Textbook & Academic Authors Association

Textbook Proposals

From Author Guidelines to Submission

TAAONLINE.NET

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From Author Guidelines to Submission

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Welcome

The Textbook & Academic Authors Association provides professional development resources, industry news, and networking opportunities for textbook authors and authors of scholarly journal articles and books.

This resource contains helpful information for textbook authors on how to form a relationship with a publisher, including how to build rapport, connect with acquisition editors and submit your project; and advice from textbook authors on how to evaluate the competition and whether or not it is okay to submit to multiple publishers. Lastly, it contains links to TAA's compilation of textbook publishers' author guidelines to help in crafting a textbook proposal.

Enjoy!

Follow TAA:

Forming a Publisher Relationship: 6 Strategies for Building Rapport

By Sean Wakely, Vice President of Product and Editorial, FlatWorld

If you're not yet ready to take the plunge and submit a proposal you can still take constructive action by building relationships with higher education publishers through working on smaller projects. Why is this important? Because most higher education publishers and their editors prefer to work with authors they know and upon whom they can rely. As an aspiring author, it's also valuable to experience what it's like to partner with various publishers before committing to a major project. Building rapport with one or more publishers today can yield rich dividends down the road.

There are a number of ways to build publisher relationships, and each of them is useful in its own way. Employ as many that appeal or make

sense to you. Or use this list as a springboard to generate your own ideas to connect and build rapport. Not only will you make important contacts, but you'll also gain valuable publishing insights and learn how to become a better textbook author.

Following are six strategies for building rapport with a higher education publisher:

1) Become a Reviewer. Higher education publishers need thoughtful input from scholars and teachers to ensure the products they're developing are current, accurate, and effective learning tools. Publishers are keen to identify new reviewers who can provide fresh perspectives based on the newest research and relevant teaching practices. Manuscript reviewing doesn't pay well, but you'll be accepting such assignments for reasons other than monetary gain, of course. Review projects can be as simple as filling out a survey, but superficial projects

generally don't get you noticed. Try to secure more in-depth assignments such as analyzing chapters, learning modules, wireframes, or beta versions of online products. Whatever the task, give it your best and be sure to cite plenty of recent, pertinent research to substantiate your comments.

2) Write a Supplement. Most textbooks aimed at the introductory markets are accompanied by a long list of supplements (also known as ancillaries). Some supplements, such as instructor's manuals or test banks, are meant to support faculty. Other supplements, such as study guides, quizzes, and online learning games, are meant to improve students' performance. Most authors don't have the time or inclination to write the supplements to accompany their textbooks. Therefore, publishers need creative and dependable supplement authors to develop useful ancillaries that align well with the associated, core product. Publishers consider

successful supplements authors to be among the best candidates to write new textbooks. They've proven they can meet schedules and understand how to synthesize appropriate scholarship and employ useful teaching strategies.

3) Contribute Features or Sections. If your expertise touches upon current or hot topics, you may be a good candidate to contribute a feature or narrative section. Many textbooks cover a wide range of content, and an author simply cannot be an expert on everything about which he/she is writing. Remember: You must be prepared for the author and publisher to edit your contribution to conform to their own styles and perspectives. Contributing content is a great way to get a close-up look at how the writing process works, and successful contributors are another preferred source from which publishers like to draw author talent.

4) Participate in Market Research. A great way to get to know a publisher's editorial and marketing staff is to participate in virtual or in-person focus groups. Class testing beta or pilot versions of print or online products is another important way to connect with publishers. Among class testers' most valuable contributions is keeping a "user diary" that closely tracks testers' experiences teaching from the preliminary product. Such in-depth feedback provides a treasure trove of information a publisher can use to improve its product. Check with your local sales representative about joining a focus group or becoming a class test site.

5) Cultivate Your Local Sales Representatives. Get to know your local sales representatives. They're your best conduit to in-house editorial, product management, and marketing staff, and they're often asked to identify strong reviewer prospects, focus group participants, and class testers. Sales representatives are sometimes rewarded for generating reviewer leads, so they'll

be eager to discuss how you can contribute to product development efforts. Ensure your CV is up to date and available online to make it easer for sales representatives to provide your qualifications to their editors.

