

## *A "Secret" Formula for Creating a Short Synopsis for Your Book*

<http://mikewellsblog.blogspot.com/2011/04/secret-formula-for-creating-short.html>

*Do check out Mike's website - he has a great deal of information and experience to share!*

If you're like most authors, summarizing your book in a couple of sentences is a daunting task. However, if you're going to sell your book, it's simply something you have to do. If you choose to go the traditional route, agents and editors alike are bombarded with so many queries that if they find themselves having to do much mental work to understand the gist of your book, they will simply pass on to the next one. The same goes for self-publishing--all the retailers and distributors require short descriptions of your book. For example, Smashwords requires a description that can be no more than 400 characters, including spaces! That's short, folks!



To help you do this, I want to share a formula I learned a long time ago, one that was created in Hollywood. I can tell you from

my dealings with the people in the movie industry that when it comes to stories and story structure, they really know their stuff.

Each and every story is composed of the same five basic elements. If you can identify them in their purest, simplest forms, you will be well on your way to writing a good two-sentence synopsis of your book, regardless of its length or complexity.

The five elements are: a (1) *hero* who finds himself stuck in a (2) *situation* from which he wants to free himself by achieving a (3) *goal*. However, there is a (4) *villain* who wants to stop him from this, and if he's successful, will cause the hero to experience a (5) *disaster*.

Actually, what I've just written above IS the two sentence synopsis which will work for any story, no matter how complex the plot or characters may seem.

Before I go further, I want to stop for a moment and address the "Is this a formula?" question that will undoubtedly come up in many writers' minds. Anyone, with any experience in writing (or painting or composing music, etc.), knows that formulas do not work when creating a new piece of art, that the most you can hope for is a cookie-cutter type result that will be mediocre, at best.

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## *A 4th of July Wish from our Georgia Peach Author*

*Skip The Cake, Eat The Peach Frosting*

[Go right to Karen's Blog](#)

Happy 4th of July, my precious readers....wait, there are people reading this, right? For those who are taking a break from the fireworks, pull up your chair and a glass of nice, cold ice tea. We had coffee last time we chatted, but it's too dang hot for coffee tonight. And I gave up diet soda. One week off of it tomorrow! That's something. I was ADDicted. No kidding.

Did you get your tea? Sitting down? Okay, here we go. So, have you ever had one of those days when NOTHING seemed to go right? I mean nothing. Your hair doesn't do what you want it to, your vacuum cleaner stops working, you drop your ice cream bowl, people get on your nerves, etc. I had a day like that today. Hey, I never said this blog would be all sugar and spice and everything nice all the time. I'm gonna' be real with you. So, I can sense y'all nodding your head that you've had such a day before. Boy, it's those kinds of days when I want to pull the covers over my head and wait it out till the next day. Our little minions wouldn't hear of it, though.

Ever baked a cake and mixed and blended all the ingredients so perfectly? You even cleaned up as you went. Kitchen looks marvelous and cake's in the oven. Someone walks through the kitchen about mid-bake and says, "What's the oven?" As you run in what seems to be slow motion to keep them from opening the oven door and disturbing your baking masterpiece in the making, you are too late. They look, they drool and then...you guessed it. They let the oven door slam shut. What does this do? Everyone say it with me..."Kills the cake". Oh yes. The cake you so carefully created has now sunk the middle due to the "noise" of the oven door slamming. All bakers know you're supposed to be quiet when you're baking a cake or something of the sort.

*Continued on Page 9*

## *Today's Encouragement*



“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.”

[Stephen R. Covey, \*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change\*](#)



*Secret Formula... Continued from Page 1*

However, what we are doing here is summarizing a piece of art that has already been created. Because we know that each and every story must contain these five elements, if we can step back from our own story and identify them, it makes the job of summarizing the story much easier.



The only thing formulaic about this approach is the order in which the information is presented, and the structure of the sentences. You can change this around later and make the synopsis appear as original and unique as you desire.

So, back to the method. Another way to write this compressed synopsis is to move the goal into the second sentence into the form of a question, as follows:

Hero finds herself stuck in situation from which she wants to free herself. Can she achieve goal, or will villain stop her and cause her to experience disaster?

All you have to do is identify the elements and plug them in to create the most basic two sentence synopsis for your own story. By the way, you don't have to put the second sentence in the form of a question--you could write, she must achieve goal, or villain will stop her and cause her to experience disaster. I posed it as a question only because it emphasizes the main narrative question in the story--discovering the answer to that sticky issue is what keeps readers turning the pages until (hopefully) they reach the very end of your book.

