

They want a synopsis, no, a chapter outline, er, ah, no, something called a treatment, whatever that is? Just what *DO* those editors mean when they say they want three chapters and a something?

The answer to that question is, like most of writing, open to interpretation and subject to change. My advice would be to keep one thing in mind. Your editor, should she get excited about your story, is going to have to persuade her boss to buy your book. That boss doesn't have a lot of time to read. Remember, she, like so many people in today's publishing world, was hired to go to meetings. So, what do you think your excited editor will get that busy boss to read?

Right, your what-ever-it-was you sent in with your three chapters or seven (that's what I sent) or entire manuscript. It's a lot shorter, tells the story, and may just get that boss excited about your book. So, what you are writing is more of a pitch package than anything else.

Make it exciting. (Did you ever see a chapter outline that was?) Fill it full of sparkling words and active verbs that grab the reader. Ask questions that get the reader involved. Say outrageous things that grab their reactions. Organize your package in a way that hooks people on your story . . . and a synopsis that just follows your story may not do that nearly as well as a specifically designed package that is just there to light a fire under your pre-sale audience.

And if you're like me, after you write that exciting, grabbing treatment, you will take a good look at your first couple of chapters and see if you can't make them even better. Yep, if the treatment gives you a better handle on your story, it may just mean that you can now do another (groan!) rewrite with a sharper focus. (Sorry, the rewriting is never done until the editor says, "Yes, that's what I want to pay you money for.")

One further word. First novel treatments have to be specially focused, like first novels. I've seen the treatments that authors used to sell eighth, twelfth, and fortieth novels. They frequently don't sparkle, don't hook. Often they read like a fifth grader telling you a story "And then this happens and then this happens, but meanwhile something is also going on over here and then they both happen."

There is a reason for this. The editor knows that someone who's written eight sellable novels knows how to write sellable. What they worry about is giving them up front money only to hear six months after the novel was due (and two months before it should be on bookstore shelves) that "I don't know how to finish it." Believe me, the editor will put up with "and then this happens" from an established pro.

Do you want to bet that they will take that kind of writing from a stranger? I didn't.

Here are two cover letters that I used to sell my very first novels to ACE.

Here also is the *Outline* that I used to persuade ACE to give me money to write Kris Longknife – Defiant and Resolute. It reads a lot like "this happens then this happens."