

Book Proposal Bootcamp

I. The State of the Industry

Trends in nonfiction

- Narrative – history, biography, journalism, memoir - character, story: imagine the movie
- Self-help – practical, pursuit of happiness, news you can use
- Concept history (i.e. a noun, preferably one that changed the world) - *Cod, Salt, Secrets of Saffron, Zero, Longitude, Uncommon Grounds, A Mind of Its Own, A History of the Breast, The Pencil, The Potato*

Structural changes in the book business

- Retailer concentration: B&N, Borders, Amazon vs. independents
- Publisher concentration
 - Bertelsmann: Random House (Knopf, Ballantine, Bantam, Crown, Doubleday...)
 - Pearson: Penguin (Dutton, Gotham, Putnam, Riverhead, Tarcher, Viking...)
 - News Corp: HarperCollins (Collins, Harper, Morrow...)
 - Viacom: Simon & Schuster (Free Press, Touchstone, Scribner...)
 - Hachette: Grand Central Books (Grand Central, Little Brown, Business One, Springboard, Twelve...)
 - Holtzbrinck: Macmillan (FSG, Henry Holt, St. Martin's Press, Palgrave-Macmillan...)
 - Perseus: Basic, DaCapo, Running Press, Seal, Public Affairs...
- Changes in academic presses, small publishers always exist, new modes of self-publishing
- Changing roles of authors, editors and agents / Acquisitions vs. editing / Hollywood model
- Everyone wants “platform” and “synergy”

II. From Idea to Book Tour

Build your brand

- Resume, credentials, other writing, domain name

Recruit a great management team - “Board of Directors”

- Editorial resources - writing group, copy editor, consulting editor, book doctor
- Lawyer, accountant
- Literary agent - how to find an agent
- Booksellers

Book proposal = Business Plan

- Synopsis - Write the back cover, inside flaps
- Substance
 - Table of contents - Detailed, narrative road map for the book you want to write
 - Sample chapter(s) - Representative, polished to a high gloss
- Style
 - Author credentials - Expertise, exposure: “brand”
 - Target audience - Size, composition, accessibility
 - Competitive and comparable titles – Venn diagram
 - Marketing and promotion - Blurbs, media, speaking, serialization

III. Further Resources

- Michael Larsen, *How to Write a Book Proposal*
- Jeff Herman, *Write the Perfect Book Proposal*
- Jacqueline Deval, *Publicize Your Book*
- Lissa Warren, *The Savvy Author's Guide to Book Publicity*
- Publishers Marketplace - www.publishersmarketplace.com
- Publishers Weekly - www.publishersweekly.com

Nonfiction Book Proposal Outline

I. Overview

Describe your book in two or three paragraphs (500 words or less). What is the title and subtitle? Who is the target audience and what makes your book unique and worthwhile for them? Think of this as the copy that would go on the back cover of your book or in the publisher's catalog, or as the brief review that you hope to see in Publishers Weekly or the NY Times Book Review.

II. Target Audience

Who are the likely purchasers of this book? Who is in the core audience and the wider audiences. How big is the market? What are the best ways to reach them?

III. About the Author

Your credentials and experience. What makes you uniquely qualified to write and promote this book? What other media outlets do you regularly appear in?

IV. Competitive Titles

List and summarize the major competitive titles and explain why yours is different from each. You are trying to accomplish two things with this section: prove there is an audience who would find your book interesting, as demonstrated by earlier, successful books, while making clear how yours is different enough to compel those readers – and others – to buy it.

V. Marketing and Promotion

What is your comprehensive plan to actively promote the book? Where should publicity be focused? What are the magazines and other media outlets that your target audience pays attention to? Where should you and your publisher work especially hard to get the book reviewed?

Blurbs: What "name" people would be willing to contribute a blurb? Can you get their commitment before the manuscript is completed?

Media and Speaking Appearances: Does this book or your prior experience give you credentials to speak on any current topics in the media? What are the topics and target outlets? Beyond book stores, what other types of groups and organizations would be interested in having you speak to them?

Serialization: What parts of your book lend themselves to excerpting in magazines and journals? List the appropriate excerpts and the 5 or 10 most important publications in which they could appear?

Describe additional promotional opportunities you will pursue: Retaining a speakers bureau to book speaking opportunities. Retaining an independent publicist. Organizational connections? Mailing lists? Workshops? Tours? Does the book have series potential? Opportunities for regular updating? Other "legs"? Think creatively, think big.

VI. Detailed Table of Contents

Include the full Table of Contents, with detailed summaries of each chapter. This section could be anywhere from three to 20 pages - it needs to give a comprehensive, detailed map of what the book will contain.

VII. Sample Chapters

Include the first one or two chapters – not the introduction, but sample chapters that offer an accurate sense of the style, substance and structure of the book.