

به نام خدا

اصول نگارش کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

محمد آرمند

دانشیار رشته برنامه ریزی درسی

عضو هیات علمی سازمان مطالعه و تدوین کتب علوم انسانی دانشگاهها (سمت)

mohammadarmand@yahoo.com



dr.m.armand



۰۹۱۲۵۳۵۶۳۴۰

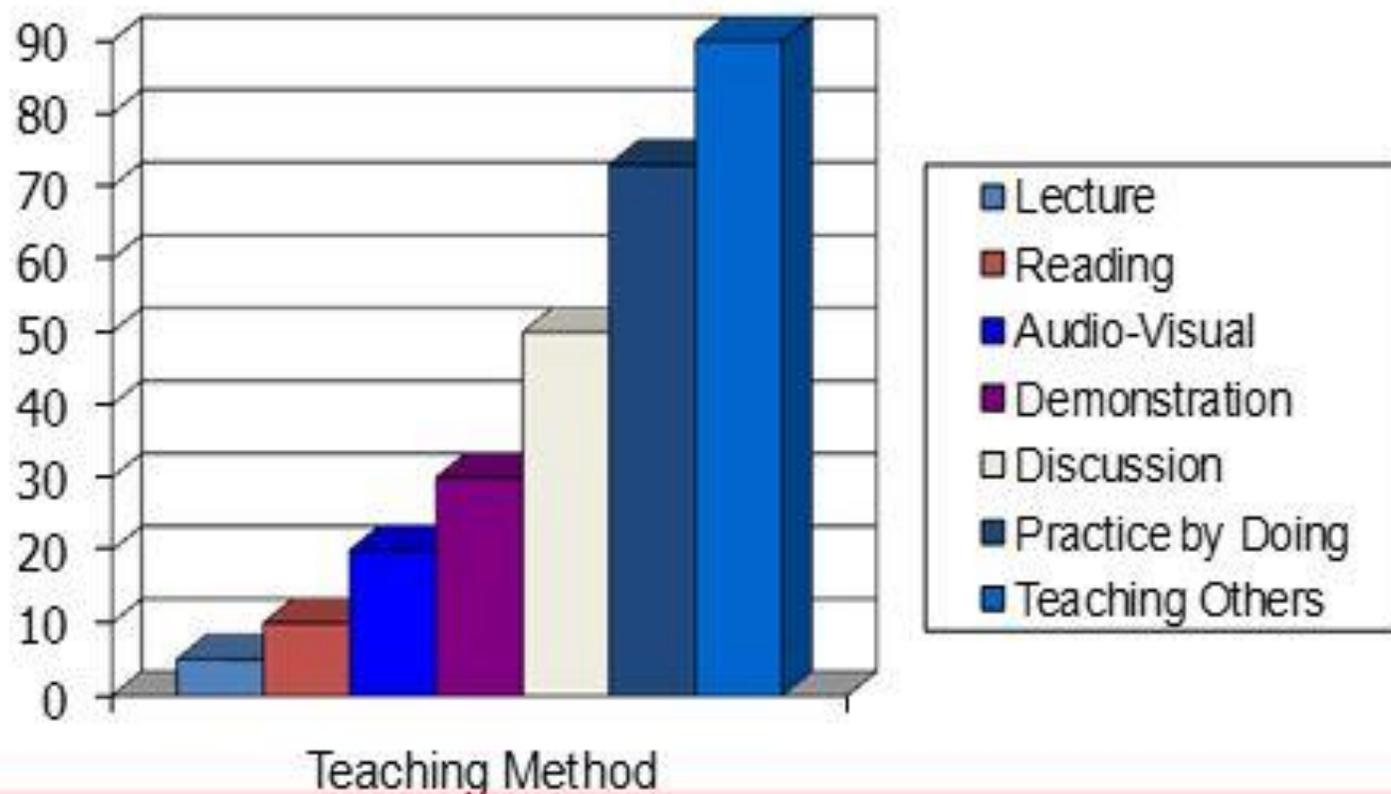


Retention of Information

After 24 hours, what percent of information is retained by students in a lecture environment?

- a. 5%
- b. 10%
- c. 20%
- d. 40%
- e. 50%

Passive vs. Active Learning





Words of Wisdom

- When I hear, I *forget*.
- When I hear and see, I *remember* a little.
- When I hear, see, and ask questions about it or discuss it, I begin to *understand*.
- When I hear, see, discuss, and **do**, I *acquire* knowledge and skill.

نوع کتاب

تصنيف

تأليف

ترجمه

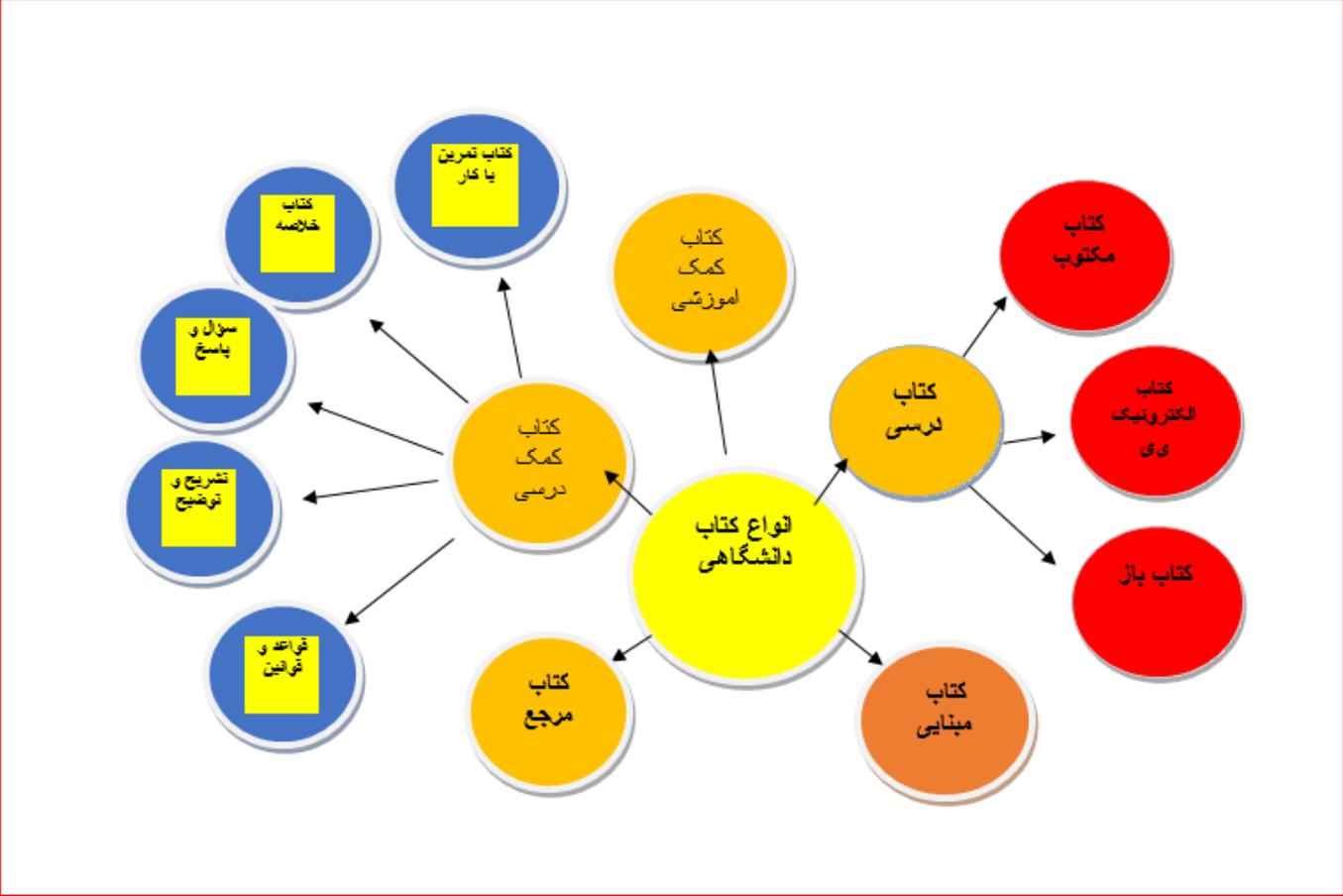
تأليف و ترجمه

ترجمه و اقتباس

- به سرپرستی - زیر نظر

- به کوشش، به اهتمام

تفاوت کتاب با گزارش پژوهش



مفهوم کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

درس معین

دوره معین

حجم معین

مخاطبان مشخص

نقش آموزشی

چرا کتاب تالیف کنیم

- تسلط علمی
- وظیفه و خدمت علمی
- تجربه خود را به دیگران منتقل کنیم
- رزومه قوی تر داشته باشیم
- کمک به ارتقا
- کسب اعتبار و شهرت بالاتر
- کسب درآمد

کتاب های گروه مطالعات کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

نمایش ۱ تا ۱۰ مورد از کل ۱۰ مورد.



مقدمه‌ای بر شیوه طراحی و تألیف کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

کد کتاب: ۱۶۰۷

نویسنده (ها): دکتر محمد آرمند، دکتر حسن ملکی
Mohammad Armand



عملکرد گرافیک در کتابهای درسی دانشگاهی

کد کتاب: ۱۶۹۵

نویسنده (ها): دکتر کامران افشار مهاجر
Kamran Afshar
Mohajer, PhD



پژوهش و نگارش کتاب درسی

کد کتاب: ۱۸۰۵

نویسنده (ها): جان میک
Jaon Mikk
مترجم (ها): شهروز فرزادانده، دکتر راسین



گرافیک در خدمت یادگیری: دستورالعمل‌هایی علمی برای برنامه‌ریزی طراحی و ارزیابی نمودهای بصری

کد کتاب: ۱۸۶۷

نویسنده (ها): روت

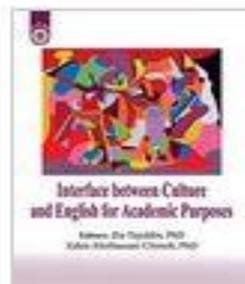


مقدمه‌ای بر تفکر نقادانه و آموزش آن

ناشر: سمت

کد کتاب: ۲۳۷۲

نویسنده (ها): دکتر ناصر آلائیانی



فرهنگ در کتاب‌های انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی

ناشر: سمت

کد کتاب: ۲۴۴۹

نویسنده (ها): دکتر ضیاء



نحوه نگارش و تهیه کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

کد کتاب: ۱۰۲۷

نویسنده (ها): مری ال لیونکا

مترجم (ها): مریم جابر محمد حسان، دکتر ناصر



کتاب درسی دانشگاهی (۱): ساختار و ویژگیها

کد کتاب: ۱۰۶۰

نویسنده (ها): جمعی از مؤلفان

قیمت: ۱۵۵۰۰ ریال



کتاب درسی دانشگاهی (۲): فناوری اطلاعات و ارزشیابی

کد کتاب: ۱۰۶۱

نویسنده (ها): جمعی از مؤلفان

قیمت: ۳۵۰۰۰ ریال



نگارش و تهیه ملحقات کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

کد کتاب: ۱۰۰۲

نویسنده (ها): مری ال لیونکا

Mery Ellen Lepionka
مترجم (ها): محمد حسان



گرافیک در خدمت یادگیری

دستورالعمل‌هایی علمی برای برنامه‌ریزی،
طراحی و ارزیابی نمودهای بصری
در مواد آموزشی



روت کالوین کلارک و چاپتالاینز
ترجمه: مجید اخگر



مرکز اسناد و کتابخانه ملی جمهوری اسلامی ایران

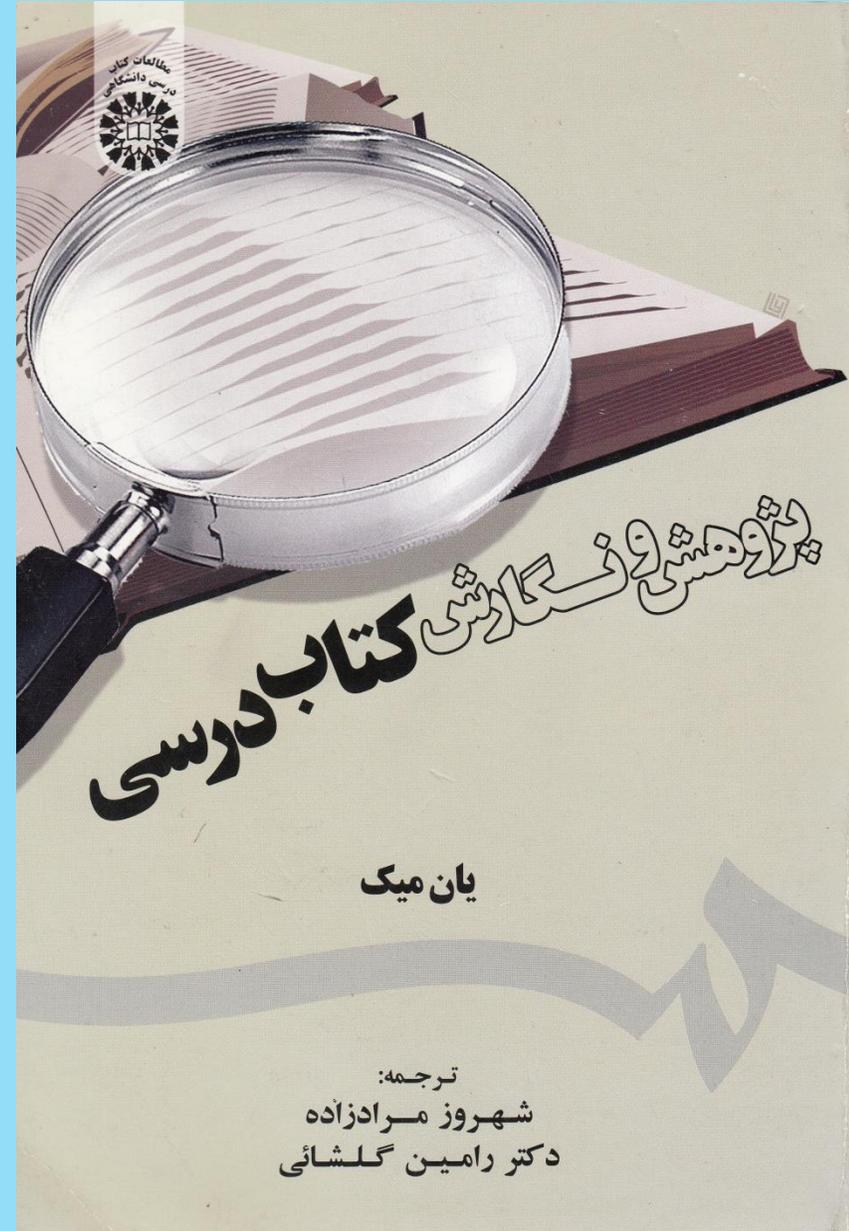
نصوبه نگارش و تهیه کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

