

# Crafting a Winning Non-Fiction Book Proposal

Cindy Lambert

## What does a book proposal accomplish? For whom?

### **The Seven Audiences of a Book Proposal:**

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

## What is a winning book proposal?

*A winning book proposal is a tool that entices seven audiences (author, agent, editor, pub board, marketing, creative, and sales) 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.*

## How can I equip each audience to help my book succeed?

## What role does the proposal play for each unique audience?

- What is my purpose in writing this book? What is the felt need addressed by my core message?
- How is this book best described, in one or two sentences?

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- How would I describe the book in 500 words or less?
- What features will I provide for my readers to absorb and apply this material to their lives?
- Who is my primary audience? Secondary audience?
- What specific benefits will the reader experience upon reading this book?
- Why/how am I uniquely equipped to write this message?
- What other books are written to this audience that meets this, or a similar need/interest and how does my book compare?
- How is my book unique from every other book? (USP)
- What endorsers will I seek?
- What will I do to market and promote my book?
- What suggestions do I have to best connect with the intended audience?
- How long will the book be?
- How long will it take me to write this?
- How will I organize my presentation?
- What sample of my writing will best...
  - Cast the vision and scope of this book
  - Demonstrate my craft and skill

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## The Elements of a Non-Fiction Book Proposal

### **IMPORTANT:**

The elements below are the basis for a thorough proposal. However, some publishers may have variations in requirements. Once you have selected the publishers you wish to approach, research each 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. NEVER BIND, HOLE-PUNCH OR STAPLE PAGES!

### **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 a (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 this author apart from others
- Thank the editor for 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 publishers at that same time).
- If the publisher requires a physical copy of the proposal, include a SASE for response.
- Include all your contact information (physical address, email, phone numbers) on the cover letter as well as on the cover page of the proposal.

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## A Proposal

**Title**  
Subtitle

By  
**Author**

Contact Information:

Agent/Author Name

Address

Address

Email

Phones: home/office/cell

Fax

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## **Purpose and Felt Need**

Describe your purpose in writing this book and the need met by its core message, in one, or at the most, two sentences. This is not a description of the book, but the driving purpose to writing it.

## **Brief Description (One to 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 “elevator speech” and the goal is to present the book in a nutshell.

## **Overview (approximately 500 words)**

Consider this similar to a catalog description of your book. Your goal is to give a clear understanding of the book’s purpose, contents, features, and uniqueness, expressed in an engaging, dynamic way.

## **Special Features**

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 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, seekers or spiritually curious, non-Christian), professional or lay status (pastors, leaders, teachers, counselors, professionals, blue collar workers), geographic location, specific life needs.

## **Secondary Audience(s)**

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

## **Reader Benefits**

Describe what this book will accomplish in the lives of readers

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

Close with your city and state and family. Example: 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)**

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Include education, career, and life experiences that qualify you as a voice who has earned the right to be heard on this topic.

## **Author's Writing Experience**

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

## **Author's Platform**

Describe your platform (your exposure and interaction with audiences) such as media, speaking, teaching, social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.). Include numbers of people touched by each, speaking schedules, past media appearances and contacts, upcoming opportunities, etc.

## **Unique Author Qualifications**

Here you may editorialize a bit, explaining, briefly, 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**

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. Then for each, offer a few sentences describing how your book is unique from the competition.

Include statistics and research that help quantify the reading audience or need. For instance, for a book written to women with breast cancer, offer statistics on how many women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

## **USP (Unique Selling Proposition)**

Complete the following sentence:

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

*Then (insert target audience) will experience (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***

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*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**

- 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.

## **Marketing**

- 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.
- Social media in which you are involved should be listed above in PLATFORM. Here you explain what your social media promotional strategy will be.

## **Length of manuscript**

Give approximate word count range. (Note: Assume a rough estimate of 300 words per bound book page of completed book. Assume an average 12 point 8 ½ X 11 typed ms page is 250 words.)

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

Common times given are anywhere from six to twelve 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 most traditional publishers expect 9 to 12 months between manuscript due date and release month, as this allows for lead time for selling to retailers, promotion planning, and PR.

## **Table of Contents**

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

## **Sample Chapters (3)** (Double spaced)

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