
BOOK PROPOSAL BASICS

Cover Letter - Stick to one page in length. Name a specific author with whom the agent or editor has worked whose writing resembles yours. The cover letter can be single spaced while the rest of the proposal should be double-spaced.

Overview - Describe your book's purpose and content in two to three paragraphs. What gap does it fill? What problem does it solve? What mission does it serve?

Author Biography - Have you published essays or articles in magazines, newspapers, trade publications, and online? Do you have a syndicated column, radio or television show, podcast or subscription-based newsletter? Are you a member of professional organizations? Include relevant information about your education, credentials, experience, and community building.

How You Will Help Sell Your Book (a.k.a. Marketing) - Do you speak at events at which your book could be sold? What kinds of organizations do you speak for (e.g. Fortune 500 companies, universities, non-profits)? Do you have media contacts who could interview you or otherwise publicize your book? Have you founded or are associated with an organization that would buy bulk copies of your book to give away to members? Do you have a database of followers? Are you spotlighting your book on your web site? If you don't have a web site, are you building one to support your book? Are you hiring a publicist at your own expense to complement the efforts of your publisher?

Competition - List books, preferably those that have been published within the last five to ten years and have sold well, that most resemble your book. For example, if you've written a low-fat Mexican cookbook, every other low-fat Mexican cookbook is competition. If there aren't any direct competitors, list the books in the same category that come closest (such as low-fat cookbooks of other Latin cuisines). Briefly describe how your book differs from each.

Specifications - Approximately how long will the final manuscript be in terms of word count? How much time do you need to finish the manuscript? Will it include any special features, such as illustrations (color or b&w, photos or line art), tables, sidebars, excerpted or reprinted material?

Outline - Keep to three pages in length. Indicate if there will be a resources section, appendix, bibliography, etc.

Sample Pages - Provide approximately the first fifty pages of the manuscript. Unless the agent or editor has specifically requested you do so, do not send the entire manuscript.

Snail Mail - For agents and editors who request snail mail submissions, include a self-addressed stamped envelope large enough to contain the material you wish returned to you. Attach enough postage to cover all delivery costs; do not enclose cash or checks to pay for postage. Do include copies of recent articles about you and your work, if you have any. When agents and editors get excited about a submission, they need to copy and share it with colleagues as quickly as possible and fancy binding gets in the way so use paper clips, binder clips or rubber bands.

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