

## **Tip #20. Battle of the Blurb**

Okay, after numerous edits and rewrites, you've finally got an edited manuscript that you're proud to release into the world. Now comes one of the hardest parts: 'the Blurb'. The Blurb is the bit that entices the reading public to part with their cash and buy your work. Typically found on the back cover of a physical book, or below or next to the cover image of an electronic book in an electronic store.

We've all seen them. We've all read them. Few of us have ever written one and, when we do, it's not pretty. For many authors, the blurb can be one of the hardest tasks to tackle. They seem so simple, yet they can be fiendishly hard to master. If you've ever tried to write one, you'll understand what I mean.

### First off, what is the purpose of the blurb?

To whet the reader's appetite. To spark curiosity! To get them to READ a sample and hopefully BUY the book!

### What is it not?

It is NOT meant to be a summary of the book!

It is NOT meant to be a sample of your writing style!

It is a sales tool. Nothing more and nothing less. So, how does one go about whetting the reader's appetite?

- Appeal to an emotion. i.e. the character's experience will be heart-breaking, terrifying, creepy, fraught with a terrible choice etc.
- Hint at the plot
- Use language or phrases that will resonate with readers of that genre
- Name and characterize main characters
- Give a glimpse of the setting
- Hint at a mystery
- Leave an unanswered question in the blurb
- Use hyperbole
- Get testimonials from readers
- Make it personal – make use of 'About the author' sound-bites

Some things to avoid:

- Excessive superlatives
- Spoilers, no matter how tempted you are
- Don't simply summarize the first chapter
- Don't open with "In a world," or any other overused phrase
- Don't say how amazing your book is
- Don't compare yourself to other writers or your book to other books. ESPECIALLY If YOU'RE an INDIE AUTHOR!!
- Too few paragraphs! Use line breaks and paragraphs to increase pace.

So, is there a 'formula' to writing blurbs? Yes, there is. Quite a few actually, but don't let that prevent you from creating your own. What follows, are two fairly common approaches.

#### 1. The Three Bullets approach

Essentially this formula aims to grab the reader's attention with three quick-fire bombshells, often seemingly at odds with each other.

i.e. Bullet 1! Bullet 2! Bullet 3!

## 2. THE 5-part Blurb

This formula aims to entice the reader with reference to five key points, each suitably laced with intrigue:

1. **The Situation.** Describe the characters and setting
2. **The Problem.** Outline the 'insurmountable' problem. This part of the description often starts with the word, "But..." or "However..." or "Until..."
3. **The Payoff.** Hint at the "cool thing" or "longshot" that will happen once the problem has been overcome.
4. **The Twist.** Introduce the beginnings of a twist if possible. Another "but" moment.
5. **The Mood/Tone.** Finally, readers want to know what kind of emotional state they're going to get into while they're reading this book. Is it a dark, dystopian tragedy or humorous chick-lit cotton candy? This is where you set the tone and clinch the deal, turning browsers into buyers.

In fact, many books combine these two approaches, although, as stated earlier, don't be afraid to experiment with your own approach. Consider the following four blurbs, taken from well-known works:

A mysterious island. An abandoned orphanage. A strange collection of curious photographs.

A horrific family tragedy sets sixteen-year-old Jacob journeying to a remote island off the coast of Wales, where he discovers the crumbling ruins of Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. As Jacob explores its abandoned bedrooms and hallways, it becomes clear that the children were more than just peculiar. They may have been dangerous. They may have been quarantined on a deserted island for good reason. And somehow—impossible though it seems—they may still be alive.

A spine-tingling fantasy illustrated with haunting vintage photography, Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children will delight adults, teens, and anyone who relishes an adventure in the shadows.

### **Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children**

An ingenious code hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci. A desperate race through the cathedrals and castles of Europe. An astonishing truth concealed for centuries . . . unveiled at last.

While in Paris, Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon is awakened by a phone call in the dead of the night. The elderly curator of the Louvre has been murdered inside the museum, his body covered in baffling symbols. As Langdon and gifted French cryptologist Sophie Neveu sort through the bizarre riddles, they are stunned to discover a trail of clues hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci - clues visible for all to see and yet ingeniously disguised by the painter.

Even more startling, the late curator was involved in the Priory of Sion - a secret society whose members included Sir Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Da Vinci -and he guarded a breath-taking historical secret. Unless Langdon and Neveu can decipher the labyrinthine puzzle - while avoiding the faceless adversary who shadows their every move - the explosive, ancient truth will be lost forever.

### **The Da Vinci Code - 174**

The book no one can stop talking about... In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead and survival, for her, is second nature.

Without really meaning to, she becomes a contender. But if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weigh survival against humanity and life against love.

New York Times bestselling author Suzanne Collins delivers equal parts suspense and philosophy, adventure and romance, in this searing novel set in a future with unsettling parallels to our present.

### **The Hunger Games**

The runaway international No 1 bestseller that launched Tom Clancy's spectacular career and introduced his acclaimed hero, Jack Ryan, in the ultimate submarine adventure.

Silently, beneath the chill Atlantic waters, Russia's ultra-secret missile submarine, the Red October, is heading west. The Americans want her. The Russians want her back. With all-out war only seconds away, the superpowers race across the ocean on the most desperate mission of a lifetime. The most incredible chase in history is on... The Hunt for Red October... the classic story of a spellbinding battle of nerves, above and below the waves, unrivalled in its authenticity and breath-stopping suspense.

### **The Hunt for Red October**

And finally, a blurb from a slightly lesser known work (purely for purposes of comparison!)

While Zululand reels under the blows of a lunatic's hammer, half-hearted schoolboy Craig's imagination ignites when he links an Anglo-Zulu War letter his grandfather bequeathed him, to his History teacher's mesmerising tale of the lost inKatha, 'The Soul of the Zulu Nation'.

However, in his feverish quest to find the relic he unwittingly sets in motion a chain of events which disturbs the dark equilibrium of forces in his hometown; forces both past and present, and steeped in malice.

As chance encounters with his History teacher become alarmingly more frequent, events explode when the boys clash with caddies from the local golf-course, the malevolent greenkeeper makes a sinister threat and the finger of suspicion drifts towards a friend's father when the lunatic's hammer falls once again.

Set in a small town in Zululand during the turbulent summer of 1983, Zululand Snow is the tale of a boy searching for a way to bring a glorious past back to life. It's a tale of history and imagination, of folklore and legend, and the gravitational pull they exert on the marrow in a boy's bones.

### **Zululand Snow**

When seen in the light of the blurbs above it's clear that this blurb, from my first book, is nowhere near as 'tight' as the rest. It arguably introduces too many elements, with a writing style that is perhaps a little too flowery.

... And so, the battle of the blurb rages on.

Till next time, break a lead!