The best way to demonstrate the process of creating a two-sentence synopsis is with a real example. As virtually everyone knows the story of The Wizard of Oz, let's use that. The five elements are:

**HERO** Dorothy, a Kansas farm girl

**SITUATION** Finds herself transported to faraway land called Oz.

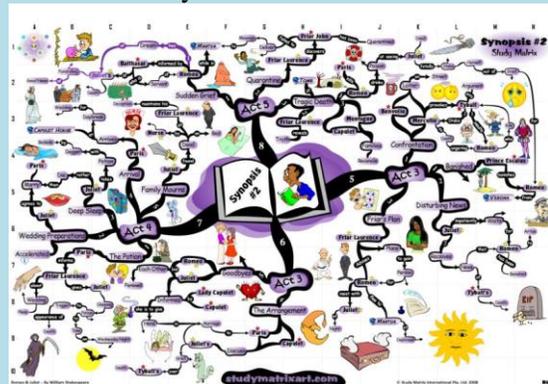
**GOAL** To find her way back to Kansas

**VILLAIN** The witch

**DISASTER** To be stuck in Oz forever

Plugging the elements into the two-sentence structure, we have:

Dorothy, a farm girl, finds herself transported to a faraway land called Oz. Will the witch kill her before she can find her way back to Kansas?



Now, before you begin to think that this sounds too simplistic for your story, or if you don't believe your book contains one on more of these elements, or that they seem too melodramatic, etc.--you're wrong. Your story has all five elements, or it would not be a story.

*Continued*

*Secret Formula... Continued from Page 3*

Granted, some of your story elements may require some thought to identify. For example, your villain might be society as a whole, Mother Nature, or even your hero's self-doubt. Similarly, your disaster could be little more than your hero having to live with an unbearable self-concept or overwhelming guilt. It's also important to remember that the "disaster" is seen through the eyes of the hero. This is usually the worst possible scenario he or she can envision at the beginning of the story, but may in fact be the just outcome, or the outcome that does the hero the most good in the long run.

Back to The Wizard of Oz. While the two sentence synopsis we wrote is accurate, it is also painfully dull. This is because we started with the five story elements distilled into their absolute minimal forms (done intentionally by me for the purpose of this exercise). To jazz it up, let's go through the list and expand each element:

**HERO** - Dorothy isn't just a farm girl, she's a lonely, wistful farm girl

**SITUATION** - Dorothy isn't merely transported to Oz, but is whisked away by a tornado and dropped there. Also, Oz is far more than a faraway land, it's a magical but frightening place, full of strange characters, little people call Munchkins and witches, both "good" and "bad."

**GOAL** - Dorothy's main goal is to get back to Kansas, but she soon learns that only the great and powerful Wizard of Oz can help her do that, and he lives in Emerald City, a long and dangerous journey from her starting point (You'll note that in any story, the hero's main goal breaks down into a series of sub-goals).

**VILLAIN** - The witch is more than "just a witch"--she is the Wicked Witch of the West.

**DISASTER** - Dorothy's possible fate is actually worse than being stuck in Oz forever--the Wicked Witch of the West is determined to kill her.



So, let's plug these expanded elements into the original formula.

Dorothy, a lonely, wistful farm girl, is whisked away by a tornado and dropped into in a faraway land called Oz, a magical but frightening place, filled with strange and wonderful characters--little people called Munchkins, and witches that are both good and bad. Can Dorothy make the long and dangerous journey to Emerald City to see the Wizard, the only one who can help her return to Kansas, or will the Wicked Witch of the West kill her first?

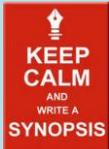
Note that we still have exactly the same structure as before which does make the synopsis read a bit clumsily. But you have to admit it's a lot more colorful and engaging. For better reading flow, the first sentence can be rearranged as follows:

When a tornado strikes her home in Kansas, a lonely, wistful farm girl named Dorothy finds herself transported to a faraway land called Oz, a magical but frightening place, filled with strange and wonderful characters--little people called Munchkins, and witches that are both good and bad. Can Dorothy make the long and dangerous journey to Emerald City to see the Wizard, the only one who can help her return to Kansas, or will the Wicked Witch of the West kill her first?