6) Reach out at Academic Conferences. Many publishers send editors, marketing managers, and sales representatives to the largest academic conferences and regional meetings. Check the conference exhibitor list to identify appropriate publishers and stop by their booths. Strike up conversations with acquisitions editors, development editors, and marketing managers. If you're presenting a topic that might be of interest, invite them to your conference session. Ask what kind of help someone with your background can provide to support the development of existing products, help the publisher learn more about the market, or spark innovation. It's important to remember that publishers make many conference appointments ahead of time. Don't be

discouraged if it's hard to find or connect with an editor or marketing manager at first. Once you know whom to contact, you can make an advance appointment for a future meeting.

Key Strategies and Tips. Getting to know a higher education publisher by working on smaller or more limited projects is a great way to familiarize yourself with the inner workings of the publishing industry, make valuable contacts, and prove you can successfully write or create for the textbook genre. If you build a strong rapport with one or more publishers, when it does come time for you to write a textbook or online courseware, you'll be well prepared to proceed with your new project. •

Forming a Publisher Relationship: The Acquisitions Editor

By Sean Wakely, Vice President of Product and Editorial, FlatWorld

The acquisitions editor is the gatekeeper to forming a productive publisher relationship, so it's particularly useful for authors to understand who acquisitions editors are and what typically motivates them.

Let's start with a brief overview of the acquisitions editor's role, key responsibilities, and performance metrics. Then I'll cover how authors can leverage this knowledge in building a relationship with a publisher.

The Acquisitions Editor's Role. The acquisitions editor is typically the publisher's only employee who is authorized to initiate new projects. Traditionally, acquisitions editors were promoted from the sales force. However, in recent years

their backgrounds have become more diverse. Interestingly, acquisitions editors often don't possess academic preparation for the subject areas in which they work. Their skills are meant to complement an author's talents, rather than duplicate them. Therefore, most acquisitions editors possess deep knowledge of:

- Their publishers' operations and investment priorities
- Project management skills
- Sales and marketing know-how
- Strategic planning

Acquisitions editors have many responsibilities in addition to signing up new projects.

Consequently, they can have a number of job titles—sponsoring editor, product manager, or brand manager, for example. Some acquisitions editors also oversee other acquisitions editors; examples of their titles can be managing editor,

executive editor, publisher, or senior product manager. Most acquisitions editors directly or indirectly manage assistants, development editors, and digital/media developers. They also work closely with colleagues in marketing, production, manufacturing, and sales to guide a project through its various stages.

As educational publishers reposition themselves to become digital or print/digital ("hybrid") learning solutions providers, some are avoiding the word "editor" altogether; it's perceived to be too print-centric and out of date. So don't assume a potential acquisitions contact will have the words "editor" or "acquisitions" in his or her job title.

List Management. No matter what they're called, all acquisitions editors have one thing in common: They're primarily responsible for the overall management, revenue growth, and profitability of a portfolio of products, commonly called a "list."

A list is a group of print titles and digital learning solutions organized by subject area, such as psychology, chemistry, or English. Industry consolidation and organic growth have resulted in some very large lists, so it's not unusual for multiple acquisitions editors to share responsibility for the same subject area.

Growth and Acquisitions Goals. Acquisitions editors are tasked with profitably increasing their lists' revenue performance over time. There are three fundamental ways to organically grow a list:

- Publish completely new products ("first editions")
- Increase market share for existing products ("revisions")
- Increase prices

Smart acquisitions editors prefer the sustainable growth achieved by introducing new products and increasing unit sales for their existing

products—acquisitions editors don't have much control over prices anyway. Just as important, the consistent introduction of successful new products is key to building an acquisitions editor's name and reputation in the industry.