مری الن لپیونکا

مریم چاپرا،
مجید شیام‌تار،
علی‌اصغر رستمی،
زهرا ابوالحسنی چیمه،
ملیحه صابری نجف‌آبادی،
آفاق مایدینی پروچردی،
فاطمه لشکری‌نژاد،

زهر نظر
محمد آرمنند
فریبرز مجیدی





پژوهشی و نگارشی کتاب‌درسی

یان میک

ترجمه:
شهرزاد مرادزاده
دکتر رامین گلشانی

علوم تربیتی



مقدمه‌ای بر
شیوه طراحی و تألیف کتاب
درسی دانشگاهی

دکتر محمد آرمنند
دکتر حسن ملکی





نگارش و تهیه ملحقات کتاب درسی دانشگاهی

مری الن لیونکا

ترجمه
محمد حامد شاهمرادی، آفاق عابدینی
مهدی بهنیا فر و فاطمه لشکری نژاد





عملکرد
گرافیک
در کتابهای
درسی
دانشگاهی

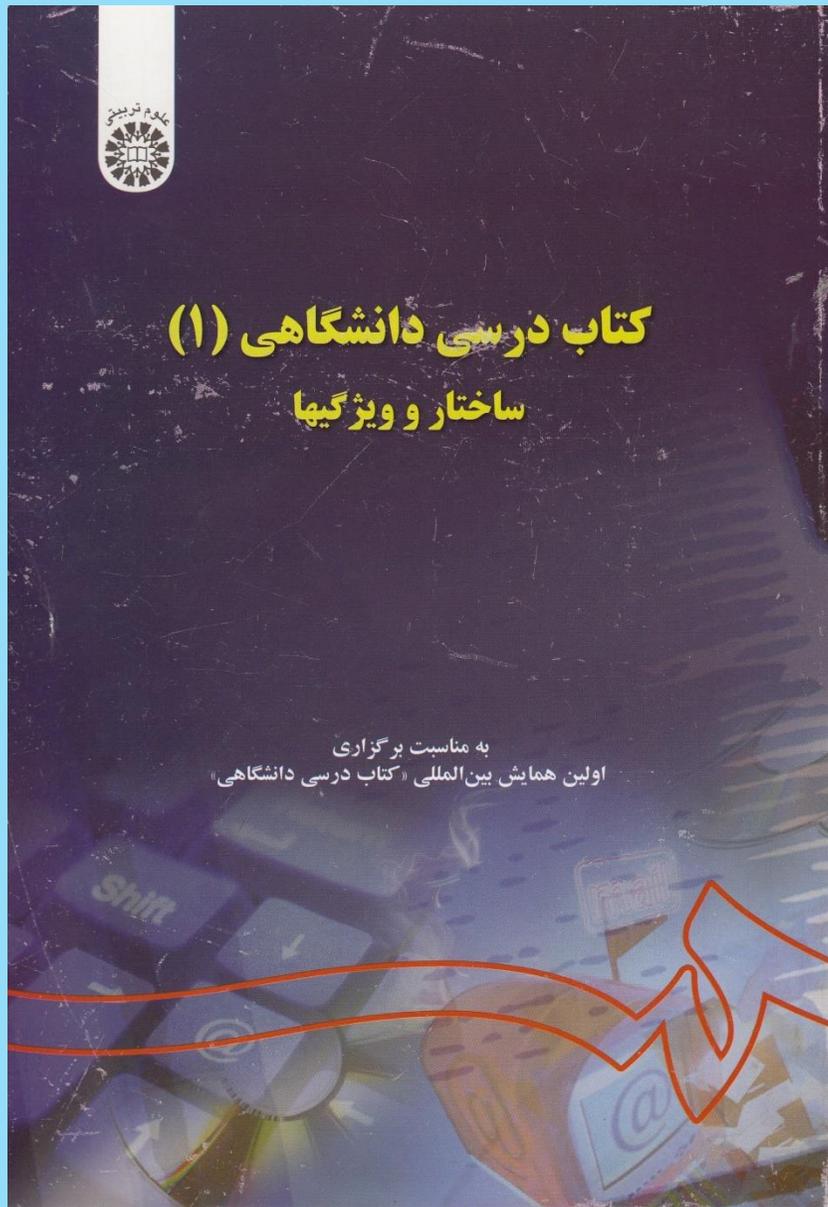
دکتر کامران افشارمهاجر





کتاب درسی دانشگاهی (۱) ساختار و ویژگیها

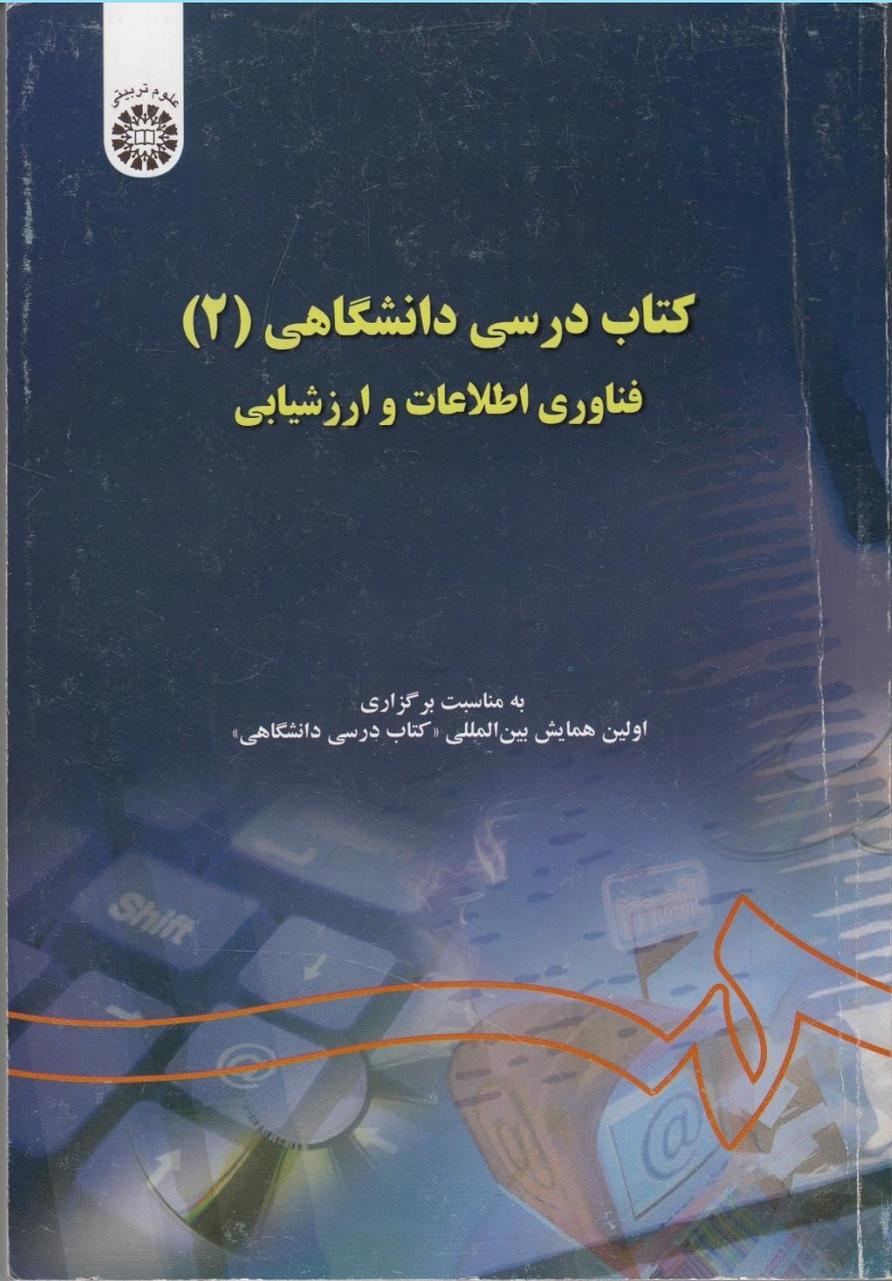
به مناسبت برگزاری
اولین همایش بین‌المللی «کتاب درسی دانشگاهی»

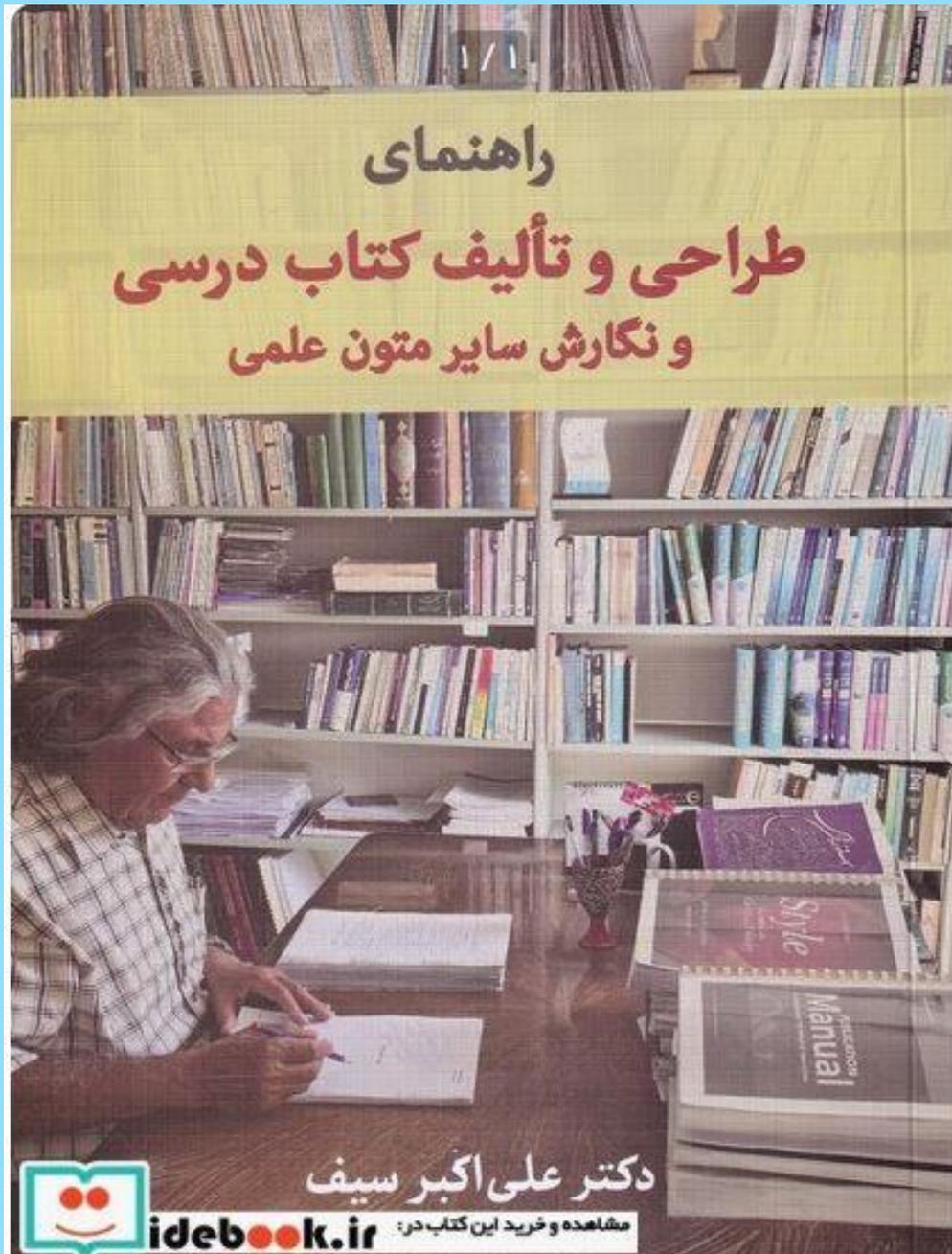




کتاب درسی دانشگاہی (۲) فناوری اطلاعات و ارزشیابی

به مناسبت برگزاری
اولین همایش بین‌المللی «کتاب درسی دانشگاہی»





راهنمای

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دکتر محمد آرمنند
دکتر زهرا ابوالحسنی چیمه
دکتر حمیدرضا خادمی



شناسنامه نشریه

صاحب امتیاز

سازمان مطالعه و تدوین کتب علوم انسانی دانشگاهها

مدیر مسئول

داود مهدوی زادگان

سرمدبیر

سید محمد رضا امیری طهرانی زاده

اعضای هیات تحریریه

- محمد آرمند
- زهرا ابوالحسنی چیمه
- ابراهیم برزگر
- فرج اله علی قنبری
- محمد علی فتح الهی
- شهبلا رقیب دوست
- ملیحه صابری نجف آبادی
- عباسعلی گائینی
- عبدالرضا نوروزی چاکلی
- علیرضا محسنی تبریزی
- محمد علی اکبری
- اسمعیل ابوتوری
- جواد حاتمی
- محمود بی جن خان
- حسینعلی کوهستانی

اعضای هیات تحریریه بین المللی

فایستاس و گابریل کورسنت

نشریه « پژوهش و نگارش کتب دانشگاهی»، وابسته به پژوهشکده تحقیق و توسعه علوم انسانی «سمت»

“University Textbooks; Research and Writing”

این نشریه در راستای اهداف اصلی سازمان در سال ۱۳۷۵ به منظور کمک به انعکاس روند تولید علم، زیر عنوان «سخن سمت» و از سال ۱۳۸۸ با هدف تغییر وضعیت و تبدیل به فصلنامه علمی-پژوهشی، با نام «عیار»، منتشر شد و در مورخ ۱۳۹۱/۱۰/۲۰ از سوی کمیسیون نشریات علمی وزارت علوم، تحقیقات و فناوری، با نام «پژوهش و نگارش کتب دانشگاهی»، به مدیرمسئولی و سرمدبیری دکتر احمد احمدی و تحریریه جدید، به اعتبار علمی-پژوهشی دست یافت. شایان ذکر است در سال ۱۳۹۴ وضعیت انتشار این نشریه به دو فصلنامه تغییر یافت.

