



“For the **maximum value** from this teleseminar, **print this handout** so you will **be prepared to take notes** on each secret.”

W. Terry Whalin  
[www.ProposalSecrets.com](http://www.ProposalSecrets.com)

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### Your Important Teleseminar Details

Duration: Almost two hours

Focus: Discover what makes an attractive book pitch to an editor or literary agent.

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### Tips to Get the Most Out of This Teleseminar

1. Print this handout so you can take notes during the teleseminar.
2. Think about how to quickly implement each secret.
3. Make a deadline to apply the tips revealed during the session.

## Proposal Secrets Teleseminar

(Please write down your answers below as you listen to the teleseminar)

Sandra Vander Zicht, Associate Publisher & Executive Editor at Zondervan  
<http://www.zondervan.com>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/233utx>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

Joan Marlow Golan, Executive Editor, Steeple Hill Books  
<http://www.SteepleHill.com>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/2bfwkj>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

Sheryl Fullerton, Executive Editor, Jossey-Bass (A Wiley Imprint)  
<http://www.josseybass.com>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/25zsc2>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

Holly Root, Literary Agent, Waxman Literary Agency  
<http://www.waxmanagency.com>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/27dcje>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

Joey Paul, Vice President & Publisher Practical Living Thomas Nelson  
<http://www.thomasnelson.com>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/yqymrm>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

John Willig, President & Literary Agent, Literary Services, Inc.

<http://www.literaryservicesinc.com/>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/2etxuo>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

David Lambert, Senior Editor, Howard Books (Simon & Schuster)

<http://www.simonsays.com/>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/25ujpz>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_

Peter Rubie, CEO & Literary Agent, FinePrint Literary Management

<http://www.fineprintlit.com/>

For Submission Guidelines: <http://tinyurl.com/ysld9r>

1. Key Attractive Characteristic \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Error Writers Make \_\_\_\_\_



## Guidelines for Book Proposals

Zondervan publishes evangelical and nondenominational trade, academic, and professional books primarily for Christian readers. Acceptable book proposals are consistent with that perspective. As a division of HarperCollins Publishers, Zondervan maintains its editorial independence and its evangelical integrity while having an avenue into the general and Christian markets.

Zondervan publishes books with the intent to meet the spiritual needs of people at all ages and all intellectual and economic levels. We seek to express our commitment to God's truth with a philosophy of acquisitions, writing, editing, producing, selling, and marketing that is consistent with biblical faith, practice, and ethics. We determine a book's worth by its contribution and content, the goal being not only to confirm readers' faith and understanding, but also to challenge and stretch their thinking.

While Zondervan publishes books within the historic evangelical mainstream of Christian faith and practice, we do not hesitate to publish books that represent the various currents within that mainstream.

### What to Submit

- **Academic, Reference, and Professional Ministry Resource Books** - College and seminary textbooks (e.g., books on biblical and theological studies, and related disciplines); ministry-related books on such subjects as preaching, counseling, discipleship, leadership, worship, and church renewal for pastors, professionals, and lay leaders in ministry; and theological and biblical reference books.

### What to Include

#### A book proposal that answers these questions:

- What are the book's subject matter, approach, and main points?
- Specifically for whom is the book written? Why would readers purchase the book and how might they use it? (For books that may have realistic potential for textbook adoption, in what courses might they be used?)
- Are there other competing titles? If so, what distinguishes your book from others on the subject?
- What specific need or purpose does your book fulfill that the others do not?
- What are your qualifications for writing this book? Include a *vita* or resume indicating your educational background, employment history, bibliography of your published books and articles, description of any speaking or seminar work you do on a reasonably regular basis, and a statement of your ecclesiastical connections including any organizations in which you are active or hold office.
- Why is your book appropriate for Zondervan?

#### Also, please include:

- A sample chapter or two.
- An indication of the tentative title and subtitle.

- A table of contents that includes chapter titles with a brief one-paragraph synopsis of each of the other chapters and an estimate of the length of each chapter.
- Descriptions and examples of any distinctive features or illustrative materials (such as charts, tables, and figures) that you might like to include.
- An appropriately sized self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of your proposal (if you want it returned).
- An indication as to when you hope to complete the entire manuscript.
- If you are submitting a previously published book, please send a copy of the book in lieu of a manuscript, plus any reviews you may have of the book.

#### **How to Submit**

- Your cover letter, sample chapters, and book proposal should be printed using Times New Roman 12-point type or similar serif font. Do not hand write or hand print your submission.
- Double-space your material, retaining ample margins, using only one side of quality 8.5 x 11 inch white bond.
- Bind your material only with rubber bands or an oversized binder clip. Do not staple, paste-up, or attach anything that will interfere with photocopying should multiple copies be necessary for committee review.
- Consecutively number your pages throughout.
- Type your name and address on each document you submit.
- Mail your material flat in an envelope with adequate postage. Do not fold your submission. If you do not send return postage, your material will be discarded and you may not receive a response to your submission.

#### **What NOT to Submit**

- Do not send audiocassettes, computer disks, or videotapes in lieu of printed manuscripts.
- Although Zondervan does extensive editing on manuscripts, we do not have the staff for re-writing or to serve as coauthors. You may want to contact local universities or colleges, writers' guilds, or editorial services for such assistance.
- Zondervan does not review proposals for tracts; booklets; sermons; dissertations; four-color children's storybooks; coloring books; game, puzzle, or craft books (except for children); art books; cookbooks; charts; books of quotation or poetry; short story collections; plays; romances; Sunday school curriculum; high school textbooks; or books on tape (we only produce tapes for books we have previously published in printed form).
- We cannot be responsible for original manuscripts, photos, artwork, etc. Do not send these originals (make photocopies instead).

**Paul E. Engle, Vice President and Publisher,  
Church, Academic, and Reference Resources**



5300 PATTERSON AVENUE SE, GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49530  
<http://www.zondervan.com>

## BOOK PROPOSAL Check List (Prepared by a Zondervan Editor)

### Author

**TITLE**                    title

**SUBTITLE**                subtitle

**FORMAT**                 hardcover/softcover; # of pages/words; trim size

### SUBMISSION

**DATE**                    Anticipated manuscript completion date (also, if applicable, suggested publishing date)

**AGENT**                    if applicable

### SYNOPSIS

One sentence if possible, including main focus and features.

### DESCRIPTION

Description of book up to 500 words.

### PRIMARY MARKET

- Very specific target market

## **SECONDARY MARKET**

- If applicable

## **MARKET DEMAND AND FELT NEED**

## **AFFINITY GROUPS / PERSONAL MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES**

## **COMPETITION**

- Books that may sit next to yours in a bookstore
- You can also include a short paragraph of what makes yours unique/better/different from the competition

## **UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS**

Why are you writing this book? What do you add to the topic?

## **LIST OF POSSIBLE ENDORSORS**

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Include any relevant information including previous publications and sales numbers if applicable.

## **BOOK OUTLINE**

List of chapters with a paragraph under each title explaining what the chapter is about.

## **SAMPLE CHAPTERS**

## Editorial Interview

**Name:** Joan Marlow Golan

**Title:** Executive Editor, Steeple Hill Books

**Q: What is your role at Harlequin?**

**A:** As Executive Editor of Steeple Hill, I manage Harlequin's inspirational books imprint, with an editorial staff of five in addition to myself. The Steeple Hill imprint consists of three original series, Steeple Hill Love Inspired®, Steeple Hill Love Inspired Suspense® and Steeple Hill Love Inspired Historical® (LIH will be launching in 2/08), as well as a single title program that includes Steeple Hill Women's Fiction and Steeple Hill Cafe®. The greatest asset at Steeple Hill is our authors. Steeple Hill authors have twice won the highest awards in inspirational publishing, the Christy Award and the RITA® Award, as well as myriad prestigious awards from the American Christian Fiction Writers, various regional RWA awards and other honors. Our books have been featured in the media, including *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and on *The Today Show* and even Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*

In addition to managing the imprint, I am the proud editor of Steeple Hill authors Hannah Alexander, Judy Baer, Vanessa Del Fabbro, Annie Jones, Catherine Palmer and Janet Tronstad as well as HQN New York Times bestselling author Linda Lael Miller and radio personality Delilah, with whom I'm developing three nonfiction titles for Harlequin's new nonfiction program.

**Q: What is your work history?**

**A:** I just celebrated my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Harlequin—in some ways I feel as if I've been here forever, because it's such a good fit, it feels like “home.” My first job here was as Senior Editor of Silhouette Romance, and then, after ten months I became Senior Editor of Silhouette Desire. In 2003 company reorganization created the opportunity for me to manage Steeple Hill, of which I'm currently Executive Editor.

I began my publishing career in 1979. I had spent six years getting a doctorate in English and American literature from Harvard University and was a diehard bookaholic. When I realized that there was a job that involved actually getting paid for reading books, I knew that was the job for me. I was determined to break into publishing despite being told by many that I was “overqualified and underexperienced” for an entry-level job. Ultimately, my entrée into the industry was as a Book of the Month Club reader. It took me three months to get that position—I kept calling the BOMC Editor-in-Chief, Al Silverman, and since I knew he was a Yankees fan would chat with him about Reggie Jackson, Billy Martin and company, and every month he'd tell me he wasn't hiring but to call him back next month.

My first full-time job was as a nonfiction editor at now-defunct Hart Publishing Company, where I edited the bestseller *THE 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* by Michael Hart, which has spawned many imitators. I went on to fiction, and then I discovered romance publishing—it was love at first sight, and for most of my publishing career I've been a romance editor.

I began my romance publishing career with Richard Gallen, a packager, and then became an editor at Berkley's Second Chance at Love line, which I eventually managed. When my daughter was a toddler, I decided corporate life wasn't sufficiently family friendly and mommy-tracked myself for seven years, continuing to freelance. Working at home eventually got lonely, but I still wasn't ready to reenter corporate life, so I got into religious publishing as an editor for Catholic publisher Liguori Publications. After four years, Liguori decided to close their New York office, and by that time I was ready to come back to the corporate world—and Harlequin was ready for me. My friends think I have the dream job . . . and I'm inclined to agree! I especially value the warm relationships built up over years of working together, both in the author/agent community and with Harlequin colleagues.

**Q: What are you looking for in submissions?**

**A:** Please note that while we accept all submissions for Steeple Hill series, we do not accept unsolicited mss. for the single title program, which includes Steeple Hill Cafe®. As an editor I look for:

- ❖ Characters I care about
- ❖ A compelling, distinctive author voice
- ❖ A story that hooks me with the first sentence and won't let me put it down.

**Q: Do you have any advice for writers for Steeple Hill?**

**A:** Yes.

- ❖ Please read our guidelines before submitting to Steeple Hill. You will find them on [eharleuin.com](http://eharleuin.com)—scroll to the bottom of the homepage and click on Writing Guidelines.
- ❖ Remember that Jesus got His points across by telling wonderful stories and do likewise.
- ❖ Keep in mind that if you do not interest an editor on page one, they aren't going to read much more (if the editor is me, I am not going to read any more).
- ❖ Try to read your work not like an author but like a consumer who has picked it up in the bookstore and is sampling to decide whether or not to buy it.
- ❖ The best way to endear yourself to your editor is to deliver your mss. on time.

**Q: What are your favorite childhood novels?**

- ❖ My all-time favorite novel, which I reread every few years, is *LITTLE WOMEN*. I also consider it the ur-inspirational novel—not only are many of the chapters named after elements from John Bunyan’s Christian classic *PILGRIM’S PROGRESS*, but the four March sisters each make an inner pilgrimage to spiritual enlightenment and each finds her mission. It’s also a very well-written book with a dynamite first line—“‘Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents,’ ” grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.” At various times in my life I’ve identified with each of the sisters, but now I identify most with Marmee—who is a great role model for me as a manager. I have to admit, for me life doesn’t get any better than lying in bed rereading *LITTLE WOMEN*—I find the March family endlessly fascinating, not to mention never having gotten over my childhood crush on boy-next-door Laurie.
- ❖ Another book I adored as a child and is back in print again today is *HALF MAGIC* by Edgar Eager. Four children, whose widowed mom works so that they are often left to their own devices, find a magic coin that grants wishes—but only by halves. This leads to some terrific adventures and profound life lessons for all of the children. What I really love about this book is the author’s voice. I used to read *HALF MAGIC* to children I babysat for and they all loved it, too, as did my own kids. I enjoyed it just as much rereading it as an adult. If you’ve never read it, treat yourself!
- ❖ Both of these beloved books have great dialog. Dialog is really important in making a novel work—it can provide sparkle, humor, reveal character and fill in the backstory as well as making the pace sufficiently brisk that the reader doesn’t get bored.

