

NONFICTION BOOK PROPOSALS

Always answer these three questions

- So what? (the reason for your book's existence and your unique product or selling angle)
- Who cares? (your audience/market, the need in the market)
- Who are you? (your credentials and marketing platform)

Basic book proposal elements

- *Cover letter.* Introduce your proposal; give a mini-pitch if submitting cold.
- *Cover page and the proposal's table of contents.*
- *Overview.* Incorporates elements of your entire proposal—about 1-2 pages. Write last.
- *Audience and target market info.* Who will buy this book? How many will buy it? Why will it sell?
- *Competitive title analysis.* Analyzes competitive books and why yours is different/better.
- *Author bio and platform.* Explains why you're perfect to write and promote the book.
- *Marketing and promotion plan.* What you will specifically do to market/promote the book.
- *Chapter outline or table of contents.* Briefly describe each chapter.
- *Sample chapters.* Include at least one, not the introduction, but the strongest, meatiest chapter.

Tips

- There are many different ways to write, format, and structure a book proposal. Just be sure that you answer the three key questions convincingly. Your proposal must showcase your very best writing, your most compelling ideas.
- Editors care about one thing only: A viable idea with a clear market and a writer with credibility and marketing savvy.
- Knowing your audience/market will make your proposal successful. Pitch only the book you know has a firm spot in the marketplace.
- Create an effective title. It should have benefit and impact. It should be positive, empowering, and convince book buyers that it will solve their problems or otherwise benefit their lives.
- Don't skimp on the competitive title section—editors can tell when you haven't done your homework. Also, knowing the competition and its strengths/weaknesses should help you better write your own proposal. Whatever you do, don't claim there are NO competitors to your book. If there are truly no competitors, then your book might be so weird and specialized that it won't sell.
- In most cases, editors aren't looking to acquire finely written manuscripts (except in the case of memoir or narrative nonfiction). They're looking to acquire a powerful selling handle, with the authority/marketing platform to back it up. Your proposal should deliver a promise of a book that will fly off the shelves and make the publisher a profit.
- Your nonfiction book does not have to be complete for you to write a proposal. You only need a sample chapter or two to prove you can deliver on the promise of your idea. (Memoirs and narrative nonfiction are often an exception to the rule; a complete manuscript may be necessary.)
- Think of your book proposal as a business plan.

Common problems with book proposals

- They've been submitted to an inappropriate agent/editor/publisher.
- No clearly defined market or need. Or a market/audience that's too niche for a publisher to pursue.
- Concept is too general/broad, or has no unique angle.
- The writer wants to do a book based on his or her own amateur experience of overcoming a problem or investigating a complex issue. (No expertise or credentials.)
- The proposed idea is like a million others; nothing compelling sets the book apart.
- The writer concentrates only on the content of the book or his/her own experience—instead of the book's hook and benefit and appeal to the marketplace.