Strategies for Success. There are a number of strategies authors can employ that recognize what acquisitions editors do and how they are rewarded. Two of the most important are:

1) Use timing in your favor. Most acquisitions editors are held accountable for achieving new product acquisitions goals. Goal achievement is commonly measured annually and according to revenue projections, but it's sometimes based on numbers of titles acquired. Some companies pay a bonus for each new contract signed. In others, reaching the acquisitions goal is a prerequisite to qualifying for the company's incentive plan. In all cases, acquisitions editors who consistently miss their goals jeopardize their jobs.

Savvy authors understand this key motivator. They know they're in a stronger negotiating position toward the end of the calendar year or whatever date has been set by a given publisher to evaluate an acquisitions editor's performance.

Due to industry consolidations some higher education publishers have de-emphasized their new product acquisitions programs. In their judgment, infusions of formerly competing lists and titles mean fewer opportunities for new product launches. At those publishers acquisitions goals are less aggressive than previously, and their acquisitions editors have become more selective or focused on finding commissioned writers, rather than authors. Therefore, it pays to find out how an acquisitions editor is being evaluated for new product acquisitions before presuming that overall goal achievement or timing are key motivators.

2) Make the value of your project easy to understand. Corporate downsizing, industry consolidation, and an achingly slow and uncertain transition to digital product and business models make the acquisitions editor's job much more challenging than it was even five years ago. The key to successfully connecting with an acquisitions editor is to realize that she or he is being pulled in many directions at once. Prospective authors who make it easy to understand their projects' value stand a much better chance of forging productive relationships. So when interacting with acquisitions editors it's important for authors to:

- Research and summarize pertinent instructional trends, particularly those involving digital innovation
- Describe typical customers' needs and how the targeted course is evolving
- Discuss competing titles' strengths and weaknesses and demonstrate how the

proposed project is better or more useful to customers

- Articulate a clear vision that is distinctive, but still conforms to the generally accepted scope and sequence for the targeted course •

Forming a Publisher Relationship: 3 Steps for Submitting Your Project

By Sean Wakely, Vice President of Product and Editorial, FlatWorld

Now that you have a sense for forming a relationship with an acquisitions editor, how do you successfully connect with higher education publishers and make it easy for them to understand your project's value?

Step 1: Target the Right Publishers. Think about your own experiences as a customer and what's important to you as an author. Among the questions you might explore are:

- Which companies are active in the discipline or course I'm targeting?
- Does my project fill gaps or holes in certain publishers' offerings?
- Which publishers' representatives are the most helpful, persistent, and successful?

- Do I want to work with an established entity? Or is a scrappy startup a better fit?
- Do I envision a hybrid (print + digital) product or a fully digital learning solution? Would it be compatible with a given company's dominant digital delivery platform?

I encourage you to ask fellow TAA members, mentors, and other textbook authors about their publishing or product development experiences. They'll help you know what to expect after the excitement of the contract offer has subsided. Try to get a feel for a publisher's culture: Its values, priorities, and typical working relationships with its authors. Remember that acquisitions editors come and go; the only permanent relationship is with your publisher.

Step 2: Make Contact. Once you've developed a short list of possibilities, some effective ways to make contact are to:

- Ask a successful author who knows you to provide an introduction.
- Meet with local sales representatives (your bookstore's textbook manager can provide contact information).
- Approach acquisitions staff directly.
    - Review copyright pages of recent publications that are similar to your project. Acquisitions editors or product managers will be listed in the credits.
    - With appropriate names in hand, you can:
        - Connect on LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter.
        - Arrange to meet at academic conferences.
        - Call or e-mail. Most editors' phones rarely ring anymore; distinguish yourself by making a personal contact. Find publishers' main numbers on the Web. The best time to call is first thing in the morning or later in the day. Operators or automated phone systems will connect you to the right person.

Once you've made contact, you should be ready for the next step: Submit a winning proposal, table of contents, and, if requested, sample chapters or modules.