*Continued*

### Secret Formula... Continued from Page 4

Once you have this much, you can keep expanding, rearranging, and enriching the synopsis to make it as long and original-sounding as you like. You can pull in more information--for example, that Dorothy's house fell on the Wicked Witch of the East (which sets up the motivation of why the Wicked Witch of the West loathes Dorothy, as the two witches were sisters), and you can break the main goal down into sub-goals (for example, that Dorothy is only told that she must "follow the Yellow Brick Road" to reach Emerald City, and that once she does manage to see the Wizard, he tells her she must bring him the Wicked Witch's broom in order to prove her worthiness, and so on)



In my query letters, I always include a two sentence synopsis similar to that above in terms of detail, then usually expand on it in another paragraph and introduce more subtle elements.

In this second paragraph, I always try to point out the villain's motivation to stop the hero (as above) and also the most important character conflict. Although I did not do this above for *The Wizard of Oz*, the most important character conflict in that story might be between Dorothy and the wizard--after she does manage to return with the witch's broom, he gives her the runaround, and she must find the courage within herself to stand up to him and demand that he deliver on his promise.

The two-sentence synopsis method takes a little practice, but once you get the hang of it, you will find the task of writing synopses--of any length--much easier. In fact, now I often write this type of two-sentence synopsis as soon as my story idea has jelled, because the "top down" approach helps me stay focused as I begin the actual process of putting it into words.

"One word of caution: if you are having trouble generating interest in your book, resist the urge to "reposition" the story to make it more appealing to agents who represent other genres. For example, if you had written *The Wizard of Oz* and could not get any fantasy genre agents to read it, you could compose the following short synopsis to make it into an edgy thriller:

Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets, and then teams up with three total strangers to kill again.

I'm joking, of course, but you get the idea. Such repositioning misleads agents and wastes their time.

To see the two-sentence synopsis method applied to ten different well-known stories from literature and film, go to [Story Synopsis Quiz](#). All ten of these synopses are written in exactly the same form as I have outlined here. To practice, you might try writing up a few from your favorite books, plays and films.

(Note: this post has been nominated for an award - see below. If you liked it, please take a moment and vote for it by clicking on the badge)

Color and highlights added by Bill Joyce - this is a wonderful exercise and a great little formula to break through this taunting task. Thanks Mike for a wonderful concept and aide

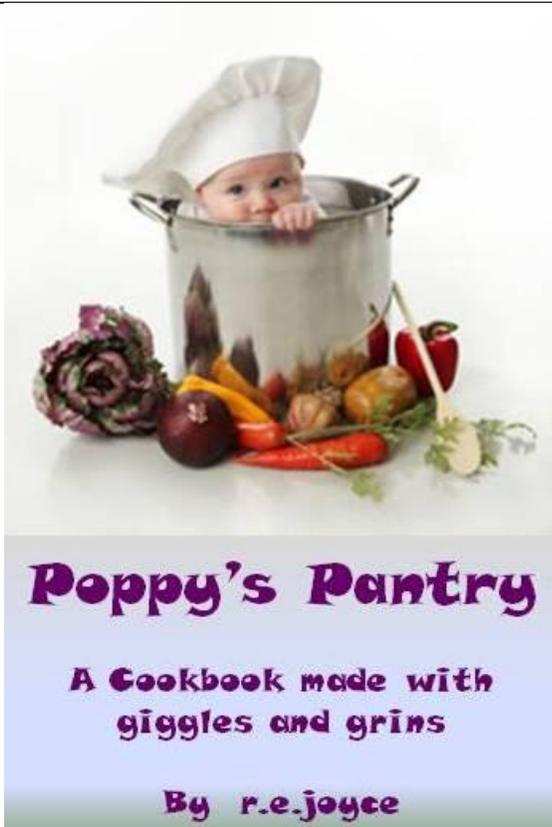
AND

Take the [Story Synopsis Quiz](#) above it is really fun  
I passed by the skin of my teeth - another story looking for a 2 sentence explanation...

### [Mike Wells](#)

American bestselling author of the Lust, Money & Murder series and over 20 other 'unputdownable' thriller and suspense books. I live in Europe and have taught in the Creative Writing Diploma Program at the University of Oxford.





**Monthly Recipe Adventure**

We have begun a yearlong cooking adventure to create a cookbook that is - fun.

We would love to have you participate in this adventure.