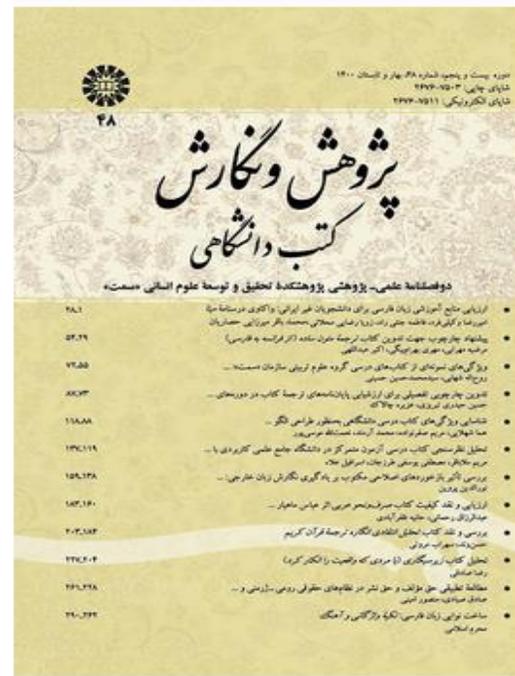
«پژوهش و نگارش کتب دانشگاهی» نشریه ای دانشگاهی است که با هدف معرفی آخرین یافته های پژوهشگران و صاحب نظران در حوزه کتاب دانشگاهی منتشر میشود و مقالات آن دستاورد طرحهای پژوهشی، پایان نامه ها و نقد و بررسی علمی، در حوزه کتاب دانشگاهی است.

دوفصلنامه علمی پژوهش و نگارش کتب دانشگاهی از تاریخ ۱۰ مهرماه ۱۳۹۹ (Oct. 1, ۲۰۲۰)

در پایگاه بین المللی DOAJ نمایه شد.



محل چاپ: ایران، تهران



مقالات آماده انتشار

شماره جاری

شماره های پیشین نشریه

دوره 28 (1403)



به نام خدا

ساختار و ویژگی های کتاب درسی

mohammadarmand@yahoo.com



عوامل و مشارکت کنندگان

مدیر تدوین

مؤلف

متخصص آموزش

گرافیک و طراحی و عکاس

ویراستار



رشته های مرتبط با کتاب درسی

- رشته تخصصی مربوط به کتاب
- هنر و گرافیک
- زبان شناسی و ادبیات فارسی
- فناوری های آموزشی
- روانشناسی و تعلیم و تربیت

عنوان کتاب و جلد





این شکل که تلاش و کوشش بشر را برای اصلاح
نظیر شکل‌های موجود در طبیعت نشان می‌دهد
و برای اولین بار در سال ۱۹۶۸ در کتاب ارتوپدی
نیکلاس آندره (Nicholas Andre) چاپ شد به
مظهر ارتوپدی معروف شده است.

مقدمات قبل از متن

فهرست ها (بخش و فصل)

پیشگفتار

مقدمه

- بخش و فصل
- فهرست مختصر و مفصل
- تناسب فصول با یکدیگر
- ارتباط منطقی

پیشگفتار و مقدمه

- دلیل نوشتن کتاب و اهمیت کتاب برای نویسنده
- حجم پیشگفتار 1 تا 3 صفحه می باشد
- کسی یا چیزی که انگیزه ی نوشتن این کتاب رو در نویسنده بوجود آورده
- دیدگاه و آموزه هایی که خواننده بعد از مطالعه ی کتاب کسب خواهد کرد
- اتفاقات دوران تالیف کتاب
- مشکلاتی که در مسیر تالیف با آن مواجه شده اید.
- رویکرد تالیف پژوهش توصیف
- منابع مورد استفاده محدودیت های مربوط به منابع
- مدت زمان تالیف کتاب

در پیشگفتار:

مخاطبان کتاب

کتاب برای چه کسانی و در چه دروسی قابل استفاده است

راهنمای استفاده از کتاب

تمرین ها و تکالیف و راهنمای مطالعه کتاب

تشکر از همکاری کنندگان:

کسانی که به چاپ کتاب کمک کرده اند

تایپیست

طراح

صاحب نظران

کمک در یافتن منابع

مقدمه

- بحث در باره محتوای کتاب و آشنایی اجمالی خوانند با مطالب
- اشاره به تعداد بخش ها و فصول و مباحث هر یک

- مقدمه هم ۱ تا ۳ صفحه می باشد
- تفاوت پیشگفتار و مقدمه

■ در صورت تجدید چاپ کتاب، در هر نوبت چاپ که ویراست تازه‌ای از اثر ارائه می‌شود، پیش‌گفتار جدیدی نیز نوشته می‌شود. در این صورت پیش‌گفتار ویراستهای قبلی نیز به دنبال پیش‌گفتار جدید می‌آید.

مقدمات فصل

هدفهای آموزشی و هدفهای رفتاری

مقدمه فصل

انواع هدف هاي آموزشي

شناختی

عاطفی

حسی - حرکتی (عملی)

هدف های شناختی

دانش و معلومات و تواناییها و مهارتهای ذهنی

سطوح هدف های شناختی

دانش

فهمیدن

کاربرد

تحلیل

ترکیب

ارزشیابی

ارزشیابی



نمونه هدف های شناختی

دانش: تعریف کردن، ذکر کردن، بازگو کردن، تکرار کردن، فهرست کردن، نام بردن، حفظ کردن

فهمیدن: توضیح دادن تمیز دادن، خلاصه کردن، شناسایی کردن
کاربرد: محاسبه کردن، به کار بردن، تولید کردن، آماده کردن، نمودار تهیه کردن

تحلیل: تفکیک کردن، به اجزاء تقسیم کردن، دسته بندی کردن
ترکیب: ترکیب کردن، تجدیدنظر کردن، تألیف کردن، از ترکیب جملات مختلف یک متن منسجم نوشته شود

ارزشیابی: ارزیابی کردن، مقایسه کردن، انتخاب کردن، نتیجه گیری کردن، قضاوت کردن، نقد و بررسی کردن

مقدمه فصل

- حجم آن حد اکثر تا نصف صفحه می باشد
- خواننده با مطالبی که فصل آمده آشنایی اجمالی پیدا می کند.
- معرفی کلی موضوع فصل و بیان ارتباط محتوای فصل با فصل قبلی
- در آن زمینه ذهنی لازم برای ورود به مطالعه متن به وجود می آید

متن فصل

فونت

طرح و تصویر

کادر (زمینه های رنگی)

جدول و نمودار

حروف متفاوت

جدول و نمودار

- جداول اطلاع رسان و جداول مقایسه ای

کادر

- تاریخچه موضوعی خاص ،
- تکالیف عملی
- توضیحات اضافی در باره مطلبی

پرسش و تمرین



انواع پرسش

- پرسش در متن
- پرسش های پایانی فصل
- تستی
- تشریحی
- مبتنی بر متن
- استنباطی

- خلاصه فصل
- اصطلاحات تخصصی
- پرسش های پایانی
- منابع فصل
- منابع برای مطالعه بیشتر

مطالب پایانی کتاب

- فهرست منابع

- نمایه

اسامی، مکان ها و موضوعی و...

نمایه : کمک به یافتن موضوعات

تفاوت با فهرست تفصیلی مطالب

- واژه نامه

- انگلیسی به فارسی و بالعکس

مسائل ارزشی و فرهنگی

توجه به حفظ حرمت و حساسیتهای اجتماعی و سیاسی خوانندگان
آسیب پذیر:

۱. اقلیتها

۲. کسانی که دچار نارساییهای جسمی هستند / سالخوردگان

۳. خانمها

۴. محرومان و کسانی که در مناطق غیر برخوردار زندگی می کنند.

۵. کاربرد واژه های مناسب

- - همخوانی کتاب با ارزشهای عرفی جامعه
- - درج نگرشهای سیاسی غیرسوگیرانه
- - عدم ترویج یا زیبا جلوه دادن ناهنجاری
- - عدم تحمیل هنجار گروه خاص یا هنجار جلوه دادن ناهنجاری

- - عدم تبعیض نژادی
- - عدم تبعیض قومیتی
- - عدم تبعیض جنسیتی
- - عدم تبعیض در طبقه اجتماعی
- - عدم تبعیض سنی

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New York Times best-selling author of *A Dog's Purpose*



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WritersDigest.com
Cincinnati, Ohio

“Two top publishing pros, Jody Rein and Michael Larsen, offer here an invaluable guidebook for anyone trying to figure out how to best present your story so that those in power will pay attention. Step by step, they take you through the process of creating your proposal, giving you priceless insight into what will work best for YOU. They demystify and clarify, and make the whole process make sense. Trust them; you won’t be sorry.” —**CHUCK ADAMS**, Executive Editor, Algonquin Books

.....

“Jody Rein taught me how to write my very first book proposal, which resulted in my very first book sale, the *New York Times* best-selling *8 Simple Rules for Dating my Teenage Daughter*. Now she’s taken that pragmatic advice and turned it into an indispensable guide for neophytes and seasoned professionals alike, full of hands-on, practical advice on what to do and when to do it to ensure a professional, winning book proposal!” —**W. BRUCE CAMERON**, best-selling author of *A Dog’s Purpose*

.....

“The fifth edition of *How to Write a Book Proposal* sets a new gold standard for aspiring authors.” —**MADELEINE MOREL**, literary agent, 2M Communications Ltd.

.....

“Michael Larsen’s *How to Write a Book Proposal* has been the respected standard in the field ever since it was first published. Now in its fifth edition, it continues to be the best resource for any author wishes to land an agent and a commercial publishing deal. The market is more competitive than ever, and this book gives you the edge you’ll need.” —**JANE FRIEDMAN**, publishing consultant

.....

“Jody Rein knows what publishers want. This book is a treasure trove of ideas to get your work published.” —**MARK OBMASCIK**, Pulitzer Prize-winning best-selling author of *Halfway to Heaven* and *The Big Year*

.....

“*How to Write a Book Proposal 5th Edition* is hands down the most thorough and helpful proposal-writing guide on the market. Rein and Larsen eliminate all guesswork and provide writers with exactly what they need to craft pitches that sell! I wish I’d had this gem years ago.” —**TONI ROBINO**, best-selling collaborator and coach, Windword Literary Services

“The fifth edition of this book will change everyone’s dream of writing and publishing a book into actual REALITY! The ideas in this edition have been integral to the publication of my last six books. And I love the inside scoop and behind-the-scenes stories of the publishing world. I LOVE this book! Thank you Jody Rein and Mike Larsen!” —**MARK KISTLER**, best-selling author of *You Can Draw in 30 Days!* and Emmy Award-winning host of PBS’s *Mark Kistler’s Imagination Station*

.....

“This book is truly the ultimate resource for writers who want to land a book deal; it’s written by two extremely experienced publishing pros who understand the industry and know what it takes to break in. If you are serious about taking the path to traditional publishing, buy this book now and absorb every word. Highly recommended!” —**STEPHANIE CHANDLER**, author of *The Nonfiction Book Marketing Plan* and CEO of NonfictionAuthorsAssociation.com

.....

“*How to Write a Book Proposal* is THE resource for aspiring nonfiction authors. It breaks down what we are looking for as agents with useful examples and tips from our side of the desk. I recommend it!” —**GORDON WARNOCK**, Partner, Fuse Literary Agency

.....

“Take it from someone who has seen A LOT of book proposals: the advice in this book is the real deal. More than simply a ‘how-to,’ the fifth edition of *How to Write a Book Proposal* shines a light on virtually every aspect of book publishing today. And it’s fun to read!” —**JUDY KLEIN**, former VP, Farrar, Straus & Giroux; owner, Kleinworks Agency

.....

“The no-nonsense title says it all. This book is your ticket to getting published, full of practical advice from pros with long records of helping authors turn good ideas into salable and successful books.” —**CHARLES SLACK**, author of *Liberty’s First Crisis*, *Hetty*, *Noble Obsession*, and *Blue Fairways*.

DEDICATION

To the writers this book inspires to do their best work and cast an affirming flame.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the 5th Edition

PART ONE: THE BASICS

1: Why Book Proposals Matter

2: The Parts of a Proposal

3: Is Your Idea Bookworthy?