Step 3: Develop the Proposal and Table of Contents. A project proposal is your request for a company's investment. Therefore, your proposal must put your best foot forward in all respects. Needless to say, the document must be free of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Further, it must demonstrate that you can:

- Logically organize your thoughts and construct a clear narrative.
- Effectively introduce both known and unfamiliar concepts in an engaging manner.
- Convey a distinctive voice or sense of personality.
- Use appropriate and current research to support a narrative.

In addition to displaying excellent thinking and writing skills, the proposal is meant to sell your project. Therefore, it must persuasively:

- Describe and support a robust market need for your product.
- Explain why your approach and product strategy will take adoptions away from existing competitors.
- Outline the product's themes, content coverage, pedagogical features, supplements, and distinctive elements that meet customers' requirements and highlight how each element contributes to taking market share from the competition.
- Substantiate why you specifically are qualified to write or develop this product.

Key Strategies and Tips

It's a good strategy to submit your proposal to several publishers in order to prompt multiple

offers and gain negotiating leverage. Most publishers' websites provide proposal guidelines, although topical order varies. Each submission should be tailored to what you've learned about that publisher and its product offerings, but most sections can be re-used across versions. As long as key topics are addressed in sufficient detail and the narrative flows well, most publishers won't care if the organization exactly matches their suggested guidelines.

You'll be expected to submit a detailed table of contents (TOC) with your proposal. It should reflect all planned chapters or learning modules. The detailed TOC should make clear the range of topics being covered and in what depth (i.e., scope and sequence). It must be consistent with the proposal's descriptions, clearly appeal to the target market, and support how the proposed product will be superior to the competition.

The most persuasive tables of contents are annotated outlines that include objectives and a brief rationale for each chapter's themes and

topical coverage. Then, in typical outline form, all main headings and subheadings should be listed. Titles and descriptions of any unique pedagogical features, such as special applications, case studies, and interactive simulations should also be reflected.

You may be asked to submit two or three sample chapters or learning modules for consideration. Before going to the effort of preparing samples, I suggest first writing and submitting an excellent proposal and annotated TOC. If you're able to pique interest, the acquisitions editor or product manager may provide useful input to help you better prepare the samples. •

Textbook proposal submission Tips: How to Evaluate the Competition

When submitting a textbook proposal, most publishers will expect you to provide information on two to four of the closest competitors in the market and identify how your book will be different and better than the competition.

Three veteran textbook authors share their advice on how to study competing textbooks and which elements should be reviewed in making the case in a textbook proposal.

Q: Once you have acquired a copy of a competing textbook, how do you study it?

Al Trujillo, author of "Essentials of Oceanography" and a 2017 TAA McGuffey Longevity Award winner:

"I think most instructors, whether they are authors or not, use a couple of key topics of a textbook as metrics to assess a competing textbook. One topic that I use is the Coriolis effect, which causes moving objects to veer in different directions based on the hemisphere they're in. It's a complicated topic that often confuses students. I study the way it's presented in a competing textbook, especially looking at the figures associated with the explanation. Is the description clear and accurate? Does the competing textbook cover the topic in a way that could be understood by students? How it the coverage different than in my textbook?

Another thing I examine is the overall order of the textbook. Are all the main topics covered? How is the order different than in my textbook? For example, does the competing textbook devote an entire chapter to the topic of energy from the sea, or is it split up into its appropriate chapters (waves, tides, and currents)? Where does a

competing textbook put the topic of marine life: at the beginning, middle, or end? And for the oceans and climate change, is that topic covered as a separate chapter, or integrated into all parts of the book? I don't think there is any one 'right' way to do it, but to me, it's interesting to see how other authors have organized topics within their book.

I also look at the overall features of a chapter. How are graphics such as figures and tables used? Are the graphics clear and understandable? What kinds of end-of-section and end-of-chapter features are there to help students study? Are there any items that a competing textbook has that my book doesn't? If so, would it be helpful if a similar feature was added to my textbook?"

