

How to Craft a Winning Nonfiction Book Proposal

Cindy Lambert

What is a winning book proposal?

A winning book proposal is a tool that entices seven audiences to grasp a contagious vision for a book, and then equips them to successfully play their parts in placing the book into the hands its ideal readership.

What does a book proposal accomplish for each audience?

The Seven Audiences of a Book Proposal:

- Author
- Agent
- Acquiring Editors
- Publishing Board
- Creative (art & design)
- Marketing
- Sales Team

Goal: Equip each audience to play their part in my book's success

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Formatting and sending your proposal

IMPORTANT: The headings on the sample proposal template below cover the critical elements of a thorough proposal. However, some agents and/or publishers may have variations in requirements. Once you have selected the agents/publishers you wish to approach, research each agent's/publisher's requirements, standards and procedures.

Format:

- 12 point Times New Roman font on standard 8 ½ x 11
- Single-space the entire proposal EXCEPT the sample chapters, which need to be double-spaced
- Number ALL pages sequentially, including pages of sample chapters
- Footer: include your name, title, and page number on the footer of every page
- If sending a physical copy, NEVER BIND, HOLE-PUNCH, OR STAPLE PAGES!

Create a Cover Letter

The 4 C's of a Cover letter:

Courteous, Compelling, Concise, Contact

- Be professional and business-like rather than casual or quirky
- Use no more than 2/3 of a page, single-spaced. Include, *at the most*, four brief paragraphs
- Capture immediate interest by asking a question or making a statement that surfaces the need or interest met by the book. Propose that the book will meet that need with an (some effective descriptor --fresh, unique, controversial, thought-provoking, life-changing, surprising, entertaining, hilarious) approach.
- Very briefly, cast a vision for the purpose and core message of the book
- State the uniqueness that sets this book and you, as author, apart from others
- Thank the agent/editor for their time and considerations and offer complete contact information.
- State whether or not this is a multiple submission (meaning that you are sending the same proposal to multiple agents/publishers at that same time).
- Include all your contact information (physical address, email, phone numbers) on the cover letter as well as on the cover page of the proposal.

Each heading within a book proposal answers a key question

Feel free to use the headings and format of the template below. Be sure to REMOVE the key question and explanation beneath each header.

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[Sample cover page]

A Proposal

Title
Subtitle

By
Author

Contact Information:

Agent or Author Name

Address

Address

Email

Phones: home/office/cell as applicable

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Felt Need

- What is the felt need that would drive someone to read this book?

Describe the need met by the core message. Your description of FELT NEED needs to clearly identify what factors will drive your reader to purchase and read this book.

Length: no more than ½ page.

Purpose of Book

- What will this book accomplish in the life of the reader?

Given the felt need you've described above, in one to three sentences describe what impact you intend this book to have on the reader. This is not a description of the book, but the driving purpose that book will accomplish. Keep in mind that some nonfiction books are written to provide instruction, knowledge, and information. Others are written to inspire, motivate, and/or entertain. Some are written to accomplish a combination of those goals. Be as specific as possible.

Genre

- What genre (category) does this book fall into?

Every book needs to fit into a “shelving” category. If it were shelved in a bookstore, what category would be the best fit? A few examples: Biography, Memoir, Self-help, Devotional, Marriage, Parenting, Relationships, Finance, Counseling, Men, Women, Grief, Christian Living, Spiritual Growth, Humor, Inspirational, Bible Study, Reference, Theology, etc. It is acceptable to list up to three.

Brief Description (One to two sentences)

- How is this book best described, in one or two sentences?

Imagine yourself a writer for an Internet bookseller or a sales clerk in a bookstore. In one or two sentences, entice a shopper to grasp what this book will do for him or her. This is sometimes called the “pitch” or “elevator speech” and the goal is to present the book in a nutshell.

Overview (approximately 500 words)

- How is this book best described in about 500 words?

Consider this similar to a catalog description of your book. Give a clear understanding of the book's purpose, contents, features, and uniqueness, expressed in an engaging, dynamic way.

Special Features

- What features will the book provide for readers to absorb and apply this material to their lives?

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Describe all special features of the book such as appendices, indexes, application exercises, reader's group discussion guide, self-tests, art or illustrations, charts, links, glossary, etc.

Primary Audience

- Who is the core target audience for this book?

Who is the dead center target reader? Describe your "ideal" reader as specifically as applicable including, as appropriate, the following: age range, generational identity, life stage, gender, marital status, parents, education level, spiritual state (i.e., believer, active Christian, cultural Christian, seeker or spiritually curious, non-Christian), professional or lay status (pastors, leaders, teachers, counselors, professionals), geographic location, specific life needs. [Note: if you have statistics about your potential readership, place them here.]