Each month we are going to include a new recipe being developed in our test kitchen. (Location of the test kitchen is kept secret - even from Poppy... We believe it is somewhere under the pile of dishes he forgot to do...)

Your task, if you wish to participate is to:

Try the recipe and comment - help us make it better and add a family story or two to the adventure.

Take a picture of your completed dish and send it in as a jpg file...

Or add a recipe of your own and become part of the cookbook!

All proceeds of Poppy's Pantry and Grandma's Cupboard will be donated to North Texas Children's Hospitals.

**Poppy's Pantry Recipe Listings**

#	Recipe	Main Ingredient	Meal Course	Occasion / Holiday	Season
1	PP r.e.joyce Apple Pie		Desert		Fall
2	PP Cranberry Runaway		Garnish	Thanksgiving	Fall
3	PP Slow-Cooker Pot Roast	Beef	Main		
4	PP Irish Soda Bread		Bread		
5	PP Piggy in the Pot	Pork	Main		
6	PP Chickens and the Piggy	Chicken	Main		
7	PP Texas Beef & Bean Chili	Beef	Main		
8	PP Spicy Stuffed Peppers	Beef	Main		
9	PP Picante Brunch Quiche	Eggs	Breakfast		
10	PP Burger in a Sombreno	Beef	Main		
11	PP Sweet and Savory Beef Stew	Beef	Main		
12	PP Gastronomic Gobbler	Turkey	Main		
13	PP Thanksgiving Piggy	Pork	Main		
14	PP Chili Piggy Dressed for the party	Pork	Main		
15	PP Skillet Pork Chop Dinner	Pork	Main		
16	PP Pork Chop-Apple-Bean Packets	Pork	Grill		
18	PP Poppy's On-ends	Beef	multi-use		
19	PP Poppy's Italian Song Sauce	Beef and Pork	Main		
20	PP Peppered Pork Medallions in Tangy M	Pork	Main		
22	PP Poppy's Mac Surprise		Main		
23	Chris 20130910 Best Ever Cheese Cake		Desert		
24	GC Broccoli Casserole 20130910	Broccoli	Side Dish		
25	GC Cream Cheese Hollups		Desert		
26	GC Frenchy's Sweet Surprise Breakfast	eggs	Breakfast		
27	GC Grandma's Italian Baked Garlic Bread	Bread	Garnish		

**Have a recipe to add...**

We would love to include your favorite receipt in our Cookbook. The tradition of gathering around the table to enjoy good food and good friends is at the center of living a good life.

Feel free to contact us at [bill.joyce@vismgt.com](mailto:bill.joyce@vismgt.com) and submit your recipe. Let's work together to expand the fun of this wonderful tradition.

## Grandma's Cupboard



What makes it good  
is Love!

### Frenchy's Sweet Surprise Breakfast

Munchkins in PJs gathering around the kitchen table called from their sleep by the aroma of cinnamon and sugar. It is a holiday treat any day you want, in just a few easy steps.

#### Items you will need:

-  1 Loaf of Bread
-  1 Dozen Eggs
-  2 Cups of Sugar
-  1 Cup Milk
-  ½ Cup Maple Syrup
-  1 8-oz. Package of cream cheese
-  4 Tbsp – Vanilla
-  Cinnamon
-  Powdered Sugar (optional)
-  Fruit Pie Filling — cherry, apple, blueberry, etc.  
(optional)
-  Whipped Cream (the kind in the spray can)
-  Casserole Baking Dish (11 x 13)



### DIRECTIONS THE NIGHT BEFORE:

#### Bread Component:

-  Let the bread air dry for (yes, this means take ALL the bread out of the package and let it lay flat out to dry) - do this for about 2-3 hours before the next step.
-  De-crust each piece of bread (yes, this means to cut the brown edges off of each piece of bread)



#### Munchkins underfoot -

Have them gather the bread scraps  
in baggies for duck feeding. It will  
be more fun than a barrel of monkeys  
- wait they are a barrel...



## Frenchy's Sweet Surprise Breakfast

### PAGE 2

- ☞ Cube each piece of bread and place in a bowl to the side.
- ☞ Now, cube up ENTIRE 8 oz block of cream cheese (it will help if your cream cheese has been in the refrigerator)
- ☞ Place ½ the cubed pieces of bread in the bottom of the casserole dish.
- ☞ STRATEGICALLY ☺ place the cubed cream cheese in the pieces of cubed bread in your casserole dish.
- ☞ Place the remaining cubes of BREAD on top of the cream cheese and bread already in your casserole dish.
- ☞ Set casserole to the side.