4: Clearing Up Some Questions

PART TWO: ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS

5: The Practically Painless Proposal-Writing System

6: Set Up Your Shop

7: Build Your Folder Buckets

8: The Proposal-Writing Order

PART THREE: PROPOSAL BREAKDOWN

9: Pizzazz

10: Comps

11: Book Table of Contents

12: Book Specs

13: Author Bio

14: Author Platform

15: Audience

16: Personal Promotion

17: Detailed Outline

18: Overview

19: Sample Writing

20: Supplemental Material

PART FOUR: THE SPECIALIZED PROPOSAL

- 21:** Proposing More than One Book
- 22:** Self-Published Books
- 23:** The Graphic Novel
- 24:** Cookbooks
- 25:** Business Books
- 26:** Novels
- 27:** Memoirs
- 28:** The Narrative Letter of Passion
- 29:** Strategies for Six More Kinds of Books
- 30:** Proposals for Ghostwritten and Co-Authored Books

PART FIVE: PULL IT TOGETHER AND PERFECT IT

- 31:** Titles
- 32:** Structure
- 33:** Voice
- 34:** Format for All Devices
- 35:** Use Feedback and Pings to Rejection-Proof Your Proposal
- 36:** Top Ten Proposal Killers

PART SIX: FIND A HAPPY HOME FOR YOUR BOOK

- 37:** Traditional Publishing Options
- 38:** The Literary Agent
- 39:** Your Query Letter
- 40:** Sell Your Book Without an Agent
- 41:** Convert Your Proposal into a Self-Publishing Plan

PART SEVEN: INSPIRATION AND THE FUTURE

- 42:** From Author to Contentpreneur
- 43:** Spring Is Coming

APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A:** The Publishing Process

APPENDIX B: The Virtual Media Kit

APPENDIX C: Four Sample Proposals

APPENDIX D: Sample Proposal Index

Additional Resources

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

INTRODUCTION TO THE 5TH EDITION

Not too long ago, Michael Larsen moderated a panel of nonfiction literary agents during the San Francisco Writers Conference, which he cofounded and codirects. The stage stretched across the front of a large room, but it wasn't big enough to hold all the agents, who sat in two rows of chairs extending from one end of the stage to the other, leaving standing room only for a *third* row of agents.

Staring back at the panelists was a sea of expectant faces: hundreds of writers eager to find representation for their nonfiction books, primed—just as you may be—to learn the fail-safe formula to getting published. One writer had just asked the big question: “What do you look for in a book proposal?”

An agent grabbed a microphone, stood, and said: “Paste the first ten pages of your proposal into your e-mail to me, right below your query letter.” He sat down and handed off the mic.

The next fellow said, “Don't send me anything in the query but the query. I don't want to see your proposal unless I ask for it.”

And so it went:

“I want one sample chapter in your proposal and five-to-ten pages about your platform. Platform is crucial.”

“Platform matters, but editors are more interested in voice and story these days. Send me three sample chapters.”

“Open your proposal with your top ten sales tips; editors love that.”

“Don't write sales stuff at the beginning of your proposal. Get to the writing immediately!”

The crowd looked a little queasy. The answers kept coming.

“Don't forget the comps! List the top three books that compete with yours—only those published within the last two years.”

“Well, I think publishers want to see five-to-ten books in the comps and they don't care when they were published.”

The mic was passed to a young agent in the second row, who rose confidently and said, “I need something that grabs my attention. Give me a great logline!” Three or four experienced agents looked around, confused. “What's a logline?” they mouthed to each other.

Jody Rein was an agent on that panel, adrift in the ocean of conflicting answers. She looked at Mike; he looked at her. In that moment, she and Mike realized it was time for a top-to-bottom

overhaul of the book you're now reading.

THINGS. HAVE. CHANGED.

For years, proposals were proposals and publishing was publishing; standards were consistent and predictable. But publishing today is no longer the same landscape that it was a few years ago: The digitalization and consolidation of the industry have altered how books are developed, acquired, sold, and published. The results of these changes are extensive:

- Advice, even from agents, can be inconsistent.
 - Since digital publication is easy and cheap, many agencies have removed genre fiction from their rosters. Nonfiction, on the other hand, is a stable and growing category. As a result, agents who have never sold nonfiction before now seek it—but in some instances they don't have experience in developing proposals to sell it.
 - Becoming an agent requires no certification or training, so people without publishing backgrounds jump into—and out of—the agenting business. This mounting wealth of agents creates opportunities for writers, but it also sometimes breeds inexperienced advice.
 - The self-publishing boom prompted many people to set up businesses offering editorial, production, and general publishing and career advice to writers. Some of these people have spent years in the publishing industry and are well qualified, while others learned much of what they know from the Internet.
- Publishers read proposals differently now, even though they may not be aware of it, and content expectations have changed.
 - Proposals are read in print *and* on devices like Kindles and iPads. We interact with digital material differently than we read printed works, so proposals must be written and constructed to appeal in multiple formats.
 - Often, writers are expected to be partners in promotion and explain in their proposals how they will promote their book.

There's one caveat to all this talk about industry changes: A beautifully written, professionally crafted proposal on a fresh, appealing subject by a credentialed, well-known expert *will* find a

publisher, even if it's missing a few pieces of information.

A WAY THROUGH THE NOISE

Writers need guidance to break through the infoglut. Confusion can lead to writer's block. If a voice in your head is whispering that you may be going about your proposal in the wrong way, it's hard to feel enthusiastic about writing it.

To lead you through the mire, this revised edition addresses recent industry shifts, provides informed recommendations for proposals in the new marketplace, and presents a writing method devised with your practical and emotional needs in mind.

New Structure, New Content

The book is organized progressively, but you can dive in anywhere. In **Part One: The Basics**, you'll find general knowledge about proposals and how they're used. You'll also learn how to determine whether your concept is salable.

In **Part Two: Organize for Success**, we get pragmatic. Moving from "I want to write a book" to "Hey, I wrote a proposal!" has a lot to do with motivation, filing systems, and work habits. We think you'll love our hands-on advice and step-by-step systems, which answer these important questions:

- How do I get started?
- How do I organize all that information?
- How do I stay motivated?
- What should I research?
- In what order should I write the proposal sections?

We suggest a writing sequence that enhances your productivity and prevents frustration and fear from standing between you and your book.

In **Part Three: Proposal Breakdown**, you'll find clear instructions for writing each section of your proposal. The proposal sections broken down in **Part Three** are presented in the writing sequence we recommended in **Part Two**. Each chapter opens with a graphic depiction of where that section will probably appear in your final proposal, along with alternative titles to consider. We include samples from more than thirty proposals, many of which have been sold

to publishers in bidding wars and have earned six and sometimes even seven figures for their authors. (You may notice in some proposals we insert graphic identifiers, like [date here]; those are intentional omissions, not typos.)

Book proposals are as unique as the writers who craft them. We end each chapter in **Part Three** with guidance for modifying your proposal based on whether your work is *promotion driven* (as are most commercial or prescriptive books) or *prose driven* (as are most memoirs or other narrative nonfiction books). In **Part Four: The Specialized Proposal**, you'll find detailed plans to customize proposals for unique or specific projects:

- more than one book at a time
- self-published books
- graphic novels
- memoirs
- cookbooks
- business books
- ghostwritten works
- novels
- the “letter of passion” for narrative nonfiction
- academic books, biographies, and anthologies

In **Part Five: Pull It Together and Perfect It**, you'll learn how to build a structure that highlights your concept's unique strengths. You'll also find a full chapter on finding and expressing your voice.

A proposal serves no purpose sitting on your computer. Find real-world guidance on securing an agent and a publisher—and for using your proposal to create a self-publishing plan—in **Part Six: Find a Happy Home for Your Book**.

We hope **Part Seven: Inspiration and the Future** will fill you with positivity about your writing future. And in the **Appendices**, you'll find additional sample proposals and an index of all the proposals in the book, an at-a-glance schedule of the publishing process, and advice on the virtual media kit.

Seeking even more information? We've provided an opinionated glossary of industry terms and two useful and downloadable checklists online at www.writersdigest.com/book-proposals. All terms defined in the glossary are printed in italics in the book.

A Few Notes

That confusing agent panel shook us up. It's hard enough to be a writer today; you don't need conflicting advice from professionals to increase the burden. We want to set the record straight about the ingredients for a successful proposal. So Jody talked with scores of people across the spectrum of the publishing business: agents, ghostwriters, publicists, and freelance writers, many of whom privately shared additional proposals. She assessed submission criteria and sample proposals posted on many agency websites, and she talked extensively with corporate publishing people: editors, editors-in-chief, and publishers who decide each day whether or not to champion proposals in every book category.

When advice conflicted, we relied on publishers more than agents because publishers ultimately decide whether to make an offer on your book. We filtered everything through the lenses of our combined decades of experience in publishing and pitching books. Sometimes we didn't agree. In those cases or when we're telling stories, we specify who is saying what.

Throughout the book, we use the words *editors*, *publishers*, and *agents* interchangeably as the people to whom you will submit your proposal. If our advice only applies to one type of reader, we say so in the text. For example, while the fundamental components of your proposal don't change with each submission, we do recommend a few minor tweaks when you submit directly to a small publisher, and don't use an agent. You'll find such suggestions scattered and highlighted throughout the book.

No one recipe for a proposal exists. Every book is different, every writer has his own voice, and many agents have their own systems. We hope this edition of *How to Write a Book Proposal* helps you clearly and confidently express *your* voice and vision, and get your book into the hands of thousands of passionate readers.

Part One

THE BASICS

Eight Ways Your Proposal Gets You Published

Why Writing a Book Proposal is Never Wasted Work

The Parts of a Proposal (a List)

No Cookie Cutters, Please

How to Test Market Your Idea

Answers to Common Questions

1

WHY BOOK PROPOSALS MATTER

“I like proposals. They’re a hell of a lot easier to deal with than full manuscripts.”

—MARK GOMPERTZ, GROUP EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, SKYHORSE PUBLISHING

If you’re a nonfiction book writer who wants to get published, you have to write a book proposal. Publishers and agents expect proposals from writers just starting their careers, as well as writers who have already been published. If you’re self-published but want a publisher, get ready to write that proposal, whether your book is fiction or nonfiction. Perhaps most surprising, even if you’ve already completed your book, publishing pros usually won’t read the full manuscript until *after* they’ve decided to work with you. They prefer proposals.

A proposal is a twenty- to sixty-or-so-page document that convinces agents to represent you and motivates publishers to offer you a book deal. The proposal expresses key facts about you, your book, and your book’s audience, ideally all wrapped up in a package so engaging that publishers and agents can’t put it down, even though scores of other proposals, manuscripts, contracts, calls, e-mails, and meetings clamor for their attention.

Sound daunting? Or at least stress-inducing? We hope the proposal-writing system we provide in this book makes the process manageable, enlightening, and even fun—but the biggest motivator may be an understanding of what proposals do, and what writing one can do for you.

The most obvious upside of proposals is this: Because publishers prefer proposals, you don’t have to write the whole book before you get paid. Publishers acquire nonfiction books based solely on their proposals, and often pay advances to help allay the expense of writing the book.

In fact, the benefits of writing a proposal run surprisingly deep. Book proposals force you to consider the kinds of fundamental questions, both personal and professional, that alter lives. Writing one helps define who you are as a writer and how you want to make your mark on the world. It provides a systematic context that encourages you to focus your work, memorialize

your ideas, and celebrate you. Writing a proposal can be—and often is—a transformative experience.

For example, in your proposal you must tell publishers how long you think it will take to complete your book. At first blush this seems straightforward—just turn on a timer while you write, and extrapolate. The question gets more profound, though, when you realize that your job and family responsibilities leave only a few hours a day for writing. How much time are you willing to allocate to this dream? What must you sacrifice in your life in order to reach it? What are your financial goals, and how will they be affected by your decision to devote time to writing a book?

A simple scheduling question can place you on a path to self-realization. Who knew?

YOUR PROPOSAL AS A TOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Whether or not you finish your proposal—and of course we want you to finish your proposal—going through the process helps you decide if you truly want to write a book and if your concept is viable. It can also shine a light on skills you need to develop—things that, when attended to, may advance your career in unexpected ways, as it did for these authors:

- Best-selling author Joseph M. Marshall III hit a wall writing up a detailed outline for the proposal. He stepped back, gave the matter a great deal of thought, and realized he was trying to merge two separate ideas. He had two books, not one. He reconfigured his concept as a two-book proposal and nabbed a two-book deal with Viking for *The Lakota Way* and *The Journey of Crazy Horse*. Both books spawned other titles and continue to influence his writing career.
- Best-selling author W. Bruce Cameron got stuck in the audience section of the proposal for his first book; he couldn't easily identify his readers. To beef up this part of his proposal, he spent more than a year growing the readership for his hilarious essays. He built up a large e-mail subscription base and worked with Jody to obtain a tryout as a columnist for his local—but nationally syndicated—newspaper. His column was a big hit. The newspaper and its affiliates' large national audience helped Bruce land a publisher for *8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter* and set in motion a series of writing and speaking gigs that enabled him to quit his day job and focus on writing full time.

- Aspiring author Trisha Pritikin struggled to succinctly describe her writing style and her brand. Heeding what her proposal-writing obstacles were telling her, she decided to clarify her message and persona online. She built a website and wrote blogs about her extensive experience as an advocate for victims of nuclear radiation poisoning. Her online forays brought her speaking invitations across the country and around the world and eventually a call from a reputable publisher who invited her to lunch to discuss book ideas.

YOUR PROPOSAL AS A SELF-PUBLISHING PLAN

The publishing business has undergone a sea change. A rejection from a publisher once meant the death of a writer’s dreams. Now you’re in control. Your book will be published if you want it to be. If you can’t get a publisher on board, self-publishing empowers you to bypass the gatekeepers.

Your proposal provides a thorough framework for an actionable self-publishing plan. (Learn how to turn your proposal into a self-publishing plan in [chapter forty-one](#).) Having written your proposal, you can move into self-publishing with the most difficult goals already accomplished. Your book will have been outlined, your means to promote it largely in place.

YOUR PROPOSAL AT THE PUBLISHER’S OFFICE

“In some ways, a really good proposal can do your job for you. It gives bones for the sales force to use to presell your book to retailers until we have a full manuscript. We rely heavily on proposals, especially since materials have to be put together earlier and earlier.”

