

# Writing a Nonfiction Book Proposal

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## What is a nonfiction book proposal?

A book proposal is a marketing tool used to present a Nonfiction Book to a literary agent or publisher. The proposal communicates the overall book concept, identifies the market value, and demonstrates your ability to write and market the book.

## Why do I need to write a nonfiction book proposal?

Nonfiction book proposals are important for several reasons:

- Editors for nonfiction books prefer to review a complete proposal with sample chapters, rather than a complete nonfiction book manuscript. Also, a proposal is what an agent will review to determine if they will sign you as a client.
- They determine how much you will be paid for your project! Since interest from publishers stems from proposals only, the initial publishing plan and contracts are based on the proposal.
- They often help writers focus and organize ideas for the entire project, including future extensions and overall organization.

## What is included in a nonfiction book proposal?

A nonfiction book proposal is typically 20+ double-spaced pages in length. There are seven major sections in a nonfiction book proposal:

### Overview—Describe the vision of your book in 1-3 pages.

- Start with an attention-getting opener (Ex: startling statistics, interesting anecdotes)
- Introduce the importance of your subject, why your book solves the need for the subject and why you are the ideal author to write the book.
  - Why will the public be interested in the book?
  - What is unique about your book? What will it do to answer a public need?
  - Why are you the most qualified author to write this book?
- Make sure the title of your book is incorporated on the first page.
- Should be concise, quick-paced and highly informative.

### Market Section—Identify the target market for the book. **BE SPECIFIC.**

- Who will buy the book? Why? Use informed speculation to answer these as specifically as possible. Do not say “everyone” will buy my book, be specific.

- Use demographics, statistics and percentages. (Example: If your book is to help nurses, list how many practicing nurses are in the U.S. and growth of industry.)

**Competition**—List competitive books and Why your book is different from each.

- List 3-5 competitive/complementary titles. Include full title, author, publisher, date of publication and any noteworthy awards or publicity.
- Helpful research tools are *Books in Print*, online bookstore searches, libraries, and bookstore shelves.
- Include a 1-2 sentence **differentiation statement** that tells why your book is superior/different from each of the titles. **This section is an opportunity to promote the benefits of your book.** Avoid critiques or criticisms of competitive books and keep the focus on your book.

**Author Profile**—Tell why you are uniquely qualified to write the book.

- Tell about yourself, your relevant qualifications (professional and personal) that make YOU the most qualified person to write the book.
- Some writers prefer to write this section in the third person.
- Include any writing credits, including dates of publication, publishers, awards/nominations, notable publicity, and sales/circulation information.
- Include speaking or media experience.
- Do not include a resume; this section must be a specific description of you as the author of the book (i.e. only what is pertinent to you as the subject expert).

**Promotion**—Share how you will help sell your book.

- Include any direct sales outlets you can use to contribute to marketing your book. (Example: If you regularly lecture, you can sell books to lecture attendees.)
- What time, talent or financial support will you personally commit to your book?
- Include any associations you belong to that may be interested in your book.
- Include a list of key contacts you know that *may* be willing to provide a pre-publication quote of your book that would help sales and publicity efforts.
- Emphasize your availability, enthusiasm and unique resources you will use to promote your book.
- Show creativity and be sure to use specific numbers and names.

**Chapter Outline**—Provide an at-a-glance look at the organization of your book.

- Create a Table of Contents on a separate page as the beginning of this section.
  - The Table of Contents shows the publisher the content organization and flow of your book.
  - Include any front matter (Introduction, Preface, Foreword) or back matter (Glossary, Bibliography) that would be included in the book.
  - Note in parenthesis which chapters are included in the Sample Chapter section (see below).
- Draft a Chapter Outline for *each* of the chapters.
  - This should *not* be a summary of the chapter, but a description of the purpose, **features/benefits for the reader**.
  - The length of the Chapter Outlines can vary, but should be 1-2 double-spaced pages for each chapter.

### **Sample Chapters**

- This is the only part of the proposal that is actually your book! Choose 1-3 chapters that demonstrate your best writing and best represent your book.
- If each chapter is typically 15-25 pages in length, your sample chapters should comprise approximately 10% of your proposal.

# Top Ten Tips for Nonfiction Book Proposals

1. Book proposals should be double-spaced.
2. Paginate a book proposal from page 1 of the proposal through the end of the sample chapters.
3. A complete proposal must include ALL seven sections to be considered by a publisher or agent. Emphasis can be placed on your strongest areas.
4. You do not have to complete the entire nonfiction book at the time you submit a proposal, only the proposal itself and sample chapters.
5. Writing a book proposal is very different from writing a book. The purpose of a proposal is to sell and the audience is publishing executives.
6. Recommended books: *How To Write A Book Proposal* by Michael Larsen, and Jeff Herman's chapter "The Knockout Nonfiction Book Proposal" in the *Writer's Guide to Book Publishers, Editors and Literary Agents*.
7. Include testimonials, publicity materials, copies of published articles, field tests, and speaking appearance videos at the end of your proposal.
8. Do not bind your proposal or materials.
9. Be sure to spell-check and proofread from beginning to end. Twice!
10. The writing in your proposal should be as good as *or better* than the book itself.