**Q: Is being an editor what you imagined when you first decided to become one?**

**A:** Actually, not so much. I thought all editors did was read and edit, So what do I do besides read and edit? I participate in a lot of meetings and spend untold hours responding to and generating email, and using my computer, with which I have a love-hate relationship. I also talk on the phone, which I still prefer to email for a real discussion (I respond to the human voice and tend to “hear” books as I read them).

Also, when I chose a career in publishing, it never occurred to me that the salaries were less than princely, making it difficult for junior editors to live in New York City. (In the early years, half my salary went to pay rent, as I foolishly insisted on living in Manhattan.) This is even truer today than when I was starting out, and I am deeply saddened that many editorial assistants and assistant editors have to supplement their income with second jobs. Recently I gave an informational interview to an intern from Farrar, Straus, Giroux, and she told me she had three part time jobs in addition to her unpaid internship, and was still struggling financially.

**Q: Is there any activity you prefer to reading?**

**A:** I do enjoy other forms of entertainment and am particularly passionate about opera and theater. In the almost two years since my husband died, I have become an avid

gardener as well, and planted over 400 bulbs this fall so that I will have “Little Amsterdam” in front of my house in the spring. I enjoy traveling and spent a memorable week in Rome, Italy, in October. I also take a Qi Gong class, meditate, and say the Chaplet to the Divine Mercy, the prayer I feel especially called to, every day, and I’m a lector at my church. But to answer the question, no, nothing does it for me like a good book—and I founded a bookclub in my community that has been meeting for over a decade! I especially enjoy poetry and biography in addition to fiction, with Linda Pastan and Mary Oliver my two favorite contemporary poets at the moment. My favorite quote is by Logan Pearsall Smith: “People say that life is the thing, but I prefer reading.”  
Amen!

## 6.

### **How to Present Yourself as an Ideal Author**

Get your work published in little ways first, like one chapter or so, in all the magazines and newspapers you can think of, wherever, to get as much exposure as possible. This shows potential publishers you have been published, and who knows, maybe a nice agent will see your work around a lot and be curious enough to contact you.

— Chloe Atkins, photographer and author, *Girls' Night Out*

Many new writers tend to underestimate the importance of their author profile. They seem to feel that having a great idea (especially in the practical categories like self-help) or a life-changing experience (such as military service or spiritual breakthrough) will be enough. In fact, the opposite is true. A well-known author with the ability to sell and promote his or her book may have an idea that is actually not all that new but will be greeted enthusiastically by publishers, while a relatively unknown first-time writer with a really interesting idea may be ignored. The difference lies in how publishers perceive each author's potency in the marketplace.

### **Qualities of the Ideal Author Prospect**

All publishers—large and small—are looking for ideal authors prospects. These authors are qualified to write about their topic through education or experience, but they also have something more to offer beyond their ideas.

#### **The Author Has a Professional Writing Career**

Many book authors begin as journalists, columnists, or magazine writers, which gives them expertise in a range of subjects, insider knowledge, visibility, and a built-in readership. For example: Jon Krakauer (*Into Thin Air*), Sebastian Junger (*The Perfect Storm*), Edward Ball (*Slaves in the Family*), and Natalie Angier (*Woman: An Intimate Geography*).

#### **The Author Is an Experienced Speaker**

Authors who have an extensive consulting, speaking, or seminar or training business are very appealing to publishers because they already have visibility and know how to sell themselves and their ideas. Well-known examples include Tony Robbins (*Awaken the Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical & Financial Destiny*), Stephen Covey (*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*), and Harvey Mackay (*Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*.)

#### **The Author Has Great Contacts**

Having a long and impressive client lists or prominent mentors helps you sound credible. For example, Cherie Carter-Scott, co-author of one of the *Chicken Soup for*

*the Soul* books, went on to write the bestseller *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules*; Carol Adrienne wrote the study guide to accompany *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, and then went on to write *Your Life Purpose* and appear on *Oprah!*.

### **The Author Has a Publishing Track Record**

Having a series of critically praised published articles or another book on a similar subject (preferably one that has sold well) is a good indication that you know what you're talking about and people will want to hear more. For example, David Halberstam, already renowned as a historian, wrote *Playing for Keeps* about Michael Jordan's career in basketball, and *The Teammates*, about friendships on a baseball team. Suze Orman, author of *You've Earned It, Don't Lose It*, wrote *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*, *The Road to Wealth*, and other books, and now appears on several TV programs. She's a good example of an author who has driven her career and built an ever-stronger and more national presence as an expert on personal finance.

### **The Author Has Strong Academic Credentials**

An affiliation with a prestigious university or other institution backed up by equally impressive credentials as a scholar or researcher (especially important in writing about current affairs or history or other similarly weighty subjects). For example, Karen Armstrong, a professor of religion in London, has written several books on religion (including *Islam: A Short History* and *A History of God*) that have sold extremely well. Elaine Pagels, with her books on the Gnostic gospels and other apocryphal scriptural works, is also a highly respected professor at Princeton University. Walter Isaacson, the author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, is well qualified as a journalist and historian to write on this subject.

### **The Author Has Beautifully Polished Writing**

The ability and craft to write beautifully on a subject that readers will care about always helps when it comes to selling a book. For example: James McBride (*The Color of Water*), Frances Mayes (*Under the Tuscan Sun*), Simon Winchester (*The Professor and the Madman*).

### **The Author Has Celebrity Status**

Clearly, fame or celebrity that makes the author well-known or provides some basis for becoming well-known combined with a story or message that will interest the reading public is always a selling point. For example, Judy Sheindlin, TV's Judge Judy, known for her down-to-earth advice, wrote *Beauty Fades, Dumb Is Forever*, about the problems facing women. Monty Roberts, a famous horse trainer, made more famous by the movie *The Horse Whisperer*, published his own story, *The Man Who Listens to Horses*.

### **The Author Has A Ready-Made Audience**

Publishers also want to see evidence that the author will be a partner in selling the book. They love authors who have a large, built-in, or growing national following

acquired through newspaper columns, newsletters, TV or radio shows, seminars and workshops, a thriving speaking business, consulting, other publications, magazine writing, or a successful self-published book.

### **The Author has Demonstrated Expertise**

The right educational and professional background is essential. That could include degrees; research, academic or professional positions; consulting practice, and so on. Although a writer may be passionate about a pet subject (for example, our lack of civic virtue), it's unlikely that agents or editors will be interested in publishing a book on that subject if the author's credentials are in horticulture.

### **The Author Has Won Awards**

National awards or other formal recognition that is relevant to this book are impressive. For example, if you're writing a second book about your struggles and triumphs as minister of an interracial congregation, you definitely want to mention that your earlier work received *Christianity Today's* book award for pastoral leadership.

### **The Author Has Connections**

Publishers appreciate extensive national connections with (or membership in) organizations that might be interested in buying large quantities of your book. For example, many consultants who work with Fortune 100 companies or who speak to many professional audiences can guarantee sales of as many as 20,000 (or more) copies a year. Built-in sales like these gives publishers the sense that they can depend on a certain level of sales that would not be possible for an author with less potent affiliations.

### **The Author Has Won Praise from People Who Count**

Glowing endorsements from other well-regarded experts, from reviewers of a previous work, or from an impressive client list are great. If you're relatively unknown, but you can get Suze Orman to say you're a whiz at explaining the intricacies of the tax code for small businesspeople, you'll get to bask in her reflected glory (and success as a writer).

### **The Author Has Gotten Media Attention**

Previous media attention for your expertise, work, or story demonstrate to agents and editors that a writer is a good "story," that those who book TV and radio appearances already find something appealing and newsworthy about the book and the person who wrote it.

### **✓ Reality Check**

#### **What's an Introvert to Do?**

Being a tireless promoter of yourself and your book is fine if you enjoy putting yourself out there and working the crowds. But what if you're the kind of person who feels more comfortable curling up with a good book than hawking one?

The truth is, you may have little choice. Even though you are not a natural salesperson, your publisher will expect you to do some degree of public speaking in support of your book. As an author, you become a public person.

Again, be realistic about your strengths and strategic about your choices. You may feel uncomfortable and shy speaking to large groups at conferences or at other venues, but more at ease in the virtual intimacy of an internet chat room or blog. You may dread the idea of appearing on television, but actually look forward to phoning in your interview to a syndicated radio show. If enhancing your image with public speaking and seminars fills your stomach with butterflies, consider building your profile by writing magazine articles or a newspaper column for a local newspaper that you can eventually get into syndication.

### **How Special Do You Have to Be?**

The qualities and experience listed above are a big part of what makes the difference between a polite rejection and a contract offer. With a few exceptions, the people we have used as examples above are all fairly well known. But what about relatively inexperienced authors whose books not only get published but go on to become top-selling titles? Fortunately for authors and publishing, this still happens—but the authors still have something to recommend them to publishers. For example:

- Jane Juska's bestseller *A Round-Heeled Woman: My Late-Life Adventures in Sex and Romance* is the memoir of a retired schoolteacher who placed this ad in the *New York Review of Books*: "Before I turn 67—next March—I would like to have a lot of sex with a man I like. If you want to talk first, Trollope works for me." Juska is an engaging writer with a great story to tell that appeals to the largest segment of book-buyers: middle-aged women. The fact that this is an unusual story with an irresistible hook for the media was also key to its success, as was Juska's low-key yet frank self-presentation in her appearances and in articles written about her
- David Neale Walsh's *Conversations with God* was published by small publisher Hampton Roads and picked up by a larger publisher once the book had established itself. Walsh had no background in theology and no national presence. It was his ability to touch readers in a profound way that made the books sell. Sometimes the exact right message at the right time can take off in a way that no one—least of all publishers—can predict. But that's kind of the same principle as winning the lottery, not something that first-time authors can reasonably expect.
- Laura Corn's *52 Invitations to Grrreat Sex* and *101 Nights of Grrreat Romance* were self-published wonders that have now sold hundreds of thousands of copies. The word is that she had been turned down by about every New York publisher and so, after publishing and selling them herself, found a good distributor and continued her efforts as what *Publishers Weekly* called an "indefatigable self-promoter." And that's what made her book sell all those copies—that and a topic that seems to preoccupy a great many Americans.

You don't have to be as wildly successful as these authors to do well. Hundreds of less visible but nevertheless highly successful authors have done well with smaller or specialized publishers like New World Library, Red Wheel/Conari Press, New Harbinger, Avery Publishing, John Muir Publications, Heyday Books, Gibbs Smith, Hay House, and many, many more. New World Library, for example, says that several of their books have sold over 100,000 copies and a few have sold into the millions—no small feat for a publisher of any size.



### Insider Insight

#### Think of Yourself as an Author

When you write a book, you go from being a private person with an idea to a public person with a book that people will read, comment on, like, dislike, or even dismiss. This fact seems obvious, yet many first-time authors are shocked by the public nature of the endeavor and what they are asked to do. They aren't prepared to talk to the media or to give sound bites or to pitch their ideas or present the core of their work so that people will be attracted to and buy the book. And they can't believe anyone would tell them that the book changed their lives (or, less pleasantly, was no good). Many published authors are surprised, pleased, and a bit embarrassed—all at the same time—to discover that the reading public perceives them as Authors with Something to Say. Yet, this is what they have become.

**Part of the joy of writing a book for publication is your personal transformation from aspiring author to published author. The more you can prepare yourself beforehand for this public life—including thinking of yourself as someone who will be called on to discuss your ideas—the more effective you'll be at promoting your book. That's why publishers value authors' experiences as speakers and presenters and seminar leaders. Not only have you built up a receptive audience, you've also learned how to present yourself and your ideas in a compelling way.**

#### What's *Your* Author Profile?

Agents often ask editors, "So what author profile are you looking for?" Sometimes they ask the question because they're hoping that the publisher will consider a lesser-known writer for an especially hot topic. Sometimes publishers will be receptive if the project has a terrific hook or if they are looking for a book on this particular topic. More often than not, however, their answers indicate that their sales and marketing departments want authors who can prove that they can directly generate sales.

Smaller publishers are more likely to be flexible; after all, they know they usually cannot pay the price tags that the biggest name writers command, and they are more accustomed to establishing less well-known writers. If you are an aspiring writer, however, your best bet is to do whatever you can to enhance your author profile *before* you start contacting agents and editors.

