

The Second Log Line

by Linda Rohrbough

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One of the most useful ways to polish your log line, or the pitch for your book, is to have a second log line. In fact, that second log line can help make or break selling your book.

Just so newbies can track with us, let me go back and review the basic log line. This is a one or two sentence overview that describes the main part of the action or plot of the book. It consists of the following elements (but not necessarily in this order): hero, flaw, life-changing event, opponent, ally and opposition/battle. Here's an example from a movie.

A New York writer with obsessive compulsive disorder ends up taking care of his gay neighbor's dog, a move that thrusts him into the world of relationships. Like all good log lines, you've probably gotten enough to guess the movie, but here it is: "As Good As It Gets." The **hero** is the NY writer; his **flaw** is the obsessive compulsive disorder; the **life-changing event** is caring for the neighbor's dog; **opponent** is implied but it's the disorder and the gay neighbor; **ally** is the dog; and the **battle** is the hero's struggle with relationships.

Once you've delivered your log line, it's useful to have a second log line to reel in your listener while they're still digesting the first one. It's important to focus on the conflict in the main part of the story. (Note I said the main part of the story. Now is not the time to drift off into subplots.)

Let me show you how Romance Writers Hall of Fame inductee Jodi Thomas (www.JodiThomas.com) works with a second log line. When she talks about *The Texan's Wager*, the first book in her wife lottery historical romance series, she starts with: *A man raised by a deaf mother who was killed by Indians, puts his name in a wife lottery held by the local*

Sherriff. Jodi then waits for you to respond, because remember, talking to someone you don't know about your work is not a monolog, it's a dialog.

Once she gets a response (usually "oh" or "really") she offers her second log line. *But later he wants to take his name out of the Sherriff's hat, because he realizes if he gets a wife, he'll have to talk to her.*

Gotcha. Notice how your mind races ahead, seeing possibilities for the story. The second log line has several of the same elements as the initial log line but with one critical difference: emotion. And the conflict or obstacle is tied to the emotion. It is, in essence, the summary of the character arc in the story – meaning the summary of the emotional journey (or change) that occurs in the main character. In some stories, it's not the main character that changes, but another critical character makes that change. But whoever changes, it is their character arc that should be the focus of your second log line. If it can be funny or charming, like Jodi's, so much the better.

Here's a second log line for "As Good As It Gets." *The writer has to enlist the help of his gay neighbor to win the woman he loves, a waitress in his favorite coffee shop who knows his compulsive side all too well.* Can you see how a first and second log line for your book allows you to talk compellingly to draw your listener in?

You can also do this same thing for non-fiction books. There's a story behind non-fiction books and the formula works the same way there. For example, with my latest book, *Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band*, the log line and second log line are: A formerly obese woman and her doctor team up to write a book about a new weight loss surgery to correct the disease of obesity. The patients in the book learn, along with medical professionals, that obesity

can be successfully stopped not by dieting but by non-invasive surgery combined with a dramatic lifestyle change.

One of the things I say often when I speak is the secret to transitioning from a pre-published writer to a published writer is learning to talk in an interesting way about your work to people you don't know. When you're new to the game, those people will be agents and editors. But later the people you don't know will be potential book buyers: from people at your book signing who come to see what a real author looks like to people seeking a speaker for their next event.

While learning to talk about your book is completely different than actually writing the book, it's another professional skill you'll need in order to make it as a writer. And here's another tidbit: most professional novelists develop their log line and second log line on a book before they start writing. In other words, using these tools are lifelong skills in your career arsenal.

Bio:

Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and three national awards for her work. She taught the pre-conference workshop "Pitch Your Book" to sell-out crowds two years running at the Writers' League of Texas Agents and Editors Conference. Her latest book is Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band, released spring 2008. Visit her website: www.LindaRohrbough.com.