### Egg Mixture:

- ☞ Crack all the eggs in a bowl.
- ☞ Mix in Sugar AND STIR.
- ☞ Mix in Milk AND STIR.
- ☞ Mix in Maple Syrup AND STIR.
- ☞ *(Trust me...it will be MUCH easier to stir the mixture each time you put in an ingredient!!)*

### The meeting of the "Bread Component" and the "Mixture" (Doesn't this sound fun???? ☺):

- ☞ Poor the "Egg Mixture" evenly over the "Bread Component."
- ☞ Make sure that EVERY piece of bread is soaked using a fork.
- ☞ Sprinkle the top (if desired) with Cinnamon...it looks real pretty, plus it smells good!
- ☞ Cover with foil or plastic wrap and refrigerate until morning.

## DIRECTIONS IN THE MORNING:

### Baking Instructions:

- ☞ Bake @ 350° for about 35-40 minutes or until golden brown.

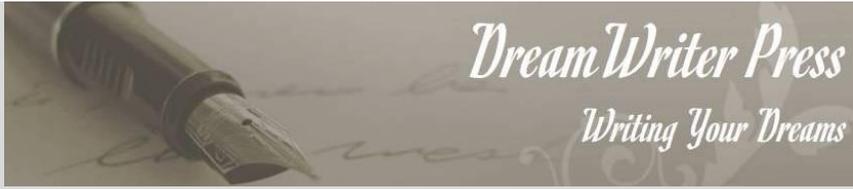
### Serving:

- ☞ Cut in squares and serve.
- ☞ Optional: top with pie filling and whipped cream or serve w/ syrup and butter.
- ☞ Serves about 12-15

### Oh...almost forgot - make sure you make Poppy's coffee!

Do you have a special family fun recipe - now is the time to get it published here in the Newsletter!

Feel free to contact us at [bill.joyce@vismgt.com](mailto:bill.joyce@vismgt.com) and submit your recipe. Let's work together to expand the fun of this wonderful tradition.



Life is like that, isn't it? You get up and get ready for the day, making plans (getting your ingredients out). You rearrange your day for little hiccups that alter the "schedule" (cleaning up as you go) and then the day still seems to go South (cake dead). But then, like a superhero with his/her cape, you look over to the counter where you prepared your almost delicious cake and see the bowl of frosting looking back at you like a superstar. This, my dear readers, is the light at the end of the tunnel.

You see, although my day today didn't go like I had planned it to go, sweet things happened that made my day brighter. I was able to talk to our two older kids that are in MS visiting some family - that equals at least 1/4 of the bowl of frosting. Then, our two little boys gave me kisses and shared lots of giggles with me today (a couple of more spoons of frosting). Texts and comments on social media from my family and friends were just as sweet (scraped bowl clean). Days like today aren't what we ask for. Aren't what we hope for, but if we look over to the counter (special people and moments around us), we'll see the big bowl of peach frosting, just waiting for us to enjoy.

So, when the plans for your day don't work out as you planned (cake dead again), skip the cake and eat the peach frosting. It'll help turn your day around.

Thanks for reading.  
Peace, love and peaches.  
Karen E. Hall

### **Bragging rights**

*Wife to the one who teaches me what love is about. Mom to the four sweetest kids I could ask for. Daughter of the most loving parents. Sister to two of the most unique individuals ever created. My prayer is to be the wife, mom, person God intends me to be. He heard my prayers by giving me my husband and children. I'm blessed beyond measure.*



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*Interesting meetings and other important happenings for authors*

<i>Meeting with Link</i>	<i>Key Topic</i>	<i>Date &amp; Time</i>
<a href="#">South Arlington Creative Writing Social Club</a>	Check Meetup link for topics	Every Monday starting at 6:00pm
<a href="#">Euless Library Writer's Support Group</a>	Author Critique Group	3rd Tuesday of the month starting at 7:00pm
<a href="#">Dallas Mystery Writers</a>	Helping mystery writers author, publish and promote their own mystery books.	1st Saturday of the month starting at 9:30AM

[Have a meeting you want to advertise that will help our members and advance their writing dreams? Please contact our Newsletter Editor and we will review and post as appropriate.](#)

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*Have an idea or article for the newsletter...*

Be sure to email the [editor](#) and we will do our best to get you published... It is all about sharing the word...