Take a moment right now to review your own author profile by thinking about the following questions:

1. **Do your background, education, and credentials support your desire to write your book?** If you want to write a self-help book, you should have a background in psychology or another appropriate field. If you want to write a book about small businesses, you should have at least an MBA and run a successful enterprise or be a consultant who helps others do a better job at running theirs.
2. **Have you published before? In what publications?** The bigger and more national the publication, the better. It's also important to make sure the audience for these publications is the same as for your book—academic papers, for example, don't necessarily count if you're writing for a popular audience. Listing your publications is useful to show your track record as an expert and as a writer. If you're publishing on a related topic, make the link between the two areas clear. Show how they build on each other and have enhanced your value as an author.
3. **Have you received any recognition, especially formal awards, either for work that is related to the subject of this book or for your writings?** Awards show that people in your field are already taking you seriously.
4. **How strong are your national connections?** For example, if you are a consultant, is your client list national or regional? The larger the number, the more national, and the more prominent the names on your list, the better.
5. **Would these national connections be likely to result in book purchases?** If so, at what level (that is, how many copies would the organization buy)?
6. **Have you done any media (radio, TV, newspaper interviews) on the subject for your book?** If so, how many appearances? Were the appearances in the national or local media?
7. **Do you appear as a public speaker?** If so, how often? How many people do you speak to each year? At what venues (for example, conventions and seminars)?
8. **What kinds of endorsements do you have from the leading lights on this subject?** The people you ask for endorsements should be familiar to a generally well-read person, which is what agents and editors are. It is desirable to include four or five endorsements in your book proposal; if you can't get any well-known people to endorse you, it may not be worth it to include any.

### ✓ Reality Check

#### What Is Enough?

Let's say you have decent credentials and some impressive clients, you've had op-ed pieces published in the local paper, you mail your newsletter to 500 people every month, you speak to professional groups a couple of times a year, and you have presented a paper at a national convention. Does that give you a strong enough author profile to interest publishers?

The answer is probably no because it's not a large enough national platform to make your book break out—that is, sell at commercially viable levels. Although all these activities set you off from the majority of your colleagues and peers, in the high

stakes game of publishing, agents and editors will be looking for someone with bigger numbers and a more established following that will help them drive sales.

The only ways to make up for a perceived shortfall are (1) to get endorsements from top people and (2) to go to work getting yourself published and noticed on a national level.

Try to think strategically:

- Where can you start to build visibility? Who could you contact to set up speaking engagements or appearances?
- What articles could you write on your subject for a local paper or other publications that might get picked up nationally?
- Could you submit a shorter version of one of your chapters to a journal or other publication that might be interested in it?
- Could you give a series of papers or lectures or workshops at local and regional meetings, Learning Annexes, conventions, or other venues that would make you more attractive to those who create programming for similar events at a national level?
- Could you work on putting yourself forward as a local expert who is called by TV and radio stations when they need someone to talk about your topic?

### **How to Transform Your Author Profile**

It's tempting to dismiss the idea of author profile as something that doesn't apply to you, or to feel defeated by the current publishing attraction to big names and sure things. But resist both temptations. The smart thing is to figure out what you can do to strengthen your profile and get the attention that will make publishers notice you.

#### **A Common Dilemma**

Let's say that you're a therapist with a PhD from a solid state university. You live in a large Midwestern city, and have spent the last twenty years working with people who have phobias. Over the years you have developed what seems to be a particularly potent method for helping your clients to overcome their fears permanently. You've published two or three journal articles on the subject, have given a couple of presentations at national conferences, and are now the person your local media calls on as an expert.

Your clients and professional associates have urged you many times to pull together all your insights, techniques, and information and put them in a book. You're not aware of anyone else who's written a book that really talks about what you do, even though you know there are books about phobias, for both general and professional audiences.

So you start working on your manuscript, and in just a few months you have several chapters written. You've also got a good start on your book proposal. When you get to the author biography section of the proposal, however, you start to wonder whether you've got what it takes to attract an agent (and eventually a publisher) for your book. After all, you're sort of a local expert, but you don't have much of a national platform. Still, you believe in your book and the need for it, since your research into existing

publications showed that there was indeed a need for a popular (rather than academic) work on overcoming paralyzing fears.

Should you forge ahead, finish the book proposal, send out query letters to agents and editors, and see what happens? Should you give it up? Or is there another course of action you could take that would strengthen your profile as an author for this work?

### **Be Realistic About Your Strengths and Weaknesses**

You can make your author profile more appealing if you can be realistic and strategic enough to develop a plan for enhancing the qualities you know agents and editors are looking for in writers. In our case study, the therapist needs to be realistic about what agents and editors would see as positive qualities of the author profile:

- A distinctive approach to treating phobias that produces lasting change and relief
- Many years of experience
- Some local notoriety
- Some professional visibility
- Some experience in dealing with the media
- Some great, heart-warming testimonials from clients you've cured

It's also important to be realistic about what they might see as weaknesses:

- No national visibility
- No relationships or associations through which to sell large numbers of books
- Not a widely known name in your professional circles
- No large preexisting audiences who would be likely to buy your book
- A solid but not elite education

### **Be Strategic**

If you're thinking strategically, there are ways to close the gaps to increase your national professional visibility and your ability to sell books. But they take some time. Like the therapist in our case study, you could:

- Investigate the possibility of doing a column for a local magazine or newspaper and then leverage that into a national publication. Popular local columns are sometimes picked up for syndication once they are established.
- Develop a workshop or seminar designed to help people use your approach to deal with and eliminate their phobias. Get your local news media to write about the seminar by inviting a reporter to attend it. Offer the seminars in as many venues as you can find and build a mailing list and audiences.
- Write a casebook detailing the treatment of your most difficult cases and publish it with a more academic publisher. An academic work has a small audience, but with an elite publisher, it can bring recognition for excellence.
- Write and publish more articles for journals or professional publications. Choose

the most prestigious and widely circulated. Offer to be their in-house expert on your topic or to write a monthly column.

- Get to know and consult with the most prominent psychologists in your region and nationally who are also known for treating phobias; if there are clinics or institutes devoted to treating profound fears, make your work and yourself known to them. Develop professional affiliations with those prestigious organizations and seek endorsements from their most prominent members. Offer to do a workshop or speech to these groups to present your work.
- Identify other more visible and prominent individuals or organizations that might be the source of endorsements for your work.

“Hold on here,” you say. “All this building up my profile could take years. What about the book I’ve set out to write?” The truth is that—without a strong author profile—your book is not likely to be published or to be published to so small an audience (by a press that simply can’t market it) that it will not get the visibility it deserves. All those people out there whom you wanted to help with your techniques and insights may not get the benefit of what you know if you don’t get a publisher with good marketing, sales, and distribution.

So taking a step back and being more strategic in your approach to building up your profile as an author—just as you invest time and energy in writing the best manuscript you can—makes all the difference. All this effort is likely to do a lot of good for your career, too. As you begin to see yourself as an actor on a bigger stage, you take on a larger role. You begin to take on the aura of “expert.” Agents and editors at the larger publishing houses are then more likely to begin to see the potential for “breaking out” your book. And the smaller publishers—who are often great homes for new writers—will be delighted to have a dynamic writer who knows what it takes to help them sell books.



### **Insider Insight** **Be the Real Thing**

Some new writers make the mistake of inflating their credentials and qualifications in a misguided effort to be the ideal author. Even though their profile is really quite modest, they hype their connections, their background and experience, and their ability to help sell their books. Or they unrealistically claim—with no supporting evidence—that they *know* that the world can’t wait for their book to appear, even though there’s nothing except their own passionate personal belief behind that claim.

Well-informed and successful first-time authors avoid this kind of inflation. They know that it’s most effective to present everything about themselves that’s relevant to their book project in a positive light—all the things we’ve mentioned so far. But they also know that agents and editors have an extremely good eye for inflated credentials or shaky claims. Agents and editors can easily differentiate the real thing from the rest.

### **A Model Book Proposal to Help You Write Yours**

Wiley is interested in book proposals for nonfiction works. When submitting a proposal to Wiley, you can expect early contact from the relevant editor to discuss your proposal with you. If your proposal is accepted by Wiley, you can expect an agreement with competitive royalty rates, feedback and advice by publishing professionals during the development stage, a high-quality production effort, and very effective marketing and sales results.

— Book Submission Guidelines, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

In this chapter we go right to the source for a look into the how, why, and what of a successful book proposal from a non-celebrity author. Although our sample represents a particular category of nonfiction—practical health advice—we’ve chosen it as a model because it is an admirable example of how a real first-time author was able to present herself and her ideas so well that a prominent New York publisher decided to acquire the book. Furthermore, you can adapt what you learn here to a wide variety of nonfiction genres, so it makes an excellent template.

When it comes to writing book proposals, nothing is entirely sacred and there are no absolutes. Although there is a more or less standard proposal format, agents, publishers, and the various advice books you may come across may call the sections by different names or divide them up in other ways.

The best proposals vary the standard format according to the type of book being sold and what it takes to communicate the book’s distinctive features and *raison d’être*. It bears repeating once again that the proposal has only one purpose: to convince a publisher to acquire and publish your book.

As you read through the model proposal, note that it focuses on selling the book idea by making three main points:

- My book has a market.
- My book is a great idea for that market.
- I am a credible author who can be promoted.

The point is not to suggest that you slavishly duplicate this proposal, but use it creatively: as a guide to create a proposal that reflects your unique style. Do take seriously the ideas that are presented in the comments, and adapt them to make your own proposal shine.

### **The Story of the Project**

Lisa Chavis was a pharmacist who noticed that her customers often consulted her about remedies for various ailments, advice about prescription drugs, and other health matters. In fact, some of them referred to her fondly as the “Drug Lady.” Then Lisa read in *USA Today* that the pharmacist was rated number one as the most trusted among all

professionals—medical and otherwise. Lisa answered many, many questions every day, and had developed a whole repertoire of practical, brief advice for all kind of common maladies. She thought she'd like to make that advice available to a much broader audience than just those lucky souls who came into her pharmacy. So she decided to write *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions*.

Her challenge in this proposal was to demonstrate that the book had solid content and an author who could drive the book into the marketplace. It took Lisa about a month or so to prepare the proposal that follows. She went back and forth with her agent to get the story of the book just right, refine her hook, and make the publishing opportunity as attractive as possible.

Her agent sent the proposal to editors at twelve major publishers: Broadway Books (an imprint of Doubleday, which has since become part of Random House), McGraw-Hill, St. Martin's Press, Simon & Schuster, Hyperion (a subsidiary of Disney), Crown (an imprint of Random House), Warner Books, HarperCollins, John Wiley & Sons, Viking/Penguin, Henry Holt, and Harmony Books (another imprint of Random House).

About three weeks after the initial submission, Lisa received two offers—all submitted as “best bids” by the editors in a sort of blind auction. She ended up signing a contract with St. Martin's Press. The other publishers declined for a variety of reasons that boiled down to two: (1) They either had a book too much like it already under contract, or (2) they thought it wasn't different enough from other already published books by bigger-name authors.

The book first came out in hardback in 2001, and was released in 2002 in mass-market paperback. The publisher felt that bringing the book out first in hardback would give it greater credibility, make sure it got reviewed (since paperback originals often do not get much review attention), and garner sales to libraries, which prefer hardbacks. Now that it is out in the small, cheaper paperback format, they feel they can sell it successfully not just to bookstores but also to other sales channels such as the “big box” stores (Costco, Wal-Mart) and to other outlets, such as pharmacies.

Lisa has since become a national spokesperson for Cepacol. Part of the reason they wanted her was because of her book—and she will be promoting it, with their blessing, along with their product. Her platform continues to develop.

YOU CAN WRITE AND SELL A NONFICTION BOOK!  
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**The Proposal:**

*Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions.*

**Proposal Table of Contents**

Executive Summary  
The Idea and the Market  
About the Author  
Author's Promotion Plan  
Competitive Analysis  
Book Table of Contents  
Specifications  
Chapter Overviews

## Executive Summary

*"For the tenth year in a row, the pharmacist is rated #1 as the most trusted professional."*

— CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, 1998

**A Closer Look:** This little quote—the epigraph—does a nice job of intriguing and setting context.

Have you ever wondered, "What did the doctor say about taking this medicine with food? Was it with or without? What will happen if I do it wrong?"

Or "What the heck is the difference between tablets, caplets, capsules, gel tabs, and gel caps? Which ones work faster—or is all that hype?"

Or "Does aspirin REALLY help prevent heart attacks?"

**Or "Can I self-treat a yeast infection or do I have to see the doctor AGAIN?"**

Or "My mother has been acting a little strange when she takes cold medicine with her heart medication. Is this something to be concerned about?"

Or "What is the best over-the-counter medicine for my poor baby's diaper rash? Nothing seems to work!"

If so, you're not the first. You may even have approached your pharmacist for an answer, since they are the more likely than other health professionals to be accessible to respond—especially to questions about common over-the-counter medications. (Unless of course, there is a long line of people in front and behind you at the pharmacy counter and your baby is screaming her head off. This is also usually the same time that your cold has you feeling as though you need to curl up in that plastic chair and sleep for a week.)

**A Closer Look:** These repeating questions pique the editor's interest and demonstrate the very wide range of questions that pharmacists are asked to answer every day. It also shows the author's low-key, charming sense of humor—a desirable quality in an advice book.