Denise Seguin, computer textbook author:

"I start by examining the TOC in detail. I look for a logical progression of topics and consider whether I agree with the author's

sequencing and grouping of topics. Then, I pick a topic that I know from experience is one of the more challenging in a course, and I go to that section of the book. I read the section and take note of the author's approach to explanations—e.g. is the concept explained in plain language with sufficient coverage, are there visual aids and examples, and what, if any, extras are given to expand upon a topic? I also look at the page design. Is the page pleasing to the eye? I also look at the end-of-chapter content to see how the main points are summarized, reinforced, and expanded upon. I look at how many projects or work is provided for student to review the chapter and practice. I also check for projects or other activities that provide opportunities to critically think and learn more about a topic beyond what the book can provide. I gauge the progression of simple to complex activities. I always look at a competitor's book in terms of if I was the student would I want to use this book in my course? If yes, why. If no, why not."

Jay Coakley, author of "Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies":

"My book exists in a fragmented, multidisciplinary market (sociology, kinesiology, sport management, sports studies, physical education), and it has had separate adaptations designed and written for students in Canada, Australia/New Zealand, and the UK/Europe.

When I review competitors' books for the regional adaptations I do it worldwide. and that involves a longer process than what I describe below.

For the US text and competitors—about 5 of them—I do the following:

- Compare the tables of contents
- Scan or read sections that are not covered in my book, and assess their relevance to the market, which is coming to be dominated by courses in sport management.

- Check the references/bibliography to see the number of references and the disciplines from which they come.
- Page through the books to see how they use photos, illustrations, cartoons, and other visuals. My book uses more visuals, by far, than any competitor, and this has been a major selling point. I spend up to $10K per edition on visuals; the publisher, McGraw-Hill spends $0 for photo and cartoon acquisition.
- Scan the competitors for how they connect research and theory, which theories they used to explain and guide coverage of topics, and how research is summarized and linked to the coverage of topics.
- Scan content to see if international issues are covered and if the book is US-centric and ignores global issues. As McGraw-Hill phases out the regional adaptations of my text, for reasons not fully explained, I cover more global material in my original text, because it is used by people outside the U.S. This is a tricky challenge for an author: students in the

U.S., as opposed to most students in other parts of the world, must be shown why global material is useful to them.

- Summarize the coverage of topics in terms of how they deal with current issues that are interesting to students now. I also try to see if the competitors' revisions contain only token changes, or if the revision is substantively significant. I have made major changes in all but one of my 11 revisions, and instructors have appreciated my efforts to keep up with changes in the field and to provide current examples.

Finally, I check the ancillaries. I have created a full set of ancillaries that assist instructors using my text. I provide test questions (either M-C or essay), discussion topics and projects for class, and complimentary readings that I have written on a wide range of topics related to content in each of the chapters. No other text comes close to mine n the provision of support materials. McGraw-Hill

provides a learning management framework for the text, if people want to pay the price they charge for it—but that's another story in the whole comparison process!"

Q: What elements should be reviewed in making the case in a textbook proposal?

Trujillo: "I think all elements of competing textbooks should be reviewed. In my situation, a proposal for a new edition of my textbook is not as formal as one might assume. The publisher contacts me when I should start working on the new edition and asks what I would like to change. My book is sent out to review by both users and non-users. Some of the reviewers who use competing texts often give a detailed review of the features of those textbook, which often helps in identifying new ways to present material or new features to add. The reviews are thoroughly analyzed: What do the majority of reviewers want in a new edition? We also get ideas from other texts that are published by my publisher.

My editors sometimes state, "This new feature in x textbook has been very successful in that book; perhaps we can modify it and use it in the new edition of your textbook." So we try to take all the best ideas from a variety of sources and modify them to use them in a new edition of my book."

Seguin: "An acquisitions editor always asked me these questions: How will your book stand out from all the others? What is your main differentiator? In the computer applications field, there are a lot of books that teach the same skills. To me, the TOC is essential because most teachers grab a book and scan the TOC to see if they have any interest in exploring further. Your TOC has to be more appealing either by choosing a more logical grouping or a simpler sequencing of topics. Always consider how a teacher will be able to teach from the book. e.g. if there are normally 3 hours per week for 12 weeks or 4 hours per week for 16 weeks, will a teacher be able to appropriately cover a chapter or two each week or two-week period? If certification is

an issue, you have to make sure the proposal clearly indicates that the book will meet certification objectives or whatever professional accreditation is desirable in the discipline—a certification mapping is a good idea. Look at the competitor's 'extras' in terms of boxed elements or margin elements that give a student more content beyond the narrative explanations."