Secondary Audience(s)

- Who, in addition to the target audience, might read or purchase this book?

In addition to your core target audience, who might be the next most interested target(s)?

Reader Benefits

- What specific benefits will the reader experience upon reading this book?

Describe, specifically, what this book will accomplish in the lives of readers. I suggest you present these benefits in bullet points.

Author Biography, Brief (one brief paragraph ideal for flap on book jacket)

Describe your position, brand, expertise, and qualifications. Close with your city, state, and family. Example of final sentence: Christina Doe resides in Minneapolis, MN with her husband, two children, and their Saint Bernard, Hugo.

Author Biography (500 words or less, an expanded version of the above)

Describe your position, brand, expertise, and qualifications. Include education, career, and life experiences that qualify you as one who has earned the right to be heard on this topic.

Author's Writing Experience

- What previous writing experience does the author have?

Include all previously published works, magazines, newsletters, and professional papers. Include complete bibliographic information and sales or distribution numbers for each.

Author's Platform

- What audience reach does this author already have?

Describe your platform (your exposure and interaction with audiences) such as media, speaking, teaching, social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.). Include numbers of

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people touched by each, speaking schedules, past media appearances and contacts, upcoming opportunities, etc.

Unique Author Qualifications

- Why/how is the author uniquely equipped to write this message?

Here you may editorialize a bit, briefly explaining why or how your experience has qualified you to write on this subject. *For example:* Christina Doe leads executive workshops on time management and has developed her own copyrighted self-assessment curriculum, road-tested for over thirteen years.

Unique Positioning among Competition in the Marketplace

- What other books have been published to this audience that meet this, or a similar need/interest and how does this book compare?

Describe at least three (preferably five or six) other books in the marketplace that are similar in nature or seek to meet the same need, and are written to the same audience. Then for each, offer a few sentences describing how your book is unique from the competition.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

- How is this book unique from every other book?

Here you are putting together the above information in a summary that encompasses the “positioning” of your book.

Complete the following sentence:

If (insert core target audience) reads (insert title)

Then (insert pronoun of target audience) will experience/discover/be... (insert reader benefits)

Because (describe HOW the book will accomplish its objectives).

Example USP of a time management book for women:

*If women who feel overwhelmed by overly demanding lives and impossible to-do lists, read **Escaping the Time Trap: 10 Strategies to Bring Balance to the Overwhelmed Woman***

Then they will discover effective strategies to prioritize their lives and successfully balance the conflicting demands on their time,

Because they will have been led through self-tests to discover their unique time traps and learned proven and tested techniques to bring balance into their lives.

Potential endorsers

- What endorsers are likely to recommend this book to their own readers and followers?

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List potential endorsers in approximate order of the breadth of their influence as far as you know. If you already have relationships or connections with some well-known endorsers, list those first and include comments about your connection. Also, if you already have endorsements, include those here.

Marketing

- What ideas does the author have for marketing and promotion and how personally invested will he/she be spreading the word and capturing readers?

How will you invest your time, energy, and funds in marketing? Be proactive. Be specific.

How will you and the publisher reach the intended audience? List networking organizations, magazines, associations, etc., that reach the same audience as your book. **MUST INCLUDE** your social media plan! Here you explain what your social media promotional strategy will be.

Length of manuscript

- How long will the book be? Give approximate word count range.

Some helpful estimate data:

- A rough estimate of the number of words per page of published book is approximately 300 words per page, so a 200 page bound book is approximately 60,000 words.
- A rough estimate of an average 12 point 8 ½ X 11 double-space typed manuscript page is 250 words, so a 300 page manuscript is approximately 75,000 words.

Manuscript completion time (length of time from contract to due date)

- When will the manuscript be completed?

Common times given are anywhere from 6 to 12 months from contract, but this can vary greatly. If there is a unique reason for the book to release in a particular month (a conference, media opportunity, seasonal opportunity, etc.) mention that here as well.

Keep in mind that once you've submitted your completed manuscript most traditional publishers will require 9 to 12 months between manuscript due date and release month, as this allows for editorial work, interior design, lead-time for selling to retailers, promotion planning, PR, printing, and warehousing.

Table of Contents

- How will this book be organized?

Include very brief descriptions of each chapter. Identify which chapters have samples attached.

Sample Chapters (3) (Double spaced)

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- Does the author's sample writing ...
 - Cast the vision and scope of this book?
 - Demonstrate the author's craft and skill?