Now there's a convenient pharmacist-in-a-book for everyone who has ever asked a question about their prescription side effects, over-the-counter drugs, or how one drug might interact with another one. In *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions*, Lisa Chavis, practicing pharmacist and online consultant for drugstore.com, delivers honest, accurate information in a clear, easy-to-understand manner, with a touch of humor and a lot of practical advice.

**A Closer Look:** Here's the premise of the book combined with Lisa's credentials and ability to reach a broad audience through drugstore.com. (A thriving entity at the time this book was sold, this dot-com later went out of business. At the time, however, mentioning her association with it was a selling point.)

In a field crowded with medical reference and advice books, Chavis rises to the challenge of filling a very real and documented need. *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions* is intended to be the first in a series of books compiled from the thousands of actual questions gathered from Chavis's "Ask Your Pharmacist" magazine column as well as her extensive community pharmacy experience. She began the "Ask Your Pharmacist" service at drugstore.com in December of 1998 and has seen over 15,000 questions in three months! The demand from the public is incredibly high for accurate, easy-to-understand drug information and *Ask Your Pharmacist* provides a way to feed this huge hunger for information.

**A Closer Look:** This paragraph sets out more of the basis for the book—the questions the book answers come not just from one pharmacist's local experience, but from the thousands of questions asked by a national user base at drugstore.com. The editor sees that Lisa, more than any local pharmacist, has the ability to tap into what people all over the country want to know. It also demonstrates the immense demand that fueled the need for the book. Her hook is based in the fact that the book will address the most urgent medical questions (their urgency verified through her experiences at drugstore.com), and that someone who is part of the most trusted professional group in the United States will give solid advice.

### **The Idea and the Market**

As a pharmacist, Lisa Chavis has the distinction of being a member of the only healthcare profession to have extensive training and knowledge in both prescription and non-prescription medications. Both physicians and pharmacists know how a medicine works in the body, but rarely will you find a physician who knows the ingredients in the latest over-the-counter dandruff product or that new natural weight loss supplement advertised on TV last night.

From the general, "What is the difference between an antihistamine and a decongestant?" to the often embarrassing, "What is the best over-the-counter medicine for hemorrhoids?" *Ask Your Pharmacist* covers them all. From her experience as a patient drug information advocate and the thousands of questions she has fielded as the "Drug Lady" at [drugstore.com](http://drugstore.com), Lisa Chavis has recognized the tremendous need to address these common concerns.

#### *Who Will Ask Your Pharmacist Reach?*

Through the use of frequently interspersed "humor pills," Chavis demystifies the strange world behind the prescription counter where people in white coats take away little slips of paper and return with bottles of healing potions and pills. *Ask Your Pharmacist* will be appropriate for men and women of all ages. Teen readers will appreciate the frank answers to questions about subjects like first birth control, body changes, and eating disorders. New parents will find welcome information in the "Oh, Baby!" section of the book. Third Agers can learn a great deal about current medications and possible side effects as well as the safety concerns of new products on the market. It even includes a chapter on questions about healthy teeth and gums—a topic that no other general advice books cover but one that is the source of many of the questions Chavis fields every day.

**A Closer Look:** Here and throughout this section of the proposal, Lisa shows the breadth of her audience and how she intends to reach them—something for anyone who picks it up, easy-to-find groupings of questions with brief answers, extensive indexes to help locate information, appendixes to cover additional topics like "pharmacy speak." Such a broad audience is generally difficult to claim, but this is an advice book, and editors know that such books are generally bought by women looking for home reference works that will cover a range of the questions they will need to ask. It's important to these readers that an advice book be easy to use and comprehensive.

### The Question-and-Answer Format

The question-and-answer format in *Ask Your Pharmacist* is designed to be clear and highly accessible. For example, questions and answers follow this basic schema:

Q. "Are there any herbs that can treat impotence (male or female)? Just curious!"

The answer includes:

- A brief overview of impotence and its causes
- A discussion of types of herbs touted for use in treating it
- Recommendations on who should take herbals for impotence
- Explanation of advantages or disadvantages
- Other common concerns about using herbs for impotence

### Quick References and Indexes

One feature of this book is how Chavis handles the inevitable overlap of subject matter. Extensive cross-referencing among chapters and specialized indexes make it very easy to find exactly what readers are looking for. When reading about asthma in the children's chapter, for example, it is simple to find out where to go for more information about the asthma medicines Grandma is taking. Both condition and drug indexes allow the reader to find what they're looking for.

Specialized appendices include "The Family Medicine Cabinet" for home medical supplies, "The New Baby First Aid Kit" for expecting and new parents, and "The Natural Medicine Chest" for those who want a sampling of natural remedies. The "Essential Resources" appendix provides the names, numbers and Internet addresses for organizations every home should have, including (among others) poison control, asthma support, breast cancer, Alzheimer's, Food and Drug Administration, and medication identification.

There is also an extended glossary called "Making Sense of Pharmacy Speak" that helps the reader with common language in medicine/pharmaceuticals as well as information on basic care. While medical terms are clearly and concisely explained in the body of the chapters, this is a more detailed glossary at the end of the book for those who want additional information.

More Than Just Answers ... Recommendations

Since consumers often want recommendations as well as information, Lisa Chavis also makes careful product recommendations when appropriate. Her recommendations are based on scientific studies or past customer experience, not on any others' vested interests. As practicing pharmacists do every day, she takes the trust instilled in her by her customers very seriously with all product recommendations. From her on-line experience, she knows what a difference having an objective and trusted advisor can mean to people. As one man who had contacted her at drugstore.com said, "Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions so completely. My wife has been taking this medication for some time, but we were just wondering about possible side effects. You've eased our minds."

**A Closer Look:** By indicating that she will make careful recommendations as well as offer more generic advice, Lisa adds another desirable feature to her book. Even though she will have to watch liability and other legal issues (and the publisher did have the book reviewed by its legal counsel), this makes the book more realistic and, arguably, more helpful to consumers.

According to a study done by the American Pharmaceutical Association, 81% of consumers want more information about their medications. As "The Drug Lady," Lisa Chavis not only provides those answers, but she does so with a humorous slant that makes being healthy seem a lot less arduous. The health trends of today and tomorrow require people to take a more active role in their health and the medications they are taking—*Ask Your Pharmacist* allows people to do just that.

Just the Beginning..

Although this proposal only concerns *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions*, Chavis already contemplates two additional titles, *Ask Your Pharmacist about Women's Health* and *Ask Your Pharmacist about Natural and Alternative Medicine*. Given the segmentation in the health market, it makes sense to consider these specialized titles, if this first book takes off, as we fully expect that it will. Other possible titles might include *Ask Your Pharmacist about Men's Health*, *Ask Your Pharmacist about Teen Health*, and *Ask Your Pharmacist about Medical Information on the Internet*. But first things first. The task now is to establish Chavis's *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions* and her persona as the "The Drug Lady" as trusted resources.

**A Closer Look:** Although it is sometimes helpful to mention additional projects, publishers do not always find this attractive. They know that, with a first-time author, they must see very strong sales in order to do a follow-up book. So it's good that Lisa has other book ideas, but even after publication St. Martin's was cautious. She has signed her second book with another major New York publisher.

### About The Author

**Lisa Chavis, R.Ph., fondly remembers a favorite customer who would often come into her pharmacy and ask, "Hey, Drug Lady, could you tell me something about this medicine? The docs don't often have the time and I trust what you tell me." The name "Drug Lady" stuck and Lisa has been dispensing invaluable information along with medicines ever since. America trusts its pharmacists more than any other profession, and Lisa Chavis provides the people with their own "Drug Lady" to give them the information they want about their medications in a pleasant, understandable, and accessible manner.**

Chavis began the "Ask Your Pharmacist" service at the on-line drugstore.com after writing health content and her own "Ask Your Pharmacist" column in *Pathways To Wellness* magazine. Now tens of thousands of questions later, Lisa can truly say that she is an expert on what people ask their pharmacists. She knows what the typical consumer wants and needs. Lisa brings the most trusted professional out of the pharmacy and right into consumers' homes.

As an advocate for clear, understandable patient drug information, Lisa realizes that the pharmacist's duty is much greater than simply putting a label on a prescription. Advice about prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, or drug interactions from "The Drug Lady" can mean the difference between a patient getting better quickly or becoming much, much worse.

Lisa Chavis spends her time as a Registered Pharmacist and Clinical Pharmacy Specialist at drugstore.com in Seattle, Washington, researching and answering consumer medication questions. She also writes pharmacy editorial content and consumer buying guides for the drugstore.com Health Resource Center and is featured weekly as a ThirdAge.com "Ask The Experts" panelist for women's health and menopause. When not on her computer, Lisa is an avid camper, whale watcher, reader, and golfer.

Her educational background includes a BA in Biology and Chemistry from the College of Charleston, as well as a BS in Pharmacy from the Medical University of South Carolina. Chavis will be pursuing her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Washington in 2000. Lisa is also active in the American Pharmaceutical Association and has had the opportunity to speak about the importance of quality patient counseling and appropriate drug information.

More information on Chavis can be found on the Internet, where she is featured by a drugstore.com partner, ThirdAge.com. The direct link is:

<http://www.thirdage.com/health/women/experts/chavis.html>. Every week a new writing sample can be viewed on the Third Age web

site, where Chavis writes for the “Ask The Experts” column:  
<http://www.thirdage.com/health/women/experts/>

**A Closer Look:** Lisa indicates that her strengths as the author for this book derive from (1) her educational background as a pharmacist (she did receive her doctorate before the book was published), and (2) her experience in writing this same kind of content for two websites and her contact with the public and their concerns through those online venues. She had also been a practicing pharmacist and so had developed a way of speaking to people (as the “Drug Lady”) in a friendly, light way that the editor could see would be valuable in writing an advice book.

### **Author's Promotion Plan**

Lisa Chavis fully intends to use her connections as "The Drug Lady" for the drugstore.com Internet pharmacy for maximum exposure and possible co-branding, licensure, and showcasing. Chavis has been approached by the Managing Editor at drugstore.com to consider co-branding the product with drugstore.com. This would include placing the book conspicuously on the home page and drug index page of the web site—and those two pages have already seen more than 2 million unique visitors since March 1999.

Chavis plans to leverage the new partnership of Rite Aid Pharmacy and General Nutrition Centers with drugstore.com. Rite Aid has 3,800 stores in the US and GNC has 2,200. Drugstore.com will be the exclusive on-line distribution for both companies. It is Lisa's goal, in conjunction with the publisher's marketing team, to pursue bulk sales opportunities and to set up appearances in as many of these stores as possible. The 250,000 pharmacy retail outlets in the US could also be a sales channel; Chavis is willing to consult with the publisher on how to reach them through direct marketing.

Because Lisa Chavis works so closely with several other large on-line entities, she has already begun trading "Ask Your Expert" expertise for book plugs. She writes a weekly column for ThirdAge.com with a circulation of over 75,000 and has already received dozens of requests for information about *Ask Your Pharmacist*. Women.com has also approached Chavis for consulting and content with the promise that any work from her books would be duly credited. Women.com has a current readership of over 200,000.

Chavis has spoken with the editorial department of another of drugstore.com's partners, Amazon.com, and with the strategic relationships already in place, could ensure maximum consumer visibility for the *Ask Your Pharmacist* books.

Lisa Chavis also hosts an "Ask Your Pharmacist" forum on AOL and is able to make product/book recommendations in exchange for this service. She also plans on-line internet promotions through her own AskYourPharmacist.org and AskYourPharmacist.net (both currently in development).

After meeting with the Vice President of Industry Relations and Marketing from the American Pharmaceutical Association, Lisa found that their plans for 2000 included a large advertising budget for "branding" the pharmacist in the public eye as the most important and accessible healthcare provider. She has opened the doors for a possible co-branding of the *Ask Your Pharmacist* books with the American Pharmaceutical Association (membership 53,000).

**A Closer Look:** It is unfortunate, but of course not Lisa's fault, that most of the online promotional opportunities she anticipated had evaporated by the time the book came out. Nevertheless, she has still worked diligently to cultivate contacts with Rite-Aid and other pharmacy chains that she developed while at drugstore.com. Some of them have paid off, but not as handsomely as expected. You can see, however, why the range of contacts, promotions, and plans that Lisa outlined were attractive to the editors who made offers on the book. At that time, online was the key to success, and Lisa definitely had great potential there.

## Competitive Analysis

The health and medicine categories in bookstores are some of the most heavily trafficked by consumers searching for more information and greater control over their own healthcare decisions. By taking 250 of the questions people most often ask their pharmacists, Lisa Chavis has provided a comprehensive reference sure to be welcome in the homes of anyone concerned about making positive health decisions. And given her experience at **drugstore.com**, Lisa certainly has an excellent idea of just what questions people are asking.