—RENEE SEDLIAR, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, DA CAPO PRESS/HACHETTE
BOOKS

The primary occupation of the proposal is to get you published, but its job doesn’t begin and end with the sale. Proposals have power. They can create industry buzz for a book long before it is published and help establish your reputation as a writer—even if you’re rejected.¹

Editors remember great proposals for years. A few editors interviewed for the fifth edition of this book mentioned proposals submitted to them more than ten years before! Here are eight ways your proposal helps your book get published:

1. **PROPOSALS DETERMINE HOW MUCH MONEY YOUR PUBLISHER WILL PAY YOU AS AN ADVANCE.** Publishers base their financial offers in part on one number: how many copies of your book they expect to sell in a year. They land on this number by researching the sales of similar titles and then making an educated guess about what your book's sales will be, relative to those numbers. If several publishers offer to publish your book and a bidding war ensues, publishers often revise their guesses upward in the heat of negotiation. The more impressive the proposal, the more copies publishers estimate they'll sell and the more money they can justify paying you.
2. **PROPOSALS GENERATE PRE-ACQUISITIONS ENTHUSIASM FROM THE PUBLISHING TEAM.** Editors share your proposal with colleagues from all departments—and sometimes with sales reps or buyers from book chains—to support their pitches to their bosses.
3. **EDITORS USE YOUR PROPOSAL TO INTERVIEW YOU.** If you're meeting with editors on the phone or in person before the sale, they'll study your proposal to decide what to ask.
4. **AFTER ACQUISITION, PROPOSALS ARE USED TO INFORM AND MOTIVATE THE SALES TEAMS.** Before you deliver your manuscript and well before publication, your proposal is used to excite the in-house sales and marketing force at "launch" meetings.
5. **PROPOSALS SPARK PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY IDEAS.** Your publishing team will draw on your proposal to develop promotion plans with you and to write catalog copy, back-cover copy, *metadata* that makes the book searchable online, and press releases.
6. **PROPOSALS GENERATE SPECIAL SALES.** *Special sales* are books sold to corporations and other specialty retailers. Often publishers make those deals based solely on your proposal, long before you've turned in your full manuscript.
7. **PROPOSALS GENERATE FOREIGN RIGHTS AND MOVIE RIGHTS INTEREST BEFORE THE BOOK IS PUBLISHED.** Your agent or publisher sometimes uses your proposal to obtain deals for translated editions from foreign

publishers. Even if they can't close the deal before you turn in your book, they'll use the proposal to create an early buzz around the world. The same goes for film rights: Jody has optioned several books to film producers based solely on the proposal. Plus, big publishing deals always trigger calls from eager film agents long before publication.

8. **PROPOSALS CONFIRM THAT YOU'VE WRITTEN THE BOOK YOU WERE CONTRACTED TO WRITE.** Your proposal can be your biggest ally in compelling your publisher to accept your completed manuscript. Editors come and go; publishing plans change; enthusiasm wanes. Deliver the manuscript your proposal promises, and you have powerful ammunition for combatting mercurial publishing decisions.

1. Sound unbelievable? Editors frequently fall in love with proposals that the big brass nix. Perhaps another editor has just signed a similar book, or the company has decided to publish fewer books in the category. Editors don't forget. They track and talk about the book that got away.

2

THE PARTS OF A PROPOSAL

“The scariest moment is always just before you start.”

—STEPHEN KING

Most proposals are divided into clearly labeled sections. Think of each section as a building block: movable if necessary, combined when appropriate. In [Part Three](#), we’ll guide you through writing each of the following sections.

- **PIZZAZZ***: Arresting material placed at the front of your proposal to intrigue editors.
- **OVERVIEW**: A persuasive introduction that expresses the reasons your book will appeal to a large and reachable audience who is eager to purchase it.
- **BOOK SPECS**: Often included under a subhead at the end of the overview; describes important stylistic and objective aspects of your book and its creation.
- **AUTHOR BIO**: Your biography as it relates to your book, often leads directly into the author platform section.
- **AUTHOR PLATFORM**: The systems you have in place to reach your readers.
- **PERSONAL PROMOTION***: Specific actions you will take, on your own time or at your own expense, with the publisher’s approval, to promote sales of your book, often placed immediately after or within the platform section.
- **AUDIENCE**: The people who are likely to buy your book and where they can be found.
- **COMPS**: Descriptions of books that compete with or are otherwise comparable to your book, usually published within the past five years, should clearly define a book’s market position relative to other published titles.
- **DETAILED OUTLINE**: An expanded table of contents for the proposed book, with brief, compelling descriptions of each chapter’s content.
- **SAMPLE WRITING**: Text that reads as if excerpted directly from your book, selected to engage and excite potential publishers.
- **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL***: Articles, reviews of previous books, platform-related lists, or any other meaningful support that would disrupt the flow of the main body of your

proposal.

- **FRAMEWORK PAGES:** Stand-alone pages that provide context for readers, including the title page, the proposal contents page, and optional divider pages.

THE PUBLISHER'S MIND-SET

Let's crawl into the publisher's brain for a moment. All publishing professionals expect three types of information in a proposal:

1. Sales and marketing information.
2. Description of the book's content.
3. Sample writing from the book.

All proposals must answer, for publishers and agents, these five questions:

1. What's in the book?
2. Can the author write it well?
3. Is the author qualified?
4. Will people hear about it (usually through the author's efforts)?
5. Will people buy it?

But the most important question a proposal must answer for agents, editors, and publishers is: "Will this book make us money?"¹

STACK THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Even though publishers expect all proposals to answer the same questions, they dislike proposals that read as if they were machine made from some template. How do you give them what they want without writing a cookie-cutter proposal?

Draft each appropriate proposal section, but think of them all as building blocks you will sort, sculpt, and stack to suit your book later, when you pull the sections together into a full proposal. In [Part Five](#), you'll find subject-specific recommendations for customizing those blocks to optimize your proposal

One high-level area of customization is important to consider now, though, before you begin. Is your proposal, in essence, prose-driven or promotion-driven?

Promotion Driven or Prose Driven?

Subject matter and platform, rather than literary merit or story, drive the sales of *promotion-driven books*, also known as *commercial nonfiction*. People purchase promotion-driven books to learn or to be entertained. Titles in this category include how-to books, inspirational books, books on or by pop-culture influencers, business books, and cookbooks. Publishers expect authors of these books to be recognizable experts in their fields and to be engaged with their audiences.

Prose-driven books are recognized for literary quality, journalistic distinction, voice, and storytelling. They are called *narrative*, *upmarket*, *literary*, *serious*, or *academic nonfiction*. Memoir falls into this category, as do explorations of significant historical events like Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*. Prose-driven books don't have to be tomes: Many are gripping, like *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel J. Brown, or fun, like Sarah Vowell's *Assassination Vacation*.

Of course, good writing is important in promotion-driven books, and prose-driven nonfiction often hits the best-seller lists. But broadly, deciding whether your book is chiefly promotion driven or prose driven will bring focus to your proposal throughout your research and writing process.

* Asterisked sections are optional; their use varies with the book proposed.

1. Yes, sometimes a publisher will publish an obscure book that it knows will lose money. Do you think it's for love, though? Nah. The publisher is looking either for (1) a moneymaking next book by the author or (2) moneymaking books submitted by other authors who are drawn to the publisher because it published the money-losing book. We say this with hearts full of love for publishers.

3

IS YOUR IDEA BOOKWORTHY?

A New Yorker cartoon published in 1999 by Mick Stevens shows Adam and Eve sitting together under a tree in Eden. Adam says to Eve, “I can’t help thinking that there’s a book in this.”

Adam had a great idea. Do you? If you’re uncertain, this chapter will help you decide if the time is ripe to write your proposal. It will also reveal the likelihood of finding a publisher. If you’re absolutely certain that your concept is compelling and salable, skip this chapter. If not, read on.

Someone once said, “Getting an idea should be like sitting on a pin; it should make you jump up and do something.” Here are five “somethings” you can do to determine if your idea is salable:

1. Examine models.
2. Test-market your concept.
3. Clarify your goals.
4. Write the manuscript.
5. Take our quiz.

Let’s take a closer look at each one.

1. EXAMINE MODELS

Models abound for any kind of book you want to write. Read the most popular similar books on your topic, and browse through several others. Assess what comparable titles *don’t* do so you can make your book different and better. If you can’t come up with a fresh angle, you’ve stumbled upon a red flag. The market for your book may be saturated.

HOT TIP

If you come up with an idea for a book that has never been done, it means one of two things:

1. You have an opportunity.
2. The market for the book isn't big enough.

Can you prove through additional research that your book will appeal to consumers? If so, you've struck gold. If not, consider self-publishing.

2. TEST-MARKET YOUR CONCEPT

Take the guesswork out of publishing by trying one or several of these ideas:

- Talk about your concept with trusted communities and local booksellers. Ask people invested in your subject if they find your idea appealing.
- Write blogs on your subject on your own website, and contribute guest blogs on other websites in your field. Notice the comments and feedback. Are people responding positively? Are they sharing your work on social media?
- Release completed chapters of your book on your blog the way Andy Weir did for his novel *The Martian*. Share chapters in online magazines like *Medium* (www.medium.com) or online reading communities like Wattpad (www.wattpad.com). Note the feedback and the number of shares.
- Submit articles and op-eds related to your topic to reputable online and off-line publications and newspapers like the *HuffPost* (www.huffingtonpost.com). This can help you establish your credibility and measure popular reaction.
- As you write articles, consider whether you've only scratched the surface of your idea or if it can be fully explored in short form—and therefore won't sustain a book-length treatment.
- Give talks or readings. Audience feedback will help you determine the focus, the structure, and even a title for your book.
- Consider whether you will easily be able to obtain a foreword or endorsements from experts in your field. This is a good measure of your credibility in that field, which is important to publishers.
- Test-market your book by self-publishing it (see [chapter twenty-two](#)). Take this step only after careful consideration of the costs and time involved.

IDEA STEALING

“Will someone steal my idea?” This is a common, somewhat justified fear: You can’t copyright an idea, and the Internet makes for easy swiping. Jody realized the power of the purloin when she approached publishers with W. Bruce Cameron’s proposal for *8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter*. One editor, who had learned about the essay on which the book was based on *Today*, accused Bruce of plagiarizing his own writing! This scenario had a happy ending: *Today* acknowledged Bruce’s authorship, Jody sold the book, and it became a *New York Times* bestseller and a popular sitcom.

Most appropriation is inadvertent. Mike has seen “The Hook, the Book, and the Cook” concept from this book used elsewhere without attribution. So, yes, things happen, but don’t let fear overwhelm you. Publishing pros often say, “Ideas are a dime a dozen.” They care much more about how you approach your subject. Nobody writes like you. Nobody else has your voice or your vision. So, yes, vet the people you deal with; for example, make sure you include your name in the body of any guest blog posts you write. Be thoughtful but not paranoid. And be willing to let a harmless copycat go now and then, and move on. You’re a creative soul and an excellent writer; you’ll come up with something else wonderful soon.

3. CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

“Begin with the end in mind.”

—STEPHEN COVEY, *THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE*

Why do you want to write your book? If you’re not sure, your uncertainty will show in your writing. To identify and stay focused on your goals, try the following:

- Tape on your wall a one-page summary of your personal and professional literary and publishing goals and how you will reach them.
- Write down the advance payment you want for your book. We’re talking desire here, not necessity or reality.
- List the ideal publisher(s) for your book.
- Copy and paste the latest *New York Times* best-seller list into a new document. Replace the number-one bestseller with the title of your own book. Print it out, tape it to a wall, and be inspired! This worked for Chicken Soup for the Soul series co-authors Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.
- For fun, design a full-page ad for your book as it might appear in the *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, with quotes from ideal reviewers.

- Write a dream review of your book for the newspaper or magazine in which you'd most like to see it.
- Use the Photoblend app or a similar app to create an image of your ideal reader.

4. WRITE THE MANUSCRIPT

For concepts that are not time sensitive, Mike's a fan of writing your manuscript before writing your proposal.¹ (Remember: Whether or not your manuscript is written, you will still need to submit a proposal to agents and publishers.) There are several benefits to writing the book first:

- You'll be able to obtain valuable feedback from objective, knowledgeable readers.
- Picking the best sample chapter will be easier.
- You'll have extra material handy for agents or editors, your blog (save newsworthy revelations for when they'll do your book the most good), and public-speaking and corporate gigs.
- You can speed up the whole publication process.

5. TAKE OUR QUIZ

If the answers to any of the following questions are "No," or "I don't think so," stop and reflect. You have uncovered an area where you'll need to improve before you start writing.

- Have you studied the craft of writing? If not, you may want to reconsider writing a serious memoir or other literary work until you train up a bit.
- Are you committed to writing another book if this one doesn't work? (Publishers generally aren't interested in one-hit wonders.)
- How did test-marketing your idea as an article go? If the article didn't get a great response or if it didn't inspire you to write more on the subject, you may want to explore another topic or approach.
- Would *you* buy a book by you on this subject?
- Is the help you provide easily found for free online? If so, people may not be willing to pay for it in book form.

- Do you have a means to reach the market for your book even if the publisher does nothing? If not, don't count on many sales.
- Does the topic have longevity? Will people be interested in it a year from now? Two? Books often take two years to publish.
- Is your topic a great conversation starter at cocktail parties? (If it's fun to talk about, it will probably appeal to editors, too!)
- If you're writing a memoir, why are you writing your story? Below are typical reasons. (Hint: Only the last two are surefire reasons to seek professional publication. See [chapter twenty-seven](#) for more on this topic.)
 - I want my descendants to understand their history.
 - I want others in my situation to learn from my experiences.
 - My life has been different from most, and I think others would be interested in my story.
 - Everyone tells me my life could be a movie.
 - I'm interested in using memoir to stretch my skills as a writer.
 - I'm driven. I must write this book.

1. No matter what, we recommend you flash-write thirty pages as your first proposal-writing step. (See [chapter six](#).)

4

CLEARING UP SOME QUESTIONS

The most frequently asked question: When should I write my proposal? The answer: Before you send out your query to agents or publishers.

