wizards. I hate you guys. I'd rather die.

So um, if I don't make it through the next three days, anyone want a talking dog that's read too much for his own good? Because the way things are going, Argos is gonna need a new home after the spells stop flying...*

*His only request is that you suck less than Odysseus. Apparently the epic poems got that all wrong, and that guy was a major asshole. Or my dog might just be bitter. Tends to rub off when you live with a demon.

Additional 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 or additional 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.

The link is to a two-part YouTube series; she also wrote a short book on her approach called [*Gotta Read It*](#).

Romance ([Rosalind James](#)):

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