

Proposal Guidelines

Purpose: A Proposal should be thought of as a sales tool to represent your book. The purpose of a proposal is to tell an agent or acquiring editor: This is what I want to say, and this is why it will sell. A nonfiction proposal will have most, if not all, of the following components. Begin each section on a new page to make it easy for an acquiring editor to find each component.

1) Overview – Describe your book. What is this book about? Why is the book needed? Why are you the one to write it? How will the material be arranged? How long will it be? Will there be illustrations/photos? How long will it take you to complete the book?

2) About the Author – More about your background; your bio or CV; your study and/or work experience specifically related to the subject of the book. Repeat here in a more detailed way, why you are the expert, and what recognition you have received. List previously published works (books, articles) and sales figures for previously published books. Include an author's photo (does not have to be a professional portrait, but a good likeness). Also, include a bio of any co-author you intend to work with; photo not necessary for co-author.

3) The Market (Audience) – Who is the target audience? A bulleted list is fine. Be specific and quantify whenever possible. That is, if there is a certain organization who will be interested and you know how many people are members, or the circulation of their newsletter this adds weight. You can also identify your market by other books they may have enjoyed: readers who enjoyed such and such a book will like your book. Remember, lots of different people may enjoy or benefit from your book, but a “market” is a group that can be targeted and reached “collectively” in a particular way.

4) Promotion – What can you, as the author, do to sell the book? Do you give workshops, lectures, retreats? Do you have an organization or a newsletter? Are

you affiliated with anyone? What TV/radio/print coverage have you already gotten, and what programs/publications would your work be appropriate for upon publication? What's the angle? That is, if you say, "My book is perfect for Oprah," or "for NPR," you need to say very specifically why it will appeal to Oprah's audience or to the NPR audience, and in the latter case you will specify which particular program on NPR your book most suits. If you have personal connections with the media, do not be shy about letting the publisher know. However, never overstate what media coverage you can deliver. If you can not in fact promise that a particular show will have you as a guest, or a particular newspaper or magazine will write about you and your book, simply say that your work is "appropriate" for that media. If you can promise delivery, then by all means promise. Be sure to list any well-known individual(s), relevant to your topic, who would be willing to write a foreword, introduction, or provide a quote for your book cover.

Note: breaking your Promotion section into subheads, such as "Speaking and Workshops", "Radio/TV", "Print Media", "Web", "Endorsements" will make it much easier for an Acquiring Editor to read and grasp.

5) Competing Titles – Are there already books on the subject that you are writing about? How is your book different from the existing competition? What is its unique selling point/why would a reader buy your book rather than another on the subject? List the competing titles, giving author, publisher, year of publication, and briefly tell how your book differs from each, i.e., why yours is still needed even though this other book has already been published. Do not try to "hide" or deny competition. Acquiring editors know their areas very well and should be considered your book's ally. By alerting them to any titles that your book may possibly be compared to, you give them the ammunition to defend your project in their editorial board meetings, at which slots may be few and competition stiff.

6) Expanded Table of Contents – This is a very valuable tool, not just for the acquiring editor to decide whether or not you really have a book here, but also as a blueprint for you, the author, to follow when writing to make sure you hit all

your marks without repetition. This consists of chapter titles followed by a paragraph or so telling what will be contained in that chapter. Once an editor has read your overview and your expanded table of contents he or she should have a *very clear* picture of what your book will look like.

7) Introduction and Sample Chapters – These are fully written, and as near final draft quality as possible. This is a sample of the way the writing of your book will actually appear. Sending loose notes or a first draft is like shooting yourself in the foot. This should be representative of your best work, both in writing quality and content.

8) Supporting Materials – This can be articles about your subject in the current media, as well as articles written about you or by you. This may also be endorsements from those who have benefited from your work; it can be flyers or brochures for workshops, etc., a video of your media appearances, etc. etc. Supporting materials is anything that lends understanding to you, your work, and your intended book, and the marketability of both you and your book.

9) SASE – When sending your proposal to an agent or acquiring editor, be sure to include a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope suitable for the return of your materials. Many agents and especially smaller publishers will not return your materials at their own cost.