**A Closer Look:** This section was by far the most challenging. There is a huge amount of competition in the health advice category, much of it driven by authors with extensive national platforms (that is, visibility and ability to reach large audiences through, for example, newspaper columns). Lisa had to demonstrate that she truly had something distinctive and different and that she would be able to help drive sales. There was so much competition, in fact, that she divided it up into categories and analyzed each one separately, positioning her book carefully within each one.

The books that could potentially compete with *Ask Your Pharmacist* can be divided into three major categories:

### 1. Encyclopedic Reference

*The Complete Guide to Prescription & Non-Prescription Drugs 1999* by H. Winter Griffith (Perigee, 1998). This comprehensive, 1104-page reference covers drug listings, dosage and usage information, and side effects. Because most consumers have questions that cover more than just the facts about a particular drug, *Ask Your Pharmacist* goes one step further and incorporates additional information that responds to these commonly asked questions.

*The Complete Guide to Pills* by Brenda Adderly (Ballantine Books, 1997). This has an impressive 1700 entries, with all generic and brand name drugs listed alphabetically. The 1123-page book does not address questions or concerns about these medications, nor does it talk about over-the-counter preparations.

*Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions* not only classifies the most common medications, interactions, and side effects like these encyclopedic references, but also provides clear and relevant information that the general public can actually use. It does not attempt to be encyclopedic but rather more selective and more consciously targeted to consumers' concerns.

## 2. General Pharmacy

*The People's Pharmacy* by Joe and Teresa Graedon (St. Martin's Press, 1998). This book is one of the first to appeal directly to the average consumer by answering questions about prescription and over-the-counter medications. While it is often difficult to find the answer to a specific question due to indexing shortcomings, the consumer-oriented approach obviously appeals to the over 3 million readers who have bought this book. *Ask Your Pharmacist* uses a similar "up close and personal" tone, inviting and reaffirming readers' trust. "The Drug Lady" is a figure that the consumer can identify with, much like that of the Graedons, who have become a popular fixture through syndication. *Ask Your Pharmacist* is also written by a registered pharmacist, while neither of the Graedon's has ever dispensed a prescription or counseled a patient from behind a pharmacy counter.

***The Alternative Pharmacy: Break the Drug Cycle With Safe Natural Treatments for 200 Everyday Ailments* by Lynne Paige Walker and Ellen Hodgson Brown (Prentice Hall Trade, 1998). This book is an excellent example of a good presentation of natural alternatives for both prescription and non-prescription drugs. From colds to insomnia, this book goes into clear detail about alternative options. *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions* intersperses commonly asked questions about these same most popular herbal treatments and supplements but goes beyond it to cover a wider range of medications.**

## 3. Question and Answer

Several other popular volumes also share the question and answer format used in *Ask Your Pharmacist*:

*1001 Health-Care Questions Women Ask* (Baker Book House, 1998). This guide gives medical advice and innovations in obstetrics and gynecology, told from a Christian physician's point of view. Written in a scientifically sophisticated manner, it gives much more diagnostic detail than a general family medicine guide. *Ask Your Pharmacist* covers women's health but also many other family health issues with a medically accurate but more accessible style.

The same question and answer format can be seen in *Ask Dr. Weil* (Fawcett Books, 1998). Dr. Weil opens our eyes to the body's ability to heal itself. This book is marketed in combination with the "Ask Dr. Weil" web site - a top rated internet site. With its focus only on natural medicine, it lacks the breadth that *Ask Your Pharmacist* provides.

At approximately 450 pages, *Ask Your Pharmacist: Answers to the 250 Most Common Questions* is more streamlined and pays

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greater attention to making an array of highly relevant information accessible to—and enjoyable for—the health-conscious reader.

**A Closer Look:** Over and over, this section emphasized the focus on consumer concerns, the selection of content (over comprehensiveness), and the author's current, extensive knowledge of the questions on people's minds.

## *Book Table of Contents*

**A Closer Look:** Note how the chapter titles are lively and expressive—and a little bit humorous. Even in an advice book, chapter titles need to be inviting as well as clear.

**Chapter 1: Sneezes, Sniffles, and Aches: Taking Care of Allergies, Colds, and Coughs**  
**Chapter 2: Oh, My Aching Body: Managing Pain**  
**Chapter 3: It's Red! It Itches! It Burns! Treating Skin Conditions**  
**Chapter 4: Could You, Er, Tell Me, Um...: Embarrassing Questions**  
**Chapter 5: Oh, Baby! Children's Good Health**  
**Chapter 6: Like, What Do I Do About This? : Teen-Age Good Health**  
**Chapter 7: Direct From the Planet Venus: Women's Good Health**  
**Chapter 8: Direct From the Planet Mars: Men's Good Health**  
**Chapter 9: Stand Up for Those Tootsies: Legs, Feet and Toes**  
**Chapter 10: Show Those Pearly Whites: Taking Care of Teeth and Gums**  
**Chapter 11: From the Neck Up: Taking Care of Your Ears, Eyes, Lips, and Head**  
**Chapter 12: Doing What Comes Naturally: Alternative and Complementary Medications**  
**Chapter 13: It's Your Body - Your Money - Your Choices: Managing Your Health Care**  
**Chapter 14: An Ounce of Prevention and Cure: Avoiding and Treating the Big Ones**

Glossary: Making Sense of "Pharmacy-Speak"

**Appendix 1: Family Medicine Cabinet: Essentials for Every Home**  
*Appendix 2: New Baby First Aid Kit: What to Have on Board before the Baby Arrives*

**Appendix 3: The Natural Medicine Chest for the Home**  
Appendix 4: Essential Resources Every Home Should Have

Notes and References  
Index 1: Prescription Drug Index  
Index 2: Over-The-Counter Drug Index  
Index 3: Conditions Index  
Index 4: General Index

## Specifications

**Length:** 450 book pages; 112m 500 words

**Format:** Probably trade paperback or as the publisher thinks best

**Completion date:** Ready for editing now.

## Chapter Overviews

**A Closer Look:** This section begins by describing general features that apply across chapters as well as the indexes and appendixes—an important part of the reference information the book offers. You'll also see that the summaries display the humor, casual writing style, and approachability that she wanted to be hallmarks of the book. Each summary also lists specific topics to be covered so that the editors could judge whether it was comprehensive enough (remember that one of its features is that it is more selective rather than encyclopedic).

Every chapter showcases a clear, concise question-and-answer format, with extensive cross-referencing among the chapters. Medical terms are highlighted and can easily be looked up in the **glossary** for more detailed explanations. A **prescription drug index, over-the-counter drug index,** and a **general index** are also available for quick information reference.

"**Humor pills,**" humorous anecdotes from real medical situations, are interspersed among the questions to enliven the text.

### CHAPTER 1: SNEEZES, SNIFFLES, AND ACHES: TAKING CARE OF ALLERGIES, COLDS, AND COUGHS

Okay, be honest. How many people really know the difference between an antihistamine and a decongestant? What about what to take when you're itching like crazy from a poison ivy rash? There are many types of allergies, from the sneezing kind to the itching type. The chapter clearly explains the differences in food allergies, drug allergies, as well as the allergies to dust bunnies and the cat.

#### **Specific Topics:**

- Antihistamine or decongestant?
- Decongestant dangers
- Over-the-counter antihistamines
- Prescription antihistamines
- Food Allergies
- Drug allergies
- Latex allergies
- Hay fever
- Eye allergies
- The allergy/asthma connection
- Difference between cold, allergy, or flu
- Allergic reactions
- Anaphylaxis and shock
- Hives
- Epi-pens and bee sting injections
- Latest allergy treatments - prescriptions and OTCs

- Cortisone creams and allergies
- Benadryl for allergic itching
- Coughs
- Sore throats
- Congestion
- Combination cold/flu remedies
- Bronchitis
- Natural cold remedies
- Echinacea for cold prevention
- Zinc for sore throats
- Vitamin C
- Flu shots and sprays
- Smoking and hoarseness

## **CHAPTER 2: OH, MY ACHING BODY: MANAGING PAIN**

Often patients who are in chronic pain are afraid or embarrassed to ask questions about their medications for fear of being seen as “addicted.” This chapter explains common differences in pain medications and helps clarify some misconceptions about powerful pain relievers. Chronic conditions like fibromyalgia and shingles are discussed.

### **Specific Topics:**

- Pain relievers
- Narcotics vs. non-narcotics
- Fibromyalgia
- Shingles

## **CHAPTER 3: IT’S RED! IT ITCHES! IT BURNS! TREATING SKIN CONDITIONS**

Many, many thousands of dollars are spent each year by those looking for a “cure” for their chronic skin condition. These consumers are desperately searching for a clear discussion of what works, what doesn’t, and what not to waste their money on. This chapter details everything from contact dermatitis to the most commonly self-treated skin conditions – eczema and psoriasis. Acne vulgaris and acne rosacea are also identified and clarified, with honest recommendations about how to clear them up.

### **Specific Topics:**

- Eczema
- Psoriasis
- Contact dermatitis
- Sunscreens and SPF’s
- Acne rosacea
- Acne vulgaris
- Topical antibiotics
- Poison ivy, oak and sumac
- Aloe and burns
- Retin-A® and wrinkles

#### **CHAPTER 4: COULD YOU, ER, TELL ME, UM ... : EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS**

EVERYONE can relate to this chapter. Who do you ask about that awful gas problem? Your best friend? Not if you want to keep your friend! Here the reader can find the answers to those "sensitive" questions that plague each and every one of us at one time or another.

##### **Specific Topics:**

- Hemorrhoids
- Passing gas
- Excessive hair
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Crab lice
- Scabies
- Urinary incontinence
- Dandruff

#### **CHAPTER 5: OH, BABY! : CHILDREN'S GOOD HEALTH**

From "What is the best product to use for diaper rash?" to "When is a trip to the doctor for an antibiotic necessary?" the Drug Lady answers all of those questions pertaining to the "little ones." She provides product recommendations, invaluable medical information, and many quick answers that will ease the minds of busy parents.

##### **Specific Topics:**

- Poison proofing/child proofing the home
- Giving medications
- Antibiotics and when to use them needed or not
- Liquid antibiotics
- Children's dosing
- Pedialyte and children's electrolytes
- Best pain medicine for kids
- Best tasting medicines
- Immunizations
- Baby gas and colic
- Diarrhea
- Lactose/soy intolerance
- Diaper rash
- Earaches
- Head lice
- Chicken pox
- Jaundice
- ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Fever
- Asthma inhalers
- Picky eating
- Sunscreens
- Bee stings
- Pinworms
- Cradle cap
- Nausea
- Impetigo

- Infant colds and stuffy noses
- Bug sprays and DEET

## **CHAPTER 6: LIKE, WHAT DO I DO ABOUT THIS? TEEN-AGE GOOD HEALTH**

The Drug Lady gives frank answers to the questions teens ask the most. She gives information that can be used to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and to know when to seek outside help for possible eating disorders. Her clear guides for both teen boys and girls who are undergoing body changes are both informative and lightly humorous.

### **Specific Topics:**

- Body odor
- Muscle building
- Weight gain
- Eating disorders
- Calcium for teens
- Laxatives and weight loss
- Soda pop and the caffeine controversy
- Teen acne
- Body changes
- Birth control
- Condoms
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Genital herpes
- Genital warts

## **CHAPTER 7: DIRECT FROM THE PLANET VENUS: WOMEN'S GOOD HEALTH**

This chapter follows a woman from her first menstrual period to her last and beyond. The often-complex workings of the female body are always a source of unanswered questions. In this chapter, a woman can learn what to expect from her first mammogram, how to treat PMS naturally, and exactly how much folic acid is necessary for healthy baby development.

### **Specific Topics:**

- Pregnancy
- Breast feeding and medicines
- Folic acid and prenatal vitamins
- Morning sickness
- Over-the-counter medications and pregnancy
- Avoiding a monthly menstrual period
- Heavy or painful menstruation
- Periods that don't stop
- Endometriosis
- PMS
- Menopause
- Estrogen replacement therapy
- Osteoporosis
- Hot flashes
- Birth control

- “Morning After” Pill
- Antibiotics and birth control
- Condoms and nonoxyl-9
- Missed birth control pills
- Fertility drugs
- Infertility
- Metronidazole and alcohol
- Anemia
- Medical tests
- Mammograms
- Breast self-exam
- Breast cancer
- Abnormal pap smear
- Bladder infections
- Bacterial vaginosis
- Candidiasis
- Yeast infections
- Vaginal lubrication
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Painful intercourse

#### CHAPTER 8: DIRECT FROM THE PLANET MARS: MEN’S GOOD HEALTH

Most men won’t stop to ask directions, so how many are going to take the time to find someone to answer their health and sexuality related questions? In this chapter the Drug Lady provides the answers about hair loss medications, routine medical tests and what to expect from Viagra®.

