

# WRITING A LOGLINE



To Capture the Heart of Your Story

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***“A logline is a technical term for basically cramming the big foot of your story into the glass slipper of a sentence or two.”***

**-David Barringer**  
Author, teacher

## **Hey Fellow Writers,**

Many writers are unfamiliar with a logline and what it's for. Loglines originated in the context of a screen writer pitching an idea for a movie to a producer. The logline allowed the writer to succinctly capsule the heart and soul of the story in a short and powerful sentence or two they could throw out quickly to get the producer's attention and a response such as, "Tell me more."

For novelists, instead of using it for marketing purposes, a logline helps the author to distill all the various elements of their proposed story down into one, coherent thought or idea. Why does that help you?

Because, many new writers (as well as seasoned writers) often struggle with finding the 'core' of their story. And that can create difficulties when they're trying to tell that story in a compelling way. After all, if you don't know the 'core' of your story, in other words what makes up the heart of the story, then you are likely to write a flat narrative. And what makes up the heart of the story is the story's central conflict. It's what makes the story move from A to B to C.

Let's look at a logline in more detail. What it is. How do you write one? And I'll give you examples.

Lynn Bohart

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## 1) Know Your Product

This may sound simple, even unimportant, but it's not. And to me, it's the place to begin.

Part of your writing journey includes the ability to describe and/or talk about your book quickly and succinctly. Why? No one wants to listen to you blab on and on as you describe what the book is *about*. If you're with a group of writers or considering hiring a writing coach, and they ask you what your book is about, they are *not* expecting you to relate the entire plot 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. So is the rest of the class.

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.

A logline helps you to synthesize the premise and conflict of your story into one (maximum two) sentence(s). Keep in mind that this is not a *description* of your story but rather a snapshot of the *core concept*. Think of it as your book's DNA or the essence of your story.

## 2) Writing Your Logline

The goal with a logline is to be brief but impactful. A logline can't be vague or too complex. Clarity is key. Which means you may have to practice a bit before you get it right. Distilling an entire novel down to two sentences so that the essence is clear to the reader isn't easy. Just as you saw above.

While I've seen several different formats for a logline, they are all no more than 25-50 words and include:

- **the protagonist**
- **premise of the story or the inciting incident**
- **a focus on the main conflict and/or antagonist**
- **and the stakes of winning or losing**

While all (or most) of those components must be evident in the logline, they don't necessarily need to be in that exact order. In fact, if you Google loglines, you'll find a variety of formulas that work. They may be worded and organized differently but will include the same main components.

The goal is to get all of the important information into a sentence or two, written in such a way as to grab the audience's attention. The benefit to you is, that when you do that, you are forcing yourself to clarify the central theme, point, or idea of your story, which will help anchor you as you begin writing, and it will keep you true to the initial premise of your story.

### 3)Examples

Here are five loglines from famous movies:

A young FBI 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***)

A young man is transported to the past, where he must reunite his parents before he and his future cease to exist. (***Back to the Future***)

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***)

When his son is swept out to sea, an anxious clownfish embarks on a perilous journey across a treacherous ocean to bring him back. (***Finding Nemo***)

A seventeen-year-old aristocrat falls in love with a kind but poor artist aboard the luxurious, ill-fated R.M.S. Titanic. (***Titanic***)

## 4) Key takeaways

- 1) Don't name your protagonist. That won't mean anything to the reader/listener.
- 2) Instead, identify your protagonist. Who are they to the story? Don't just state the obvious, however. Paint your lead character in context of the story. For instance, instead of merely describing Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* as a young girl, describe her the way she appears in the beginning of the story... a frustrated and lonely young girl. That helps us to understand *who* she is and what comes next.
- 3) Put the premise or the inciting incident of the story in context. For instance the *Wizard of Oz* would become: *A frustrated and lonely 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) Your logline must incorporate what makes your story unique or different. What's distinctive about your story or how you are telling your story?
- 5) Remember the elements of your logline don't have to be in any certain order as long as all the elements are there or at least intimated in some way. For instance, in the *Finding Nemo* logline, the words 'perilous' and 'treacherous' imply potential death.
- 5) Scriptwriting teachers often have their students write the logline first, forcing them to encapsulate the story before they begin writing. You might want to try this.

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## 5) Pitfalls in Writing a Logline

1. Obviously, one pitfall in writing your logline is making it too complex or lengthy. If you do this, you'll miss the entire point of the logline.
2. A second pitfall is using vague or bland language. Sharpen your language and you'll sharpen the impact.
3. Loglines that don't include the stakes of winning or losing, i.e. if Frodo fails in destroying the ring then all of Middle Earth will be lost, lack the reason readers will keep reading.
4. The truth is that if you can't distill your story down to its essence, you may have to rethink your story. Go back to the initial premise of your story and clarify its core conflict. What's the central internal or external battle that dominates the story? And what does winning or losing mean to your central character?
5. Be careful! You're not writing a tagline. That's a witty slogan or provocative statement used to sell the book later on.

And there you have it!

Now, give it a try on your own. When you've edited your loglinedown to exactly what you want, try it out on friends or other writers to get feedback. Your goal is to get a response something like, "Oh, I get it. That sounds like a book I'd like to read." If you do, you've hit paydirt.

Thanks for sticking with me. Good luck in your writing!



After retiring from a 35+ year career in the nonprofit world, Ms. Bohart launched her own freelance writing company, Lil Dog Communications, and now writes for clients all over the world. She holds a master's degree in theater, has taught "Crafting the Story" through Green River College for 10+ years, and has written for both Patch.com and the Renton Reporter.

Currently, she has eleven paranormal mystery novels, two short story books, and now three nonfiction books on Amazon, along with several books on writing offered through her website.

As a mystery and true crime aficionado, she has redesigned her author website into ***The No Alibi Zone*** to showcase criminal investigations. Her bi-monthly newsletter called "Let's Talk About Murder," includes blog posts and interviews with people who talk about, write about, and investigate crime as well as information on writing, her summit presentations, and her books. You can sign up to receive the newsletter for free by going here on her website: [Sign up here](#).

If you're interested in Lynn's story coaching services or just have questions, you can reach out to her at [Lildog67@icloud.com](mailto:Lildog67@icloud.com) or visit her website.

***Would you like to pick up one of the companion books in this series? Click [HERE](#).***

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## **Books on Writing**

***Writing a Novel***

***Show Don't Tell***

***From a Great Idea to a Great Story***

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***Creating Characters Readers Can't Quit***

***How to Grab & Hold a Reader's Attention***

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