Coakley: "The major element to be covered is the student-friendliness of the text: accessible writing style; clear pedagogical approach; identification of special sections, boxes, thought questions, summaries, visual materials, applications to real life issues, etc. Other points include the following:

- 'The market' -- showing knowledge of the market is crucial
- Coverage of topics central to the field
- Clearly explained theoretical and methodological framework
- Connection of content with issues and questions relevant to students today

- Elements that make it easy for instructors to use the text, and reduce the time they invest in preparation of the syllabus and planning for class, tests, and assignments.
- Connection between the text and new media (This is usually publisher driven, but it is becoming more important. Additionally, it is usually done through IT specialists who often are outside contractors. Authors should anticipate this so they can stay on top of things as the proposal is discussed)." •

Playing the Field: Is it Ok to Submit a Single Book Proposal to Multiple Publishers?

Building a relationship with a publisher, for many authors, is a lifelong commitment, so the decision of which publisher to work with shouldn't be taken lightly. How do you know that you've found "the one" for your book? We sought the opinions of seven TAA members on whether or not it's acceptable to submit a single book proposal to several different publishers. Here are their responses and reasoning.

Phil Wankat, author of multiple engineering textbooks:

"Minor changes probably have to be made in the book proposal since a new book will compete differently for different publishers. The author may need a different argument if there is a book in the publisher's list that competes or partially competes with the proposed book.

In addition, proposing a book to a publisher that is well established in a discipline is going to be different than proposing a book to a publisher that is just starting to publish in the discipline.

Finally, if you know the editor and/or have published with that publisher the cover letter and probably the proposal will be different than a cold call. One of my books was published after the editor of my technical textbook gave me an introduction to the editor of a different list (both Pearson, but different publishers)."

Starr Hoffman, head of planning and assessment at the UNLV Libraries:

"No, but sometimes only minor tweaks are needed. Just like tailoring CVs and cover letters to the specific positions to which you might apply, book proposals should be tailored to each publisher that you approach. It's likely that each has a slightly different audience or purpose in mind, and certainly a different catalog of existing

works into which they would, ideally, see yours fit. Thus, when making your proposal, you want to show each publisher why your book specifically fits in with what they publish, particularly if there are any subject gaps or existing expertise. It's a good idea, even if the publisher doesn't ask for this, to include in your proposal some books on similar or related topics, and explain why yours is different–and, if they were published by the publisher you're approaching, how your book would complement them (and thus perhaps have a ready audience, and/or augment sales of their existing books).

Some publishers have very specific book proposal guidelines, and I have had one that asks its potential authors to fill in a specific form for proposals. That alone means that it can be impossible to send the same proposal to different publishers–but you will likely need some version of similar information for each." •

Textbook Publishers' Author Guidelines

Most textbook publishers provide instruction on their website in the form of author guidelines for developing a book proposal that includes detailed information on how you can become an author for their company.

View TAA's compilation of **Textbook Publishers' Author Guidelines** for most major textbook publishers.

Join the TAA Authoring Community

With membership in TAA, you are not alone. As a TAA member, you become part of a diverse community of textbook and academic authors with similar interests and goals.

Discover just some of the member resources available to help you navigate your path to writing success:

- Increase your writing productivity by participating in live webinars or watching more than 250 on demand presentations.
- Browse a growing library of downloadable templates, worksheets, checklists and samples.
- Offset your out-of-pocket expenses with a publication grant or textbook contract review grant.
- Browse a list of industry professionals offering discounted rates and other special offers.
- Gain access to more than a dozen other eBook downloads.
- Receive discounted rates on the TAA Conference.

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