

BETTER BOOK PROPOSALS

A book proposal requires a lot of research and work in addition to your basic idea for the book. Refining and researching your idea is the most important part of the proposal process; really find out what's out there, examine it and think about how your idea is different and fills a need. Then give the acquisitions editor, who is going to go to battle for your proposal, as much ammunition as possible.

A book proposal should contain:

1. A summary.

A one-page (or less) statement describing what the book is about and what makes it different from similar books on the market. Include information about any art you intend to supply.

2. An outline.

An outline can be a list of the topics you intend to cover, similar to a Table of Contents. Give each chapter a title, and then write a short paragraph (or make a list) of the topics that chapter will cover.

3. Something about yourself.

This only needs to be a few paragraphs, and is the place to mention your writing experience, your experience with the topic you propose to write about, your competition experience, your honors, the places you've been invited to speak, etc.

4. A sample chapter.

If you have one. If you don't, include some other writing sample.

5. The market.

A description of who you think will buy this book and why. Be as specific as you can, and include statistics about the size of your market, where possible.

6. The competition.

A brief rundown of other, similar books on the market and how your idea is similar and how it's different/better. Be sure to include the title, author, publisher, ISBN, price, page count and whether it is paperback or hardcover (this information is available on Amazon.com). Check local bookstores and libraries as well as the Internet., and do not include books that are now out of print.

7. A sales history of any books you have already published.

This should include the dates they were first published, the number of books sold to date, the price at which they are sold, the channels they are selling into (in other words, how and where are the books currently being sold), the major bookstores that have shown interest.

8. Marketing and promotional opportunities.

If you have done special marketing activities for previous books, or think you will be able to do things to promote yourself and your book in the future, by all means include it. Have you done any radio or television interviews? Do you have contacts in the press who are likely to give you interviews or reviews? Are you affiliated with an organization or company that can help promote your book? Do you travel to shows or competitions or lecture or give lessons, enabling you to promote your book to the people who attend?

Do not assume the acquiring editor will do any of this research for you.

I've seen a lot of weak proposals, even from agents.

A book proposal requires a lot of research and work in addition to your actual idea for the book. Do not assume the acquiring editor will do any of this work for you.

Refining and researching your idea is the most important part of your proposal process; really find out what's out there, examine it and think about how your idea is different and fills a need. Then give the acquisitions editor who is going to go to battle for your proposal as much ammunition as possible.

- *How busy are editors these days?*
- *How does the acquisitions process generally work? What is a financial model?*
- *You have to help the editor and give them the ammunition they need. They are too busy and absolutely will not do this for you.*

A book proposal should contain:

1. A summary. A one-page (or less) statement describing what the book will be about and what makes it different from similar books on the market. Include information about any art you intend to supply.

- *Publishers need something brief that can be presented during the approval process. You can't expect them to extrapolate a summary from the entire proposal.*

2. An outline. An outline can be a list of the topics you cover, similar to a Table of Contents. Give each chapter a title, and then write a short paragraph (or make a list) of the topics that chapter will cover).

- *Even if the book is finished and you are sending it along, publishers need something briefer that can be presented during the approval process. You can't expect them to read the book and extrapolate an outline from it.*

3. Something about yourself. This only needs to be a few paragraphs, and is the place to mention your journalism experience, your experience with the topic you propose to write about, your competition experience, your honors, the places you've been invited to speak, etc.

- *"I have 12 cats," or "I have loved dogs all my life," or even "I have been a professional writer for 13 years" are generally not convincing enough. You need to show real credentials. Not necessarily academic, but that you can and have learned about this area. Maybe you have written many magazine articles on the subject, interviewed some of the country's top experts, volunteered at a local shelter.*
- *Ideas from audience on how you show your credentials???????????????*

4. A sample chapter. If you have one. If you don't, include some other writing sample.

- *But start working on a sample chapter, because some publishers will insist upon it—especially if this is your first book. This is not a waste of time, because when you sell the book you will have to write that chapter anyway.*

5. The market. A description of who you think the market is for this book and why. Be as specific as you can, and include statistics about the size of your market, where possible.

- *“Millions of cats are owned in the United States,” is not as convincing as saying exactly how many millions, how many cat owners say they need help with the problem your book proposes to address, etc.*
- *It’s also not enough to simply say “50 million households in the U.S. own dogs.” Not every dog owner will buy every book about dogs. If your book is about shelter dogs, how many people adopted dogs from a shelter? If your book is about agility, how many people participate in the sport? If your book is about Papillions, how many are registered every year? If your book is about training puppies, how many puppies are sold/adopted each year? Be as specific as you can.*
- *This info is very, very important, and most books will not get approved without it. Do some research!*

6. The competition. A brief rundown of other, similar books on the market and how your idea is similar and how it’s different/better. When you list these books, be sure to include the title, author, publisher, ISBN, price, page count and whether it is paperback or hardcover (this information is available on Amazon.com). Check local bookstores and libraries as well as the Internet, and do not include books that are now out of print.

- *Don’t insult the competition, because the pet book world is very small and you may end up insulting a book that the acquisitions editor worked on.*
- *Look especially hard for real competition, which means similar price and length—not just books on the same subject.*
- *(Proposal for book on true stories of abandoned animals, author said “As far as I know, there’s nothing like this out there.) It’s very unlikely that there are absolutely no other books on this subject—that is extremely rare—so do not try to get around this by saying so. While there may be nothing out there that is EXACTLY like your idea, there are books that are similar. Mention them, and then explain how your book has something special/different that they do not have.*
- *Don’t mention books that are out of print. Publishers will assume they’re out of print because they didn’t sell well, so why would they want to do another book on a similar subject?*

7. A sales history of any books you have already published. This should include the dates they were first published, the number of books sold to date, the price at which they were sold, the channels they are selling into (in other words, how and where are the books currently being sold), the major bookstores that have shown interest.

- *The publisher needs to know your track record and wants to understand what additional opportunities there might be.*
- *Your royalty statements are the best place to get this info, and that is something your publisher does not have access to—but you do. You can also call the publisher of your previous book(s), but the acquisitions editor cannot.*
- *If there is a reason the sales were small (limited distribution, short print run, whatever), say so.*

8. Marketing and promotional opportunities. If you have done special marketing activities for previous books, or think you will be able to do things to promote yourself and your book in the future, by all means include it. Have you done any radio or television interviews? Do you have contacts in the press who are likely to give you interviews or reviews? Are you affiliated with an organization or company that can help promote your book? Do you travel to show or competitions or lecture or give lessons, enabling you to promote your book to the people who attend?

- *Don't expect your publisher to promote your books for you—this is simply unrealistic. We do not write blockbuster titles that have promotional budgets. So being able to sell yourself makes you very attractive as an author. This is definitely a factor in deciding to acquire your book.*
- You cannot leave any of these things out.
- You cannot cheat or scrimp on any of these things.
- And the thing I need not say: no typos, no misspellings, etc.
- Easy to read (black ink on white paper)
- Bound or stapled or attached together in some secure way