##### **Specific Topics:**

- Routine medical tests
- Muscle building
- Birth control
- Hair loss
- Infertility
- Benign prostatic hypertrophy
- Viagra ®
- Herbal Viagra
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Premature ejaculation
- Vitamin E
- Excessive Sweating
- Prostate cancer

#### CHAPTER 9: STAND UP FOR THOSE TOOTSIES: LEGS, FEET, AND TOES

Is there a sure cure for toenail fungus? What about leg cramps? When these legs that we depend on for so much start acting up - who do you talk to? The Drug Lady, of course! She has the answers for the questions about bunions, blisters, and even a bit about bandages for when the blisters burst.

##### **Specific Topics:**

- Nail fungus
- Athlete’s foot
- Diabetic foot disorders
- Ingrown toenails
- Corns and calluses
- Bunions
- Blisters

- Plantar warts
- Plantar fasciitis
- Sprains and strains
- Intermittent claudication
- Varicose veins
- Restless leg syndrome
- Gout
- Leg cramps
- Muscle spasms
- Bandages, splints, and braces

**CHAPTER 10: SHOW THOSE PEARLY WHITES: TAKING CARE OF TEETH AND GUMS**

Brushing our teeth is something that we all do everyday (supposedly), but how many of us really know which toothpaste is the best? Is fluoride important when its already in your water? This chapter covers the safety of tooth whiteners, children's fluoride supplements, getting kids to brush, and emergency tooth repair kits.

**Specific Topics:**

- Gingivitis and folic acid
- Best tastes in toothpastes
- Kids and brushing
- Children's fluoride supplements
- Emergency tooth repair
- Tooth whiteners

**CHAPTER 11: FROM THE NECK UP: TAKING CARE OF YOUR EARS, EYES, LIPS, AND HEAD**

This chapter divides the head into four distinct regions (eyes, mouth/lips, head, and ears) and covers the most often-asked questions about such conditions as pink eye, canker sores, ringing ears, non-prescription reading glasses, and massive tension headaches. The Drug Lady gives a humorous account of how to properly use eye drops and eye ointments that readers won't want to miss.

**Specific Topics:**

- Cold sore and fever blisters
- Chapstick addictions
- Canker sores
- Headaches
- TMJ
- Migraines
- Allergic conjunctivitis
- Pink eye
- Glaucoma
- Cataracts
- Dry eyes
- Eye drops and ointments
- Tinnitus
- Flying and ear problems
- Ear infections
- Water in the ear
- Non-prescription reading glasses

**CHAPTER 12: DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY: ALTERNATIVE AND  
COMPLEMENTARY MEDICATIONS**

The American public is constantly bombarded with natural and alternative products that are advertised as being everything from the next “fountain of youth” to a “sure cure for cancer.” With her extensive experience in alternative medicine and herbal products, Chavis gives straightforward information and cuts through the hype for her readers. She explains the basics of the RDA and what it means to you, as well as the best selling herbs for helping you remember where you last put your keys.

**Specific Topics:**

- FDA labeling of natural supplements
- RDA and what that means to you
- Ginkgo Biloba
- Kava Kava
- Wild yam creams
- St. John’s Wort
- Valerian
- Milk Thistle
- Estrogen from plant sources
- Ginseng

## **CHAPTER 13: IT'S YOUR BODY, YOUR MONEY, YOUR CHOICES : MANAGING YOUR HEALTH CARE**

Typical consumers of medical reference material are looking for a way to take part in their own health care and well being. They want to know the best way to save money on medications, the difference between generics vs. brand name medicines, and how to best deal with the managed care monster. Common drug interactions are also discussed in this chapter.

### **Specific Topics:**

- Prescription medicine storage
- Getting the most for your money
- Managed care
- Generic vs. brand names
- Over-the-counter vs. prescription
- Availability of generics
- Common drug interactions
- Empty stomach and medications
- Capsules - caplets - geltabs
- Controlled substances

## **CHAPTER 14: AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION AND CURE: AVOIDING AND TREATING THE BIG ONES**

Chavis has compiled the most commonly asked questions regarding specific major diseases or conditions and put them together in an easily accessible format. Each disease, condition, or interest is accompanied by several commonly asked questions with overviews, medication information, and product recommendations where appropriate.

### **AIDS**

- AIDS and HIV
- Protease inhibitors

### **Arthritis**

- Glucosamine and Chondroitin
- COX-2 inhibitors
- Over-the-counter analgesics for aspirin-sensitive patients
- Repairing knee damage

## **Asthma**

- Using an asthma inhaler?
- Side effects of asthma medicines
- Spacers for asthma inhalers
- Exercise-induced asthma
- New products for treating asthma
- "Normal" initial asthma medications

## **Depression**

- S.A.D.
- Non-drowsy anti-depressants

## Diabetes

- Testing blood sugar
- Injecting insulin through clothes
- Types of insulin
- Sugar-free products
- Vision and glaucoma screening
- Calibrating a diabetic blood sugar-testing machine

## **Heart Disease and Heart Medicine**

- Forms of nitroglycerin
- Aspirin and heart attack prevention
- Orthostatic hypotension
- Warning signs of heart disease
- Coumadin and no aspirin
- Home blood pressure machines

## **High Cholesterol**

- Fiber vs. drugs
- Cholesterol lowering drugs
- Niacin

## **Insomnia**

- Natural medicines for sleep
- Best sleeping pill on the market
- Nicotine addiction
- Best method of quitting
- Zyban®

## **Stomach Problems**

- Heartburn pain

- GERD
- Stomach ulcers
- Fastest antacid combinations

#### **Stress**

- Natural remedies
- Stress and heart attacks
- Anxiety Attacks

#### **Strokes**

- TIAs or transient ischemic attacks (mini-strokes)
- Aspirin or Tylenol® for stroke prevention

#### **Weight Loss**

- Over-the-counter diet pills
- "Fat-blockers"
- Olestra®.
- Prescription vs. over-the-counter weight loss products
- Fastest way to lose weight

#### **GLOSSARY** - Making Sense of "Pharmacy-Speak"

APPENDIX 1: **Family Medicine Cabinet - Essentials for Every Home**

APPENDIX 2: New Baby First Aid Kit - What to Have on Board before the Baby Arrives

APPENDIX 3: **The Natural Medicine Chest for the Home**

APPENDIX 4: **Essential Resources** - *Poison Control, National Asthma Support, Breast Cancer Information, AIDS information, FDA information, Drug Identification, Drug Interactions, and many more.*

#### NOTES

References

**INDEX 1 : Prescription Drugs**

**INDEX 2: Over-The-Counter Drugs**

INDEX 3: Conditions

INDEX 4: General Index

# The Thomas Nelson Guide To Writing A Winning Book Proposal By Michael S. Hyatt

*Even if you have previously had a book published you'll find tremendous value in preparing a formal book proposal. It will go a long way toward helping you to clarify your own thinking about the subject before you begin the actual writing process.*

If there's one thing a publisher hates to see, it's a manuscript. Surprised? Most authors are. The fact is that publishers return most manuscripts to the author without ever having read them. Publishers simply do not have the time or staff to wade through the enormous number of manuscripts they receive from hopeful authors.

What a publisher really wants is a *book proposal*. Although you should include at least two sample chapters in your proposal, you should not finish writing the entire manuscript until the acquiring editor has approved the book's basic premise and structure, and the publisher has accepted the project for publication.

At Thomas Nelson Publishers we strongly believe in the creative interaction between author and editor. Out of this process come the best manuscripts. You'll find that most other publishers feel this way, too. Consequently, we want to give the author as much input as early in the writing process as possible. A book proposal gives us that opportunity.

So then, how do you prepare a good book proposal? From our experience, in addition to a captivating cover letter, it needs to include four distinct elements:

1. Title Page
2. Proposal Overview
3. Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis
4. Two Sample Chapters

This kind of proposal will accomplish two things. First of all, it will help us better evaluate your book idea and decide whether or not we want to pursue the project further. Second, even if you have previously had a book published, you'll find tremendous value in preparing a formal book proposal. It will go a long way toward helping you to clarify your own thinking about the subject before you get too involved in the actual writing process.

In order to illustrate these principles, let's create a book proposal. Be sure to keep in mind, though, that this is only a hypothetical book proposal—an example. It is not an absolute formula to be followed blindly. (Also, if you want to write a fiction book proposal, the format will be slightly different.) Though all good proposals mirror its basic content, each bears its own distinctive flavor as well. Now with that in mind, let's get to work.

For the sake of illustration, let's assume that you are a Christian financial planner. Through the years, you've observed that many of your clients' financial problems are the result of never having received adequate training in money management during childhood. You're convinced that if Christian parents would do a better job of training in this area, it would spare them—and their children—a tremendous amount of grief later in life.

Because of your conviction, you've worked hard to train your own children. You've even developed a seminar around this theme and taught it in a few churches. The response has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic.

Before long, several of your friends encourage you to write a book on the subject. Initially, you're flattered, and soon you begin to give the idea serious consideration. But where do you start? A book is such an enormous project! And how do you go about getting it published? The answer to both questions is a written *book proposal*.

Before you actually begin writing a book, you have to decide two things: what you want to say, and to whom you want to say it. In other words, you must determine the book's content and identify the book's audience. Once you've determined these things, it's time to go to work on the book's title.

### **Create the Title Page**

We can't overemphasize the importance of developing a strong, catchy title. If the editor isn't "hooked" by the title, he will never open your proposal to see what is inside. The purpose of the working title is to focus your thinking as you develop the book idea. The working title should clearly encapsulate the book's premise. It might state the promise to the reader if he reads the book. It might even state the consequences if he doesn't. Sometimes the title will also include a subtitle. Let's consider the hypothetical book we introduced. After a little work, you come up with the following working title: *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*

After a little more thought, you add the following subtitle:  
*What Every Parent Should Know*

This title clearly encapsulates the book's premise and communicates the promise to the reader.

Once you've come up with a title you need to remember that a working title is just that: a working title. It's tentative. You may decide to revise it later. Sometimes, the publisher will want to revise it. In any event, its purpose now is simply to focus the development of your book idea and to clearly—and quickly—communicate your book's basic idea.

Type the title neatly centered on one page. You should enter the subtitle on a separate line, directly under the title. Also, type the date you are submitting the proposal. Finally, type your name, address, and phone numbers near the bottom of the page. If you want, you can add an e-mail address.

## **Write a Proposal Overview**

The proposal overview consists of three distinct sections:

1. The Content (What is the book about?)
2. The Market (Who will buy this book?)
3. The Author (Why are you the best possible author for this book?)

It should be no more than three to five single-spaced pages in length.

### **1. The Content**

Once an editor flips past the title page, he then wants to know what the book is about. You can best communicate this by stating the book's premise, setting forth a few other details about your book.

*Premise.* The premise is a two- or three-sentence statement of the book's basic concept or thesis. Usually, it identifies the need and then proposes a solution. Let's return to the hypothetical book. What's the need you're trying to address? Isn't it the lack of training in money management that children are receiving from their parents? Or, to turn it around a bit, isn't it the failure of parents to teach their children how to become financially responsible that concerns you? After a little work, you come up with the following premise:

Most children will leave their homes upon graduation from high school with little—if any—training in money management. As a result, they are likely to experience many years of struggle and frustration. The purpose of this book is to equip parents to teach their children the attitudes, principles and skills they need in order to enjoy a life free of financial hassle and heartache.

Not Bad. You've identified the problem, and you've said exactly what the book will do to solve it. And you've done it in three sentences! Developing a good premise is one of the most difficult challenges of good writing. It is, however, absolutely vital. Without it, your writing will lack clarity and focus. With it, your writing is more likely to be strong and forceful. It is well worth investing the time necessary to write a strong premise.

*Unique Selling Proposition.* Now that you have a premise, you need to focus on how the reader will benefit from reading your book. This is what publishers often refer to as the book's "take away" value—what the reader can expect to "take away" after reading

the book. It is sometimes referred to as the book's unique selling proposition, or USP. This proposition clearly identifies what the reader will gain by reading the book (i.e., the book's benefits) and how the book will deliver it (i.e., the book's features). The simplest way to arrive at a solid USP is to complete this sentence (fill in the information between the brackets):

If consumers in the target market purchase and read [name of book], then they will [list the book's benefits], because the book will [list the book's features].

Now let's turn to our hypothetical book project, and create a compelling USP: If consumers in the target market purchase and read *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*, then they will:

- Understand what's at stake in the financial training of their children.
- Be able to pass on the most important attitudes, principles, and skills children must acquire before they can gain mastery over the money.
- Learn effective ways of communicating to children about money—with examples and metaphors children can understand.

Because the book will:

- Provide specific examples of parents who have succeeded.
- Outline a simple technique for money management.
- Build parents' confidence in their ability to teach their own children.

This kind of unique selling proposition clearly communicates to the editor reviewing your proposal that you know what you want the reader to get out of the book.