A few common questions about proposal creation may already be on your mind; let's clear them up now before setting up your office.

Q. When do I send publishers or agents my proposal?

A. If you're submitting to an agent, send your proposal only after: 1) you have sent a query letter following the agent's online guidelines, and 2) the agent has requested the proposal. If you're submitting directly to a small press, follow the press's guidelines. Some small publishers ask for a query; others for the proposal.

Find detailed submission instructions in [Part Six](#), and a graphic overview of the process in [Appendix A](#).

Q. Do I write my proposal in first-person or third-person point of view?

A. The selling sections of the proposal—everything but the outline and the sample writing—were once always written in the third person, as in this example: “Fred Writerly was born in Toledo and educated at Harvard.” Recently, though, first-person proposals have become popular, and either first or third person is acceptable to most editors. As Marian Lizzi, editorial director at TarcherPerigee/Penguin Random House, says, “I tend to like an unfiltered first person. I'm not reading something that's meant to be published; I'm reading something that's written for me. So first person is probably more natural—but third person is okay, too because I'll read past that for the content and who the person is.”

Choose the style that suits your personality and your book.

Q. How do I format my proposal?

A. Find guidelines in [chapter thirty-four](#).

Q. How can I describe the contents of my book before I've written it?

A. Editors don't expect the manuscript to match the proposal exactly, but they do expect you to thoroughly conceptualize your book at the proposal stage. This is an instance where the only way through it is to do it. We'll give you some tools, but thinking the whole thing through—and doing the requisite research to get it right—must be done at the proposal stage. If you're writing memoir or other work that you believe will evolve organically, mapping out the content will involve educated guesswork. You still must demonstrate, through the contents and outline, that you've carefully considered how the story will continue to hold the reader's interest from beginning to end.

Q. Can I include guesses in the promotion and platform sections?

A. No. Your proposal must include accurate information. Find instructions throughout [Part Three](#).

Q. Is longer better than shorter?

A. No. The length of your proposal must be dictated by what you need to convey. Editors have little time to review the scores of submissions they receive. Don't frustrate them by padding your proposal. Keep your information pertinent, concrete, and streamlined. (See [chapter thirty-five](#) to find out how.)

Q. I've heard a proposal is a “business plan” for my book. What does that mean? Should I care?

A. Business plans are dry, fat documents that people seeking funds for their business submit to banks, venture capitalists, corporations, or other investors. Think of them as Kickstarter campaigns without the kick.

A proposal is similar to a business plan in that it is a well-researched, well-written sales document created to convince a publishing corporation to invest its capital—or an agent to invest his time—to develop your proposed product and bring it to the market.

A book proposal doesn't have to *look* like a business plan, and—thank the heavens—it doesn't include financial statements. But understanding how it works may make writing it less daunting:



ACQUISITION

- **YOU** offer the product—the book—but need money and distribution.
- The **PUBLISHER** offers money and distribution but needs the product.
- **ACQUISITION OCCURS** where your and the publisher’s needs collide.
Fireworks!

Writers often balk at business, but writing with this objective mind-set can remove the worry that you’re being judged personally.

HOT TIP

PUBLISHING IS A BUSINESS. SO WHAT?

We’ve seen much online vitriol that castigates publishers because they seek profitable books. Publishers have to make money. They must keep the lights on and hire good people so they can continue to publish books. This means they say no to projects they don’t believe they can sell. Sometimes they’re right, and other times they turn down worthy projects, but in any event we want publishers to publish selectively and keep those lights on. Financially stable publishers are good for writers and good for the world.

Q. Where can I view sample proposals?

A. [Appendix D](#) contains an index to the more than thirty proposal samples in this book. You can find other proposals on some agencies' websites. Confirm that the agent or the author has sold books to reputable publishers before using any proposal as a model. (The samples in this book have been supplied by experienced agents.)

Q. Should I write a proposal for my novel?

A. Proposals are not used in fiction, with two-and-a-half exceptions:

- **EXCEPTION ONE, THE SELF-PUBLISHED NOVEL:** Present your self-published novel with a proposal that spells out its sales history, along with other information. We show you how in [chapter twenty-two](#).
- **EXCEPTION TWO, THE GRAPHIC NOVEL:** The term *graphic novel* describes intensively illustrated fiction and nonfiction. (They look like comics in book form.) You can sell graphic novels with proposals. (See [chapter twenty-three](#).)
- **EXCEPTION TWO-AND-A-HALF:** In some uncommon instances, you may be asked to send both your novel and a mini-proposal. We explain in [chapter twenty-six](#).

Q. Should I include photos, charts, and video links in my proposal?

A. Yes. The editors assessing your work were raised in the visual age and are accustomed to seeing visual representations of ideas. And ... no. Use illustrations selectively and wisely, only if the media enhances your words. Never forget: You're selling a book. Photos, charts, and videos are discussed throughout this book.

Q. Agents post differing submission requirements on their websites. Does that mean I need to write a different proposal for each agent?

A. No. A good proposal is a good proposal. If you cover all the bases described in this book and have a strong concept, agents will recognize your writing quality and professionalism. They will happily work with you to revise the proposal to suit their requirements and make it as salable as possible.

If you're still not convinced, check with the agent *after* she has asked to see your proposal. Once that request has been made, communication channels are open. Here's an example of how to handle it.

The interested agent writes, “I love the book idea you described in your query letter! Please send me a proposal.”

You reply, “Thank you for your interest! In your guidelines, you ask for five competitive books. In my proposal, I list ten. Would you like to see the proposal as is, or would you prefer that I revise it?”

Is your idea book worthy? Have your questions been answered? It’s time to set up your systems.

Part Two

ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS

Soup to Nuts Proposal-Writing System (a List)

The System, Expanded

Schedule

Software

Filing

Proposal-Writing Order (a List)

5

THE PRACTICALLY PAINLESS PROPOSAL-WRITING SYSTEM

“Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.”

—A.A. MILNE

In [Part One](#) we talked about *what* proposals contain and *why* they’re important. Although much of this book is devoted to *how* to write them, let’s explore the *when* and the *where* so you can set up your organizing and writing plans. Our recommendations come from these beliefs:

1. **SETTING UP ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AT THE START MINIMIZES STRESS LATER.** Most writers need day jobs while they’re working on books and proposals. If you’re part of the day-job club, you might write, stop for a few days or longer, and then begin again. If you can easily find your work and your plans, you’ll jump back in eagerly. If not, you’ll give up. We don’t want you to give up.
2. **THE FINAL ORDER OF THE PROPOSAL ISN’T THE BEST ORDER IN WHICH TO WRITE IT.** In *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Getting Published*, agents Sheree Bykofsky and Jennifer Basye Sander suggest that you first print out your title page and put it on your wall to inspire you. That’s a fun way to start, but we suggest you go much deeper and find inspiration in organization. [Part Three](#) reflects a section-writing order we believe will dramatically increase your productivity.
3. **ACCOMPLISHING A TASK PROVIDES A BUILT-IN INCENTIVE TO MOVE ON TO THE NEXT TASK WITH INCREASED ENTHUSIASM.** To this end, our suggested writing order staggers less rigorous sections with more difficult ones.

“Having a solid plan prevents procrastination, intensifies focus, boosts productivity, and frees your imaginative mind.”

—TONI ROBINO, BEST-SELLING COLLABORATOR AND COACH,
WINDWORD LITERARY SERVICES

- 4. PEOPLE BOUNCE BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN SECTIONS AS THEY WRITE. SOME SECTIONS MUST BE DRAFTED *WHILE YOU'RE WRITING OTHERS*.** Minds work in unpredictable ways. Ideas for your book's structure may pop into your head while you're writing about the book's audience, or you may discover an agent you want to contact while you're researching competitive books. Don't lose these thoughts: Create a filing system (see [chapter seven](#)) that enables you to store and easily find brainstorms and notes throughout the proposal-writing process.
- 5. WHILE A PROPOSAL LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE A BUSINESS PLAN, WRITING IT IS MORE LIKE DRAWING.** Draft each section as a "word sketch," and avoid self-editing. As best-selling novelist Nora Roberts says, "You can't edit a blank page." So strive to fill the screen before doubt kicks in. Do your substantive editing *after* you've finished the section drafts and collected them into one document.

THE SYSTEM

Follow these steps to productive proposal writing. If you like, type up this list and use it as a checklist, or print out the one we've created for you at www.writersdigest.com/book-proposals.

SETUP

1. Commit your calendar.
2. Flash-write thirty pages.
3. Choose organizing software.
4. Set up your digital filing system.

WRITE

1. Follow this section-drafting order:
 - a. (Consider) *Pizzazz*
 - b. Comps

- c. Book Table of Contents
- d. Book Specs
- e. Author Bio and Platform
- f. Audience
- g. Detailed Outline
- h. Sample Writing
- i. Overview
- j. (Write) Pizzazz
- k. Supplemental Material, Other Sections

FINALIZE

1. Pick a title.
2. Customize the proposal structure, and pull sections together.
3. Revise for voice.
4. Format, and add framework pages.
5. Take a break, and get feedback.
6. Revise per the feedback you receive.
7. Read for proposal killers and writing errors; revise once or twice more.
8. Celebrate!

6

SET UP YOUR SHOP

“You can’t think yourself out of a writing block; you have to write yourself out of a thinking block.”

—JOHN ROGERS

Feeling blocked? Often writer’s block just means you don’t know where to start. Use the procrastination-busting tips in this chapter to create a work environment that helps your creativity flow.

COMMIT YOUR CALENDAR

Begin by giving yourself the gift of time. Schedule writing time in your calendar for the next six months: Mondays and Wednesdays from 7:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M., for example, or Saturdays from 8:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. It doesn’t matter if you can commit to only thirty minutes a week at first; any regular commitment will move your project forward.

Whether you write, research, or just review the chapters in this book, consistently devote the time you’ve set aside to something that relates to your proposal or manuscript. Make the time pleasant, not painful. Brew some tea. Get comfortable.

Forgive yourself when you must make changes to your schedule. Don’t use a missed session as a reason to give up or panic; simply treat it as an objective fact (“whoops, missed a writing session”), and reschedule.

You may wonder if you should also schedule specific writing goals, like “I’ll finish my platform section on July 7.” You can do this, but commit to just one piece at a time. If you try to schedule out the entire proposal—“I’ll finish platform July 7; author August 10; and outline September 3”—one missed deadline can screw up your whole plan. It’s disheartening, not to mention annoying, to change the subsequent completion dates. On the other hand, finishing that one section you’ve penciled into your calendar, and then setting a flexible due date for the next one, will motivate you.

FLASH-WRITE A PORTION OF YOUR BOOK

Write with your mind wide open.

You think you want to write a book. How do you know for sure? Before taking any other proposal-planning steps, use your scheduled time to flash-write a portion of the manuscript. Don't worry about writing beautifully; don't worry about researching thoroughly. Jot down xxx in the manuscript to mark places where you need to add more information. You'll be redrafting and reconfiguring this material much later in the proposal-writing process.

Don't move on to the next step until you've written thirty double-spaced pages from anywhere in the book. Be self-aware as you write. Let this flash-writing exercise help you answer the following crucial questions:

- **DO YOU TRULY WANT TO WRITE THIS BOOK?** Did it hold *your* interest for thirty pages?
- **IS THERE ENOUGH MATERIAL TO SUSTAIN A BOOK?** After thirty pages, you'll know whether your idea is broad enough for a book or if it's better suited for a blog or an article.
- **DO YOU ENJOY WRITING?** Books can take years to write. If you hated the process of writing thirty pages, it's time to find a ghostwriter or invest your energy elsewhere.
- **HOW DO YOU WANT TO WRITE YOUR BOOK?** Until we *do*, we can't *know*. Only writing will answer questions about style, tone, and organization.

As you flash-write, ideas will occur to you. You'll come up with potential titles, form questions you want to research, and think about structure. Keep a separate idea sheet handy, and jot down thoughts as they pop up. If you don't, you'll feel distracted as you write. If you do, you'll have the ideas ready when you need them for your file buckets, which we describe in the next chapter.

SET UP YOUR SYSTEM

After you flash-write those thirty pages, take a little time to create a basic office setup that enhances your productivity.

Get a Second Monitor

One of the most fruitful organizational steps Jody ever took was to hook up a second monitor to her laptop so she could view two computer screens at the same time at her desk. What a life changer! Having simultaneous access to two full-size screens probably saves her an hour of stressful window toggling a day. Yes, you can view documents side by side on one screen, but it's less efficient for most people who need to see, for example, a Word document and a Web browser at the same time or a draft chapter and its related research notes or a password list and a form to fill in. You get the picture.

Choose a Digital File Organizer

Writing a proposal involves collecting and organizing many types of information. Experiment with different digital file organizers, and pick the one that suits the way you think. These six popular options—there are many others—were designed for varying purposes, but each can be used to keep track of your writing and research. These products, like all software, are constantly being updated, and updates don't always improve the product (Windows 8, anyone?). Check out reviews *of the latest version* of any software in an established source, such as *PC Magazine* (www.pcmag.com). While you're researching, keep an eye out for any documented and unresolved security issues. While the products listed here are all widely used, data breaches are a fact of life in the information age. This is an informal survey: The choice of options we've included as well as our descriptions are pretty much Jody's opinions derived from basic research and her own and her staff's experimentation.

Dropbox (www.dropbox.com)

This online file storage system is Jody's current favorite. It's free (or about ten dollars a month if you need a larger storage capacity). Dropbox's file system is intuitive and friendly. You can create your work using programs like Word and Excel on your desktop, and sync the files with Dropbox so that they are stored both in the cloud and off-line. You can invite collaborators to view and comment on the Dropbox documents. You can also edit Dropbox documents in the cloud, but this feature isn't yet Dropbox's forte and can be problematic.

