



WRITING A LOGLINE

Know Your Product: This may sound simple, even unimportant, but it's not. Part of your marketing strategy needs to include how to describe and/or talk about your book quickly and succinctly. No one wants to listen to you blab on and on as you describe what the book is *about*. When someone asks you what you write, they're *not* expecting the entire plot to be laid out in excruciating detail. And yet, that's what people tend to do.

On the first night of my writing class, I always ask students to share what they write. What I often get back is something like, "I'm writing a novel and my protagonist is an angry thirteen-year-old girl who has lost her parents and is forced to go live with her kooky grandmother who grows pot and dresses in the seventies and, Melody, that's my protagonist, keeps getting kicked out of school and in arguments with her grandmother, so..."

I'm already asleep.

No. What that person is writing is... *a coming-of-age story about a young girl who's lost everything and yet finds a path forward with her free-spirited grandmother who still listens to the Beatles and smokes pot.*

There. Done.

Or... if we're talking about my "Little Book of Unconventional Marketing Ideas for Self-published Authors," it *outlines little known tips to help market self-published books using techniques that don't cost much time or money.*

Done and done.

Screenwriters call this a **logline**, and it's used to pitch movie scripts to producers. It must be short and impactful and raise enough questions in the producer's mind to want to know more.

But authors can use loglines, too. It helps you to synthesize the premise and conflict of your book into one (maximum two) sentence(s). This is not a description of your book but rather a snapshot of the *core concept*. Think of it as your book's DNA. Let's practice putting one together.

While I've seen several different formats for a logline, they are all no more than 25-50 words and include (not necessarily in this order):

the protagonist > premise of the book/inciting incident > the main conflict/antagonist > and the stakes of winning or losing.

Here are five loglines from famous movies:

- A young F.B.I. cadet must confide in an incarcerated and manipulative killer to receive his help on catching another serial killer who skins his victims. (*The Silence of the Lambs*)
- An angel is sent from Heaven to help a desperately frustrated businessman by showing him what life would have been like if he had never existed. (*It's a Wonderful Life*)
- An eight-year-old troublemaker must protect his house from a pair of burglars when he is accidentally left home alone by his family during Christmas vacation. (*Home Alone*)
- A troubled child summons the courage to help a friendly alien escape Earth and return to his home world. (*ET*)
- A seventeen-year-old aristocrat falls in love with a kind but poor artist aboard the luxurious, ill-fated R.M.S. Titanic. (*Titanic*)

Key takeaways:

- 1) Don't name your protagonist. That won't mean anything to anyone.
- 2) But don't just state the obvious when it comes to identifying your protagonist, either. Instead of... a young girl (Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*). Make her... a frustrated or lonely young girl. That helps us to understand what comes next.
- 3) Put the premise/inciting incident in context. *Wizard of Oz*: A frustrated young girl runs away from home only to find herself in a strange land fighting a wicked witch who wants to prevent her from going home.
- 4) The elements of your logline don't have to be in any certain order as long as all the elements are there or intimated.
- 5) Scriptwriting teachers often have their students write the logline first, forcing them to encapsulate the story before they begin writing.