*Overview.* Once you have a solid premise and a clearly stated USP, you need to amplify them through the development of a general outline. At this point, you don't need a detailed, chapter-by-chapter synopsis (this will come later). You just need to be able to communicate the book's overall flow. Your goal is to give the editor reviewing your proposal the "big picture."

As a general rule, a nonfiction book should include at least three sections:

- (1) description of the problem or need, (2) presentation of the solution, and (3) amplification of the solution through concrete applications.

As you develop the proposal for *Helping Your Children become Financially Responsible*, you need to identify the major sections. After looking back through your seminar notes, you come up with five:

- Part I: The Road to Frustration and Misery
- Part II: Five Attitudes Your Children Must Acquire
- Part III: Five Principles Your Children Must Learn

Part IV: Three Skills Your Children Must Master  
Part V: The Envelope System of Cash Management

Of course you will also need an introduction and a conclusion. But the three basic parts are there: Part I will describe the problem or need, Parts II–IV will present the solution, and Part V will amplify the solution through a concrete application. Now that you have the major sections, you need to add a brief annotation to each, explaining in general terms what you intend to cover (again, see Figures 4 and 5).

*Manuscript.* Under this section, you need to cover the other details related to the manuscript. These would include the following:

1. Manuscript status: Where does the manuscript stand? Have you begun writing? How many chapters are finished?

2. Special features: Are there charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs, etc.?

3. Anticipated number of manuscript pages or words: Generally speaking, each chapter should run between eighteen and twenty-two double-spaced manuscript pages and should be typed in a pica (10-pitch) font. In order to arrive at the approximate length of the manuscript, simply multiply the number of chapters by what you think will be your average number of pages per chapter. If you prefer, you can also state the length of the manuscript in number of words. Depending on the font you use, the typical double-spaced manuscript page will contain approximately 500 to 600 words. Most modern “word processors” have a word count feature that will automatically give you a total.

4. Anticipated manuscript completion date: When do you anticipate completing the manuscript? In other words, when will it be ready to submit to your editor? You might want to set a goal of so many pages or words per day, week, or month. Make sure you set a realistic date.

## **2. The Market**

Once you’ve determined the book’s content, it’s time to identify the book’s audience. To a large degree, you’ve already done this, especially in developing the premise. However, in this part of the proposal, you need to be more specific. A good definition of the audience includes both its characteristics and its motivation. Let’s look at these one at a time.

**Characteristics.** This is sometimes called the demographic description. The term *demographics* refers to the external, objective characteristics of your audience. It includes such things as gender, age, education-level, socio-economic status, geographic location (if any), religious affiliations, and so forth. In other words, you must determine if the book is for men, women, or both. Is it for Christians or a more general audience (Christians and non-Christians)? What is the reader’s average age, income, political

affiliation, theological orientation, and educational background? Try to describe the characteristics of the typical prospect. Let's take another look at our hypothetical book, *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*. The first thing you'll want to consider is the kind of people who have already shown an interest in your message orally, you'll have to describe the kind of people you think would be interested.) After jotting a few ideas down on paper, you come up with the following demographic description:

The audience for this book will be middle- to upper-middle-class Christian parents with at least a high school education who have children ages five through fifteen.

All you need now is a psycho-graphic description to put "meat on the bones." In other words, you need to make your description three-dimensional.

*Motivations.* This is sometimes called the *psychographic* description. The term psychographics refers to the study of the motivations that lead people to consider your product and ultimately purchase it. While demographics involve the external, objective characteristics of your audience, psychographics involve the internal, subjective characteristics of your audience. Demographics tells you who and psychographics tells you why. For example, why would the reader want to buy your book? What are his frustrations? What motivates him? What does he expect to get out of the book?

Again, let's look at our hypothetical book. What needs and frustrations are characteristic of the target audience? You've already said that the child has a need to learn money management. But the child is not going to be the one buying the book; his parents are.

What are their needs? After a little thought you come up with this:

The audience for this book is made up of parents who have experienced frustration in their own lives as it relates to money management and, because they love their children, would like to spare them the same grief.

Now by combining these two definitions—the demographic and the psychographic—you will give the publisher a concrete idea of the audience you have in mind. But just as important, it will be an immense help to you as you begin writing the book. Specifically, it will guide you in your selection of appropriate vocabulary and illustrations.

*Affinity Groups.* The term *affinity* refers to "natural attraction or feeling of kinship." An affinity group is a body of people who will likely have some attraction to your book based on their behavioral history. Generally, you will think of and list several affinity groups. For example, if you were writing a book on marriage, a natural affinity group would be *Focus on the Family* radio listeners. If you were writing a book on starting a new business, a possible affinity group would be subscribers to *Income Opportunities* magazine.

Now consider our hypothetical book. What groups of people will likely be attracted to your message? After a little thought, you come up with the following:

1. Listeners of Larry Burkett's *Money Management* radio show.
2. Listeners of Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace* radio show.
3. Listeners of James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* radio show.
4. Subscribers of *Money* magazine.
5. Subscribers of *Parenting* magazine.
6. Readers of financial books.
7. People who have a professional relationship with a stockbroker.
8. People who have a professional relationship with a financial planner.
9. Financial counselors.

Notice that each group listed is identified by objective behavior. These are groups that (a) will be most likely to respond positively to your book's message and (b) the publisher can get to via one marketing vehicle or another.

*Competition.* Before you commit a great deal of time and energy to writing a book, you need to know what else is available. Why waste your time writing a book that has already been written? As Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, used to say, "Don't do anything that others can do or will do when there is so much of importance to be done that others cannot or will not do."

You may need to go to a bookstore and simply browse the shelves for books that address your subject or are in some way similar to the one you are proposing. Or you may want to flip through several current catalogs of the major publishers. It might even be a good idea to scan the subject and title listings in *Books in Print*.

The issue here is twofold:

1. Is there a proven market for this kind of book, and if so,
2. How does this book differ from other books like it? Differentiating your book from others is critically important.

Now that you've described the book and its audience, you need to take a little time and help the publisher get acquainted with you, the author.

### **3. The Author**

Assuming the editor is interested in the content and believes that there might, in fact, be a market, the next thing he wants to know is why you are qualified to write it and what you are willing to do to help promote it.

*Background.* Describe your background, particularly as it relates to the subject of your book. Tell the publisher why you feel you are qualified to write the book. You may want to include a brief resume. Your academic credentials may be important, but you may have other qualifications that are just as relevant. If so, be sure to mention them.

*Previous Writing.* Tell the publisher about your previous writing. Have you written a book or magazine article before? If so, what was it, who published it, and how did it do? Let the publisher know that samples of your written work are available upon request.

If you've never written before, that's fine, too; there's a first time for everyone. Just make sure you give specific reasons why you are the person to write the book.

*Personal Marketing.* A publisher cannot possibly do everything necessary to make your book successful. And most won't even try. Increasingly, publishers want to know what you can do to help promote the book. Consider the following:

- What important contacts do you have that might be willing to endorse the book?
- Are you presently speaking on the subject matter contained in the book? Are you willing to speak more? How many times per year? In what types of venues (e.g., churches, conferences, corporate seminars, etc.)?
- Are you planning to write articles based on the book?
- Would you be willing to create a Web site?
- Do you have any regular media opportunities? Television or radio appearances? Even a regular show?

### **Develop a Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis**

The purpose of a chapter-by-chapter synopsis or annotated outline is to give you (and the editor) an overview of the book's structure. It should include section titles, chapter titles, and a two-or three-sentence description under each chapter title of what will be covered in that particular chapter (see Figure 8 on p. 9). In addition, this will convince the editor that you know where you are going—and how you are going to get there.

You should pay particular attention to chapter titles. Like the book's overall title, each chapter title must be interesting and intriguing. In today's environment, the mass media have negatively affected the attention span of the reading public. People rarely read a book in one sitting. Every time they pick the book back up, the next chapter title has to convince them to keep reading. Therefore, it is extremely important that your chapter titles "pull" the reader back into the book.

### **Write Two Sample Chapters**

If you've done your work well, the editor is now genuinely interested in your proposal. There is only one question remaining: Can this author really write? The only way to demonstrate this is to include two sample chapters. These chapters in the book don't have to be the first two in the book; and they don't even have to be consecutive. But they must be *good*. This is your audition for the publishing company and everything must go without a hitch.

I don't have space to tell you everything you need to know about writing, but here are a few quick pointers:

- Each chapter should be at least eighteen and no more than twenty-two double-spaced pages (approximately 9,000 to 15,000 words.)
- Begin each chapter with an attention-getting anecdote. Readers love stories, and there is no better way to pull the reader into the content of your chapter than with one.
- Break up the chapter using sub-heads. A good rule of thumb is to use at least one subhead every two pages.
- If possible, also include an anecdote or illustration somewhere under each subhead.
- Use active voice whenever possible. If you don't know the difference between active and passive voice, get a good grammar book and spend some time studying it.
- Carefully check the spelling and grammar of each chapter. Your word processor will likely give you a good start. But if these areas aren't your strong suit, hire a copy editor who can do it for you. This will cost you a little money, but it will be well worth the investment.

### **A Few Words of Caution**

Remember, your proposal may be the only opportunity you will have to sell yourself and your concept to the publisher. Make every word count. Make certain that you come across well. First impressions make for lasting impressions. Therefore, take careful note of the following do's and don'ts:

- Do be polite, respectful, and friendly; don't make demands or launch into diatribes.
- Do make your proposal stylistically lucid, clear, and direct; don't write with lurid ornateness, showing off your voluminous vocabulary.
- Do make certain that the proposal is neatly typed and systematically organized; don't send the publisher a faded printout from a second-rate dot-matrix printer, a shoebox of scraps, or a collection of random notes you've accumulated over the last ten years.
- Do make sure all your facts and figures, names and dates, people and places, are accurately noted; don't force the publisher to sift the wheat from the chaff.
- Do engage in a little market research, sending your proposal only to publishers whose backlist and editorial objectives match the predisposition of your project; don't simply mail out a query to every book house listed in the latest edition of *Writer's Market*. Also don't send simultaneous submissions to any house unless you note this in a cover letter.

### **Conclusion**

Preparing a book proposal like the one outlined here will require a considerable investment of time and thought on your part. However, this kind of investment will pay substantial dividends later when you begin the actual process of writing. More important, perhaps, it will go a long way toward actually improving your chances of getting published. Who knows? The next book you read may be your own!

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# Writing A Book Proposal

## By Peter Rubie

(From *Telling the Story: How to Write and Sell Narrative Nonfiction* by Peter Rubie  
HarperCollins, Fall 2003)

The proposal is a description of, and sample of a proposed book. It's primarily a sales and marketing tool – for you, and for your book. It needs to be focused, accompanied by supporting materials, and above all dynamic. You need to impress the editor and the sales and marketing staff, make them feel they must have your book at all costs – but do it without being too cute, or arrogantly obnoxious, or obviously trying to make a silk purse (the proposal) out of a sow's ear (the subject of the proposal.)

You should start with these four thoughts in mind:

- What's the book about?
- What's so important and special about this book? Why should a publisher want to publish it? (Aren't there enough books out there already without adding another to the pile?)
- Why are you the best person to write this book?
- Who's the core audience for the book, and why will they care about it?

Jim Srodes said, “The book proposal is a separate item from the book. You can't be too enthusiastic in a book proposal, you can't gush enough to an agent or a prospective editor because if you don't show your enthusiasm why should they. I [once] lost a sale because an agent was diffident with what I thought was a great proposal. It doesn't really matter, (all you agents close your ears now and all you editors also) if it looks anything like the final book. Sell the book, then write the book.”

### Proposals not Manuscripts

Almost all nonfiction books are sold on proposal. It's unusual for a nonfiction book to be written on spec and then sold, and for that reason crafting a proposal requires a skill that is separate from, but not independent of your ability to write the book. You may think that the work you've begun on your book should be enough to sell it – but publishing, as you've probably gleaned by now, is a cooperative venture between author and publisher, and your job as author is to provide an editor with the ammunition he needs, at least initially, to get this book into the marketplace and sell the hell out of it.

The upside is that the more you become involved in this process, the more control you can exert on how well – or how poorly – you'll eventually be published. A word of warning: the more you rely on your belief that your skill as a writer alone should be enough to get you that book contract, the more you put yourself in the position of being just another pretty face in a lineup of many other pretty faces. If you refuse to take the time to practice your audition pieces and do the equivalent of step forward from the line

to sing, dance, act and otherwise demonstrate what you have to offer, you are unlikely to successfully grasp the brass ring – be it a role in a play or movie, or a book contract.

This may sound harsh, because many authors tend to struggle with the concept and principles of writing a book proposal. It seems unnatural, false, a con job in some way. Nothing could be further from the truth. No proposal is, or should be cast in stone, but you would not consider building a house without blueprints, or prepare a particular dish without a recipe that you can refer to from time to time in order to keep yourself focused and on track. So a book proposal, in part, is the blueprint of the book.