Scrivener (www.literatureandlatte.com)

This program, designed especially for writers, is free to try and costs about forty-five dollars to buy. Thousands of writers swear by it and use it for proposals, books, and other long

documents. However, many people begin projects in Scrivener and soon hit a wall of confusion. It's not hard to figure out how to use basic functions—and the Scrivener people provide extensive tutorials and instructions and forums—but the options can be overwhelming and duplicative.

With its many useful features, there's plenty to love about Scrivener:

- Jump between chapters or proposal sections in a nanosecond.
- View two chapters *and* your organizational structure at the same time.
- Export documents in all sorts of formats, such as .mobi and .epub for e-book publication, as well as Word, RTF, Open Office Writer, and PDF.
- Import Web pages.
- Keep categorized, color-coded notes that can be attached to the document as a whole and to each individual section.

Evernote (www.evernote.com)

A popular organizational and note-taking tool, Evernote isn't designed specifically for writers, but it is an excellent place to store ideas and research when beginning your proposal. The Web-clipping option in the upgraded version allows you to download Web pages to your files with one click. It's free in its basic version and inexpensive to upgrade. Using it often will increase your efficiency and familiarity, but it's easy to forget how it all works if you don't access it regularly.

Google Drive (www.drive.google.com)

This is a popular free cloud-based data storage site, especially useful for collaboration. Unlike Dropbox, it stores everyone's revisions so no change is ever lost. This is worth repeating: *Nothing is lost*. And you can seamlessly work with collaborators anywhere in the world on the same document in real time.

Google Drive does come with a few downsides as a file-organizing tool. The file trees aren't always intuitive, and Google's lack of support makes some users want to fling their computers across the room. Also, editing documents in the cloud can involve sluggish, frustrating response times, although you can sync files and work off-line if you prefer.

OneNote (www.onenote.com)

Microsoft's free note organizer is used by millions of people to track notes and projects. You can access and create notes without closing the document you're writing and attach the notes you've written to e-mails, calendars, and other documents. Within a note, you can type to-do lists and insert entire documents, images, and Web pages. You can even record and insert an audiotaped message to yourself with a click on the "Audio" button, or click "Camera" and insert a picture of your smiling face.

OneNote isn't uniformly intuitive; it takes training and time to get up to speed, especially if you want to use it both online and offline. It's fully integrated into the Microsoft bubble, and it seems to some users (Jody, for one) that you have to sell your independent soul to get the best use out of it, especially if you use it through Office365, Microsoft's online subscription service.

Microsoft Word

If you're comfortable with Word alone, stick with Word to both write and organize your work! File trees on the Mac version of Word are easy to find and view with the Finder tool. They're more complex on PCs, which is where Dropbox can come in handy.

HOT TIP

USE MICROSOFT WORD'S HEADINGS TO EMULATE SCRIVENER

One of the functions we like best in Scrivener is also available in Word; you just have to know where to find it. Both programs enable you to see and manipulate all the headings in your document at once. This massive time-saver is much easier to use than to describe; believe us. To make it work, use the "Heading" and "Find" functions. Label appropriate text as headings and subheadings using Word's "Styles" box on the "Home" tab. Then search your document using the "Find" command—you can get there by pressing the "Ctrl" and "F" keys on a PC or the "Command" and "F" keys on a Mac. When you hit those keys simultaneously, a navigation pane will open (it's called a document map in older versions). Click the "Headings" word or symbol in the navigation pane. When you can see the headings, you can jump right to any section by clicking on it; you can even move entire sections. Move the heading, and all the contents prior to the next heading in your document will move with it. Try not to fall in love; we dare you.

[Figure 6.1](#) shows the Navigation Pane for the first draft of this paragraph on Jody's laptop in Word 2010; [Figure 6.1a](#) shows the same function (and a later draft) in Word 2016.

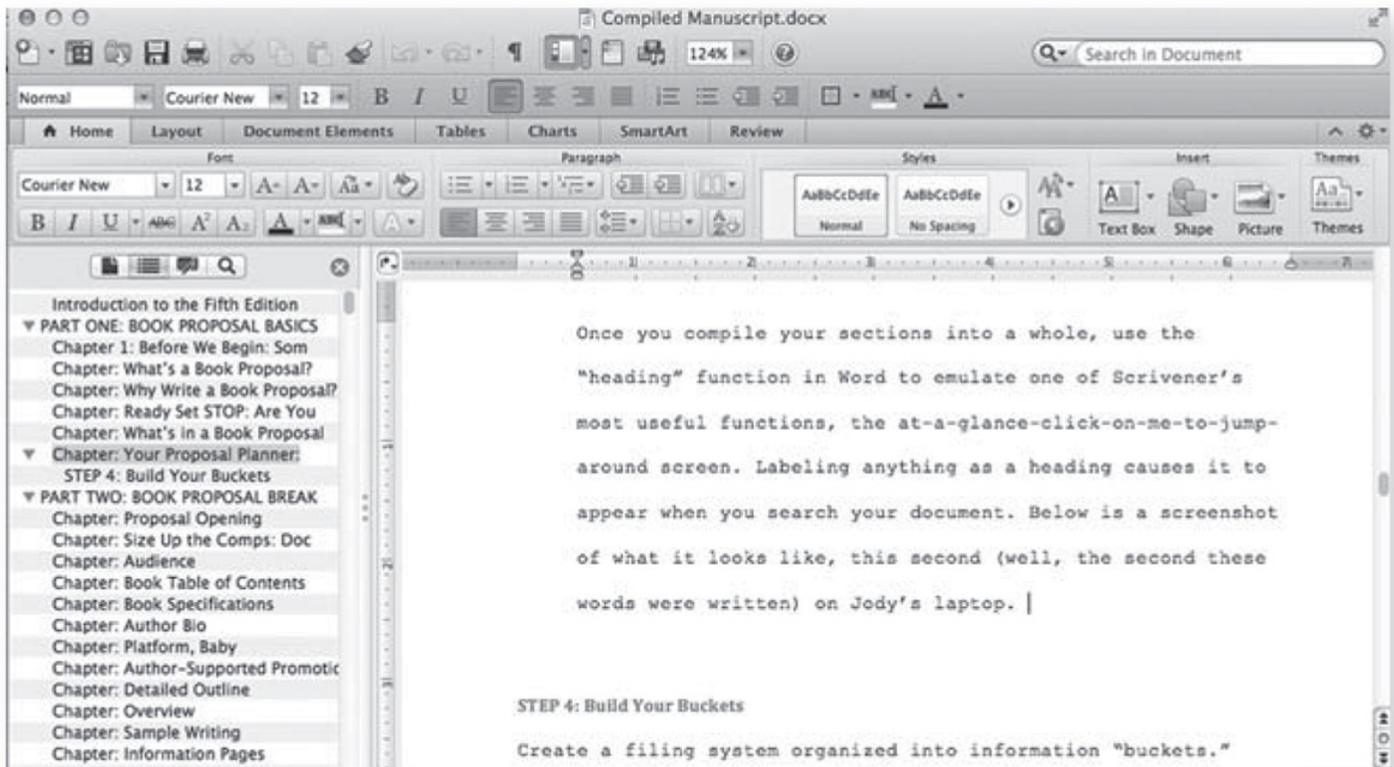


Figure 6.1: Word 2010 Navigation Pane.

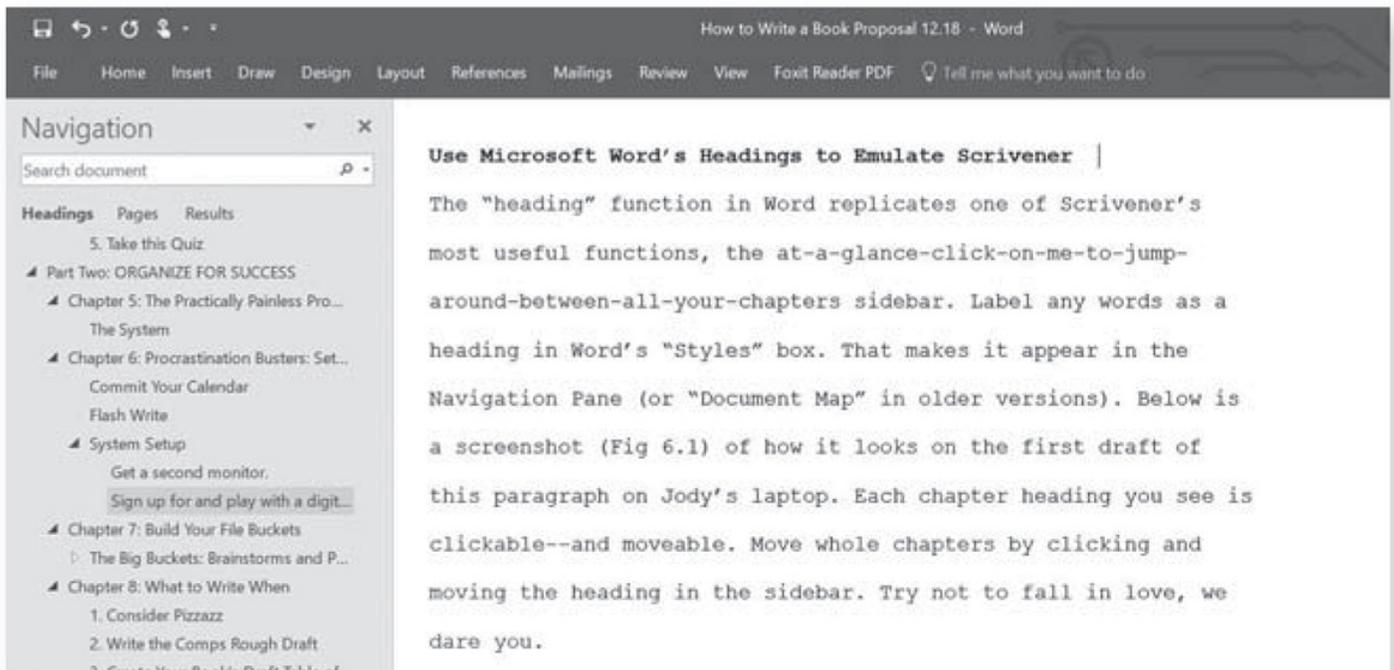


Figure 6.1a: Word 2016 Navigation Pane (toolbar ribbon collapsed).

7

BUILD YOUR FOLDER BUCKETS

“Instant gratification takes too long.”

—CARRIE FISHER

You’ve written a flash thirty pages; you’ve scheduled time in your calendar; you’ve chosen your software. Now take a few minutes to organize your digital folders, files, and documents to capture your writing and your brainstorms.

We think of proposal folders as “buckets” of info. [Figure 7.1](#) shows the proposal folders, or buckets, to initially create. If you’re an “I get it already!” kind of person, use [Figure 7.1](#) as your filing model, create your files, and move on to [chapter eight](#). If not, read on.

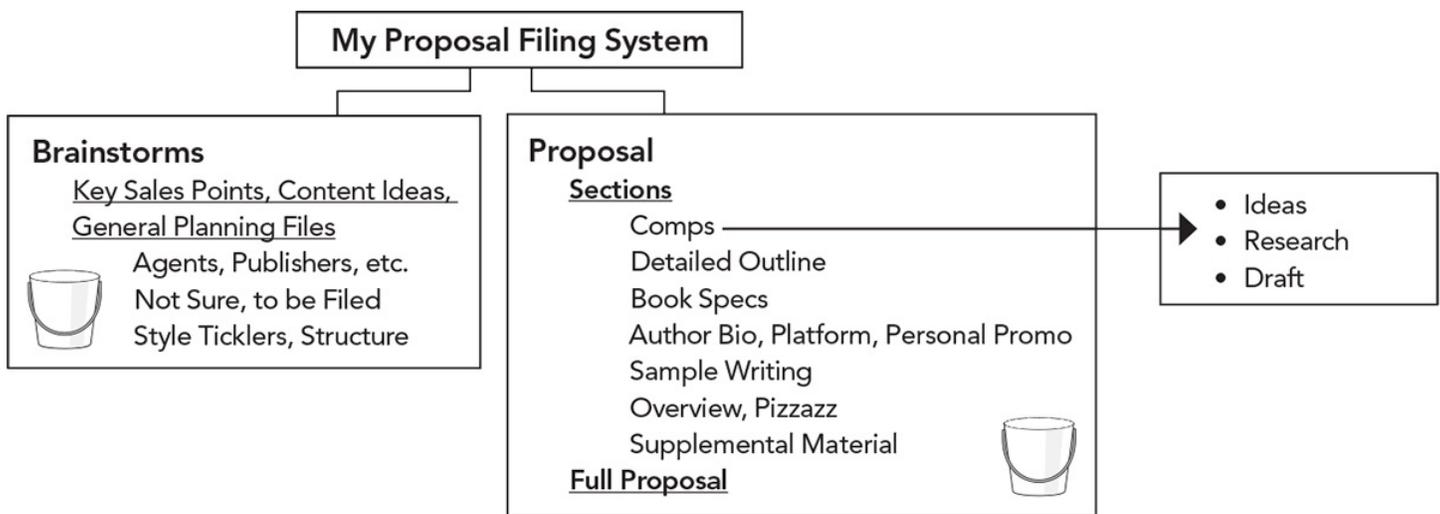


Figure 7.1: One way to organize your files.

1. CREATE YOUR PROPOSAL BUCKET

All of the folders you create will fit within this folder. You can call it **My Proposal**, or **Proposal for [Name of Your Book]**, which can be inspiring. We called it **Proposal! Proposal!**

2. CREATE THE BIG BUCKETS: BRAINSTORMS AND PROPOSAL

The **Brainstorm** bucket holds *planning* folders, files, and documents. Store documents like “possible agents and publishers,” and “key selling points,” here. The **Proposal** bucket contains your *writing* files, including drafts and research.

The Brainstorms and Proposal buckets support one another. For example, you might create a document called “Where I Put It” in your Brainstorms bucket to remind yourself of where you stored ideas that might fit in a few different sections of your proposal. Don’t spend a lot of time worrying about whether your list of newspaper contacts goes into your Author or your Platform section; store it in the Proposal Bucket, and create a reminder in your Brainstorm bucket. (Of course you can also use note-taking software like OneNote instead.)

