

Mistakes to Avoid in Preparing a Proposal

For the general outline of this handout, I am indebted to Ken Peterson of Tyndale House Publishers. If you see him, say thanks.

Years ago, Ken led a workshop in which he pointed out several mistakes that editors make when they present proposals to other departments in their publishing houses. These possible mistakes certainly apply to us as authors in preparing a proposal. Without further ado, here they are:

1. **Ambiguity**

We need to be clear when it comes to selling an idea. Ask others to look at your proposal with a ruthless eye. When they identify something that is unclear, thank them profusely!

2. **The Forest for the Trees**

We can get so excited about one section or aspect of the proposal that we can let all other parts of it slide. Be thorough with every element of your presentation.

3. **Overselling**

We need to be passionate about our book idea, but we also need to be realistic. Don't make extravagant claims, such as, "There's no other book like it!" Or "This book will revolutionize the church of the 21st century!" Try for a more qualified claim, applied to an individual: "I believe there is new hope for any discouraged Christian who faithfully applies the principles of this book."

4. **Underselling**

On the other hand, you've got to blow your own horn. You've got to get people enthused. What got you so enthused about this topic that you decided to write a book?

5. **Selling Editorial Policy, Not a Manuscript**

Find out who publishes books like yours, and send you proposal to them. Don't send it to a publisher who never publishes your kind of book.

6. **Lack of Preparation**

Don't slap together a proposal. It needs to be a reasoned, carefully executed presentation.

7. **Premature Presentation**

Make sure your idea is fully developed before you try to get someone else to invest in it!

8. **Not Oriented to the Reader**

We don't understand what the readers want — their "felt needs," for lack of a better term. Authors frequently say, Christians *need* to read this book," but the book won't sell unless buyers *know* they need to read it.

9. **Focusing on Features, Not Benefits**

Proposals often emphasize things like a study guide in the back or discussion questions at the end of each chapter. All these are fine to mention, but remember that the concept for the book has to carry the day. How does this book *benefit* the reader?