There's a common argument I hear from authors who are unhappy about beefing up a usually meager proposal for their book. "How can I commit to paper something I won't know about until I've done the research? It'll obviously change as I start writing it, so won't I be misleading the editor? Cheating her in some way?"

Editors hear this all the time, and it's not something they worry about unduly. Most editors expect a book to change as you write it. Books are, after all, organic creatures. Editors form and maintain a confidence in a writer based on the strength of his or her proposal regardless of difficulties the author may have during the writing process. An editor anticipates problems. It's part of their job, as it is part of the agent's to help fix these problems. However, a book will improve from the original proposed idea, not deviate completely. If you get into trouble you always have your blueprint to fall back on. In a worst case scenario, you and your agent and the editor can discuss writing another book, and abandoning the one they bought on proposal. But it will be a joint decision, based on discussion of a better, more commercial idea and the difficulties you're having with this book, not a unilateral decision on your part; and the new book will still need to have an outline and description for you to work from.

What's more, the better the proposal, the more likely you are to get a higher royalty advance. The reason is obvious: the more something is an unknown quantity, and therefore more of a gamble on a publisher's behalf, the smaller the amount of money they are going to risk on the project, if they decide to risk any money at all.

Publishers long for authors who write well, and who have strong concepts that the author knows what to do with. They will pay much more for that author, than for one who may have more innate talent, but who is less confident about what he selling and his ability to produce it. That is not to suggest you need to fake it – it is to suggest that you get enough of a grasp on your material that you become so confident of your mastery of it and its appeal, editors immediately pick up on that fact. When an editor picks up a proposal and is immediately drawn in, you can bet your bottom dollar he realizes that other editors seeing that same proposal will no doubt feel the same way.

Brendan Cahill, then a senior editor at Grove Atlantic Press, was asked how it was possible for a writer to create an effective proposal that would lead to a book contract. ". . . there are essential things that need to be in any proposal," he said. "Generally it's got to be about a topic that's broad enough for a general readership. The writer needs to be, if

not expert, then well informed about the given topic and to have done the initial thought work, legwork, that it takes to be able to render that experience in a thoughtful and intelligent way. And also to have the narrative techniques, skills, and be able to express the story in a way that will appeal to readers. There are books out there on how to write a book proposal that hone in on the specifics, but generally, once you have some sort of journalistic bylines under your belt, use the people who you know: agents, friends, friends of friends; and try to get your proposal into the hands of the right people who will be interested in it. Look at the books of the writers you admire, see who publishes them, find out who their editors and agents are. Find them and try to pitch them.”

The basic philosophy behind writing a book proposal is to describe to the editor the book you want to write, and provide the editor with sufficient facts and figures that will give her enough ammunition at an editorial board meeting to convince colleagues in both editorial, and sales and marketing, that this proposed book is not only a quality piece of work, it will make money for the publishing company.

What I’m going to do is outline some basic principles you should apply to writing a book proposal. Obviously, each proposal should convey the uniqueness of the particular book it’s representing so there is no formula that can or should be applied.

One of the things writing the proposal can do is help a writer focus and organize a book idea. It should have the form of a story or narrative, and be between 20-40 pages, no longer, depending on the sample material included.

A commonly accepted structure for a nonfiction book proposal broadly follows this outline:

Page 1. Title Page. Name of book, name and contact info for the author

Page 2: A one paragraph, in-a-nutshell description of the project or idea. That is, the project in a hook format.

Page 3: A one to two page overview of the project in a dynamic narrative style.

Page 5: A marketing analysis of perhaps half a page, explaining who the audience is for the book, and why the book will appeal to them.

Page 6: A brief description of competing books, with emphasis on recent commercially successful books in the field (if there are any), and why your book fills a need not currently filled in this field.

Page 7: A half page biography of the writer(s), emphasizing writing experience, any expertise on the proposed subject and why he/she/they are the best people to write that book.

Page 8: A Table of Contents (TOC) that is quite literally a list of chapters and their subheadings. (In other words, an at-a-glance description of the book.)

Page 9: A half page-one page narrative description of each chapter listed in the TOC.

Page 18 (approx): A sample chapter or two from the book.

Accompanying material such as reviews of previous books, supporting documentation for the book, copies of photos that might be used in the book etc.

Make sure that every page of the proposal is bylined and tagged in some fashion and easily recognizable with continuous numbering (except for the first page). If an editorial assistant drops the pages by accident he or she should be easily able to reconstruct the proposal. Keep pictures and graphics to a minimum and don't include them if the quality is poor.

This structure can be divided into two broad categories: Features and Benefits. Simply put, Features are concerned with what an object is; Benefits are concerned with why you need it. Many writers put together proposals filled with features, but they forget to include any of the benefits. To be effective, a proposal should be balanced with both.

### **The Features part of a Proposal. (The “What” of your Proposal).**

*The Cover Letter.* This should be brief, warm, and probably contain the Hook, ideally a one or two sentence summation of your story and why it's so compelling. It should include your address and phone numbers, relevant information such as that you're a prize winning writer, a member of this or that group, an expert in the topic you propose, that you were referred by or mentored by someone significant, whatever. Mention the book's title and what kind of book it is, then let the proposal do the rest of the work.

Always include a stamped self addressed envelop (SASE).

*The Title Page.* Center your title and the subtitle of the book proposal. Under that add your name, and an address, email, and telephone number, voice and fax if you have that. Make yourself easy to reach. Does your answering machine work? Is there a professional message on the machine when an editor or agent does get through? All these things count.

*The Table of Contents.* A TOC provides an at-a-glance guide to the book's content and organization, and perhaps a glimpse of the wit or seriousness you intend to bring to the project through your subtitling of each listed chapter. (E.g., Chapter 1: I am miserable and broke; Chapter 2: I meet Elvis, the man who will change my life; Chapter 3: I attend astronaut school, Chapter 4: Elvis is accused of murdering my sister etc.) At least 75 percent of a book proposal's success lies in its organization. You may have a great idea, but if you present it poorly it shows not only a poor writing ability, but also poor thought processes. In nonfiction, beyond the originality of the idea in question, what you're offering is a logical exploration and understanding of the importance of your subject. Agents and editors look for books that are logical, well written, and organized. It's a good idea to work on the TOC early on. As you develop the proposal you'll find you'll continually revise it, but it will provide an excellent overall map to the project while you're working, as well as a guide to its final form when completed.

*Chapter by Chapter Descriptions.* Once you've nailed down the overall structure of your book in the TOC, you should write at least a couple of paragraphs, if not more, expanding

on what you plan to cover in each chapter. The key here, as throughout the proposal, is your ability to write succinctly, yet dynamically about your subject.

*Sample Chapters.* This is pretty self explanatory. A nonfiction book needs a mixture of narrative, emotion, and logic to work well. It doesn't matter what chapters you include, but you should aim at about a sample of 15-20 pages. No more than two chapters need to be included. If you use partial chapters make sure everyone knows this is not the complete version of the chapter.

*Author Biography.* Who you are is important in selling the project. Why are you the best person to write this book? It's less true in narrative nonfiction, but it's worth bearing in mind that it's better to be an expert on something, or work in collaboration with one, than not because you will be competing with others who are experts even if their books aren't very good. Establishing your credibility may mean getting articles published in magazines on the subject you propose before you start querying editors and agents with your book idea. Try and write this bio in the third person, rather than first person, unless you have a life experience that makes your view particularly valid.

### **The Benefits Sections of the Proposal. (The “Why” of your Proposal.)**

*The Hook Overview.* The Hook should be a one or two sentence in-a-nutshell description of the book that nails it. (In fiction, this can often be determined by thinking “What if . . .” or “Suppose . . .”) It helps the editor sell the book to colleagues in 30 seconds or less. Down the line it may end up helping the sales rep sell your book to a bookstore buyer. In general, make sure that as in your overview your passion and interest for your subject comes through. An effective second person voice can work here: E.g., “Have you ever thought about how you would survive if you were attacked by modern day pirates and set adrift at sea? Joe Bloggs didn't, until it was almost too late. And it cost him his family, and a leg.”

*The Larger Overview.* This overview is an expansion of the first. If, after hearing the Hook, colleagues say, “That sounds interesting, tell us more,” you can now provide the editor with broad facts and figures (if applicable) and a general overview of the project. This overview is a much stronger sales tool than your manuscript because it allows you to state not only what the book is about (Features), but also why it's important (Benefits).

Here are some general things to think about in an overview:

- What's the book about?
- Why is there a need for this book? What's the hole in a genre or topic that this book can fill?
- Who's going to read it?
- How will your readers be entertained by this book? State your case as dramatically as you can without being overly sensational. Startle us from the outset and make us consider your topic with fresh eyes.
- How is your book different from others in the field?

- Why are you the best person to write this book?
- How long will the manuscript be, and how long will it take you to write it?

Don't answer these questions with hype or rhetoric. Nobody's interested in your opinion on how great this book idea is, what you have to do is convince us with solid content summed up in a paragraph of two.

Close your overview with something that sums up the benefits or merits of the book, reminding the reader of the book's importance.

Try and do all this in no more than 4 double spaced pages, and ideally two.

*Marketing Analysis.* In this section you need to explain who the audience is for your book. That's is, who's going to go into a store and plunk down \$7 for a paperback (or \$14 for a trade paperback, or \$25 for a hardcover) version of your book. What evidence can you offer that your assessment is accurate? Use facts and figures you have researched here. How many people belong to organizations or subscribe to magazines that deal with this topic? What other books out there have proven there is a successful and eager audience for your proposed book? Why will these people still be interested in reading about your topic in two years time, or five years time (what publishers call a book's backlist life). Give us statistics about groups who may be interested in buying copies of the book. It won't help to be sloppy or too general in your assessment. If you have experience or knowledge in selling, marketing or promoting mention that here. Do you have a seminar that you take around from place to place, or do you lecture to groups of people regularly? What can you do to translate your experiences into book sales? Are you a member of organizations who will help publicize your book, and ideally, buy lots of copies? Could you help sell bulk quantities of your book to organizations that might want to give them away as gifts to members? Do you have a connection to well known people who might endorse your book and help increase book sales that way? A strong marketing plan accompanying a book proposal will go a long way in helping to sell it.

*Competing Books.* What I mean is a list of a half dozen or so of the most successful and most recent books published in the field or on the topic you propose to write about. Nothing breeds success like success, particularly if you have a new take on a successful idea. When listing the books give title, author, year of publication, publisher, a one or two sentence description and a line pointing out the difference between your book and the published book. Every competing book gives you an opportunity to make a new point about your book idea, so take advantage of the opportunity. Use the library, and the Internet for your research. Browse the bookstores in your area; befriend bookstore owners; chat with book people in general. If there's nothing in the field to compare with your book, make certain you convince editors and agents that there really is a market for the book, and you're just the first person to have spotted a "hole" and decided to fill it.

## Some Closing Thoughts

Here are some closing thoughts on writing a book proposal:

It's worth remembering that on average it can take perhaps two years from a nonfiction book contract being signed to the book appearing on the shelves, so your book idea must be appealing enough that in two or three years time, people will still be excited about it.

Your proposal should be tightly written, with style and verve. It should offer just enough information in an accessible and hopefully entertaining manner to convince an editor you know your subject and can write well about it. It should also be well organized in a logical progression of ideas and facts, and ideally reflect the tone and style of the final book.

Research the competing books section as soon as possible because what you discover may save you a lot of work, disappointment, and aggravation if there's no viable market for the book for one reason or another. (E.g., Someone with better credentials has just published a book exactly like the one you propose.)

Another book recently published on your subject may not necessarily be a fatal blow to your book idea, because you may find once you've read the published book that the author treats the subject differently from the way you intend to treat it. It is very useful, however, to apprise editors and agents of the fact that you know this other book is in the marketplace and why it won't be a problem for your book idea. If an editor, in ignorance of this other book because you failed to mention it in your proposal, puts forward your idea in an editorial meeting and someone around the table says, "But so-and-so just published a book exactly like this," that editor will have been made to look foolish and ill-prepared. Your chances of getting published just plummeted.

Propose one idea at a time. Don't inundate an editor or agent with a shopping list of ideas at one time, on the basis of, "If you don't like this, then try that." It's unprofessional, and shows a lack of commitment and passion to the project.

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In *Telling the Story* author and literary agent Peter Rubie, a former BBC Radio and Fleet Street journalist, provides guidance and practical advice on how best to meld careful journalistic research with narrative writing techniques. Filled with insights and interviews with authors, agents, and editors such as Mark Bowden, Jon Krakauer, Jonathan Galassi (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), Peter Gethers (Random House), George Gibson (Walker & Co.), and Jack Hart (*The Oregonian*), this is the essential guide to writing this hot new genre.