This filing system is designed to be flexible; as your proposal develops and the number of documents you’ve saved grows, you will create new folders and subfolders to hold them.



Figure 7.2: Top-level folders as they look in Dropbox.

3. CREATE SUBFOLDERS WITHIN THE BRAINSTORMS BUCKET

Subfolders we recommend within the Brainstorms folder are **General Planning Folders** and **Key Sales Points and Content Ideas**.

The General Planning folder contains documents pertaining to:

- business ideas (agent, publisher, and marketing information)
- holding files (a place to quickly put things before permanently filing them—a time-saver)
- book style and organization ideas and reminders.

The Key Sales Points and Content Ideas folder is your holding spot for those big-content and marketing ideas that you'll come back to again and again as you craft your proposal. As noted throughout this book, the most successful proposals lead with the strongest sales points—the key reasons your book will sell to an eager audience. Most writers don't know which aspect of their work is the strongest until they've fully developed their proposals, but possibilities pop up throughout the proposal-writing process. Capture those ideas here.

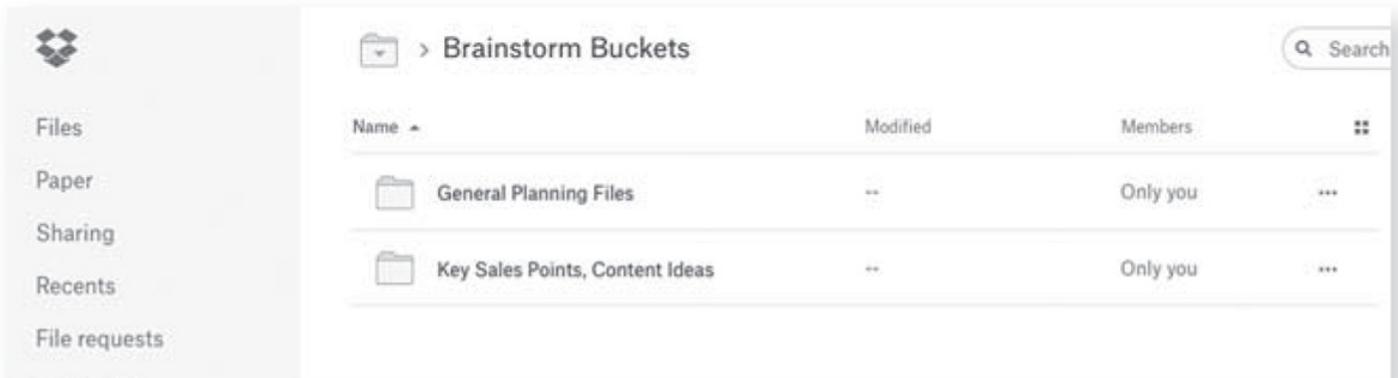


Figure 7.3: Sample folders inside the Brainstorm bucket.

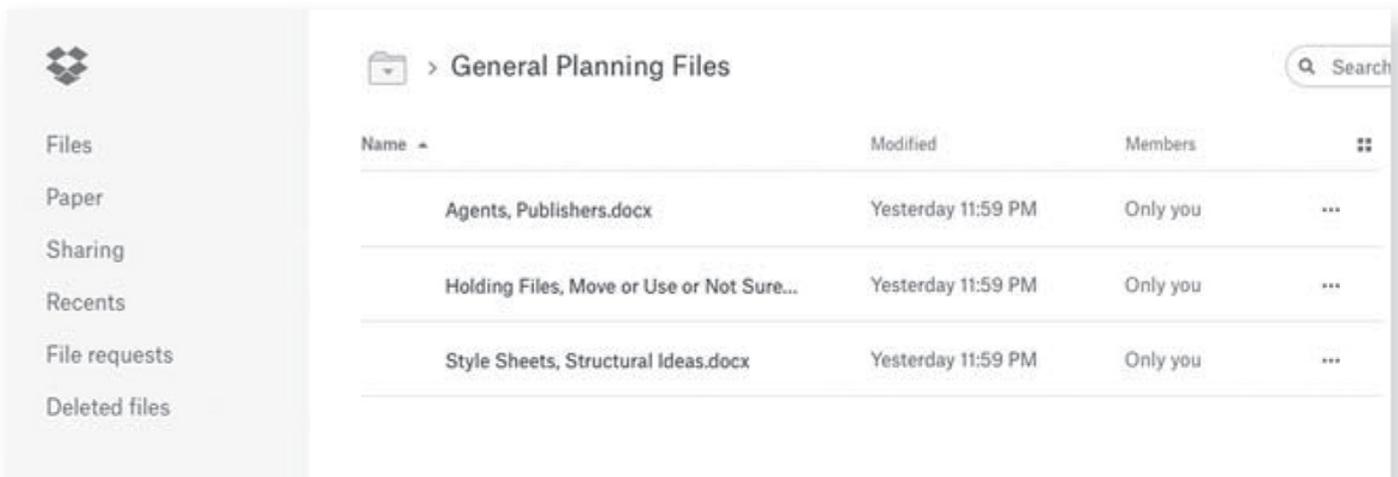


Figure 7.4: Sample documents in a General Planning folder

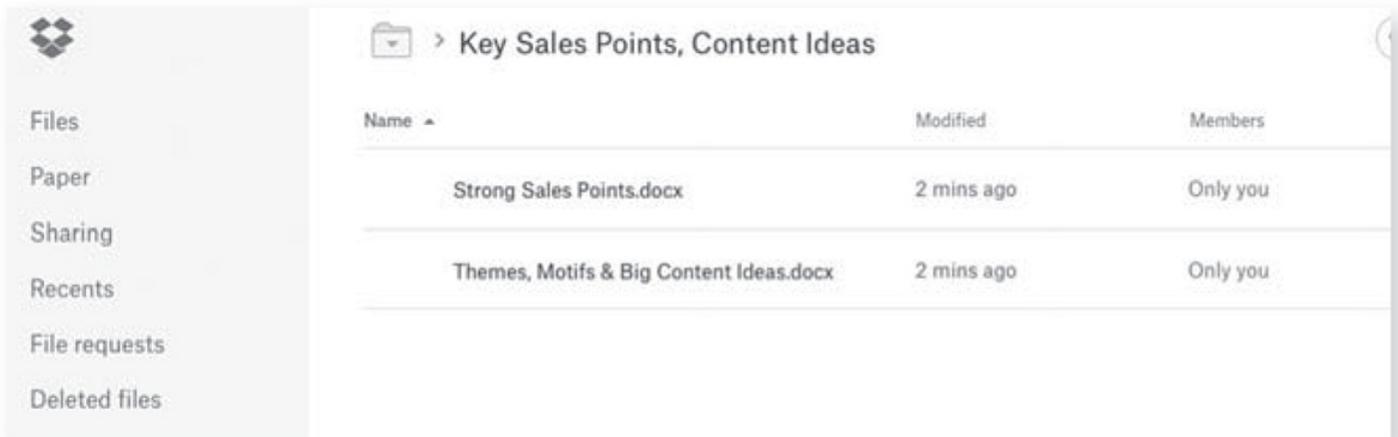


Figure 7.4a: Sample documents in a Key Sales Points, Content Ideas Folder.

4. CREATE SUBFOLDERS WITHIN THE PROPOSAL BUCKET

In the Proposal bucket, create two subfolders: Full Proposal and Individual Sections (see [Figure 7.5](#)). You won't use the Full Proposal folder at first. Eventually you'll move completed drafts of individual sections here. It's satisfying to see the Individual Sections files getting emptier while the Full Proposal file grows.



Figure 7.5: Proposal folders on Dropbox.

Proposal Section Folders

You can create individual folders for each section or, as we do, combine related sections at first (see [Figure 7.6](#)) until you're further along with your proposal. Clearly label each

document you create within a folder (for example, Author Bio Research) so it's easy to identify and move the completed section to its new location.

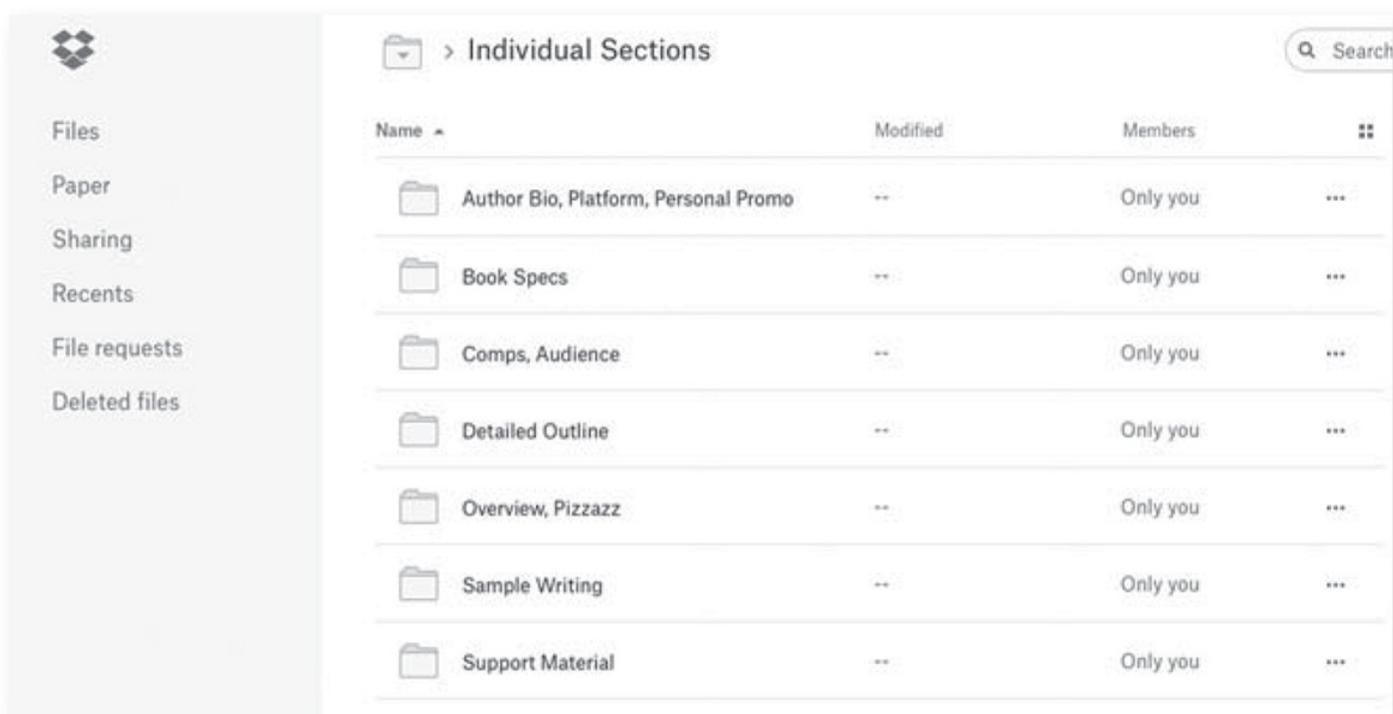


Figure 7.6: Proposal section folders.

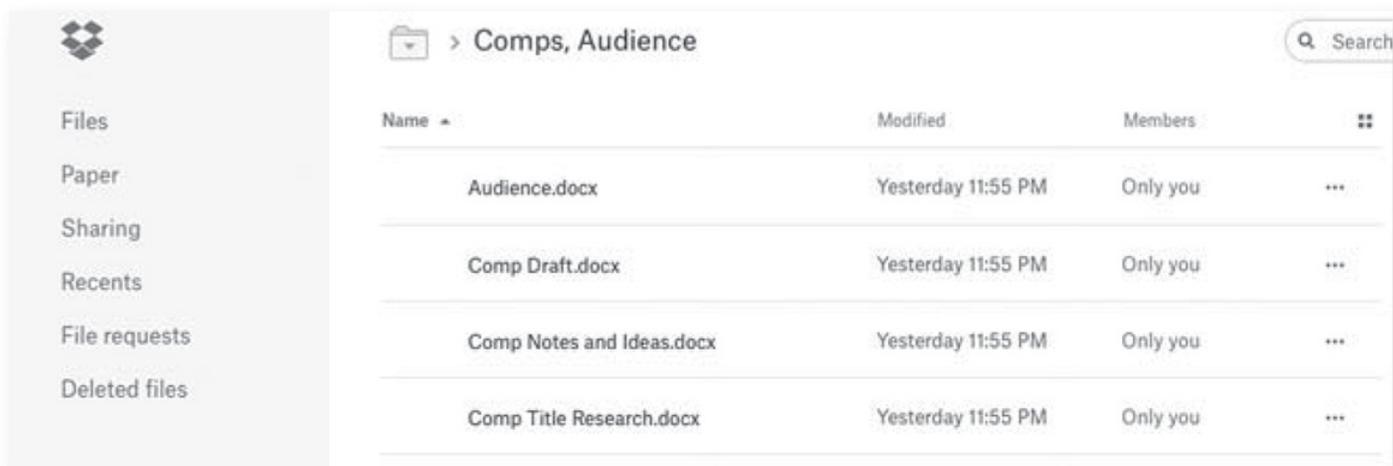


Figure 7.7: Documents inside the Comps, Audience folder.

That's it! Preliminary digital files are all set. In the following chapter, we'll finish up proposal-writing prep with a breakdown of what to write when.

8

THE PROPOSAL-WRITING ORDER

“... you never get any fun out of the things you haven’t done.”

—OGDEN NASH

Got your time scheduled? Written those thirty pages? Set up your filing systems? Feeling energized and organized? Excellent! It’s time to review the order in which we recommend you write your proposal, and why. [Part Three](#) is structured in this order. Don’t forget to write down ideas for other sections and marketing as you draft these sections.¹

1. **CONSIDER PIZZAZZ.** Get into the right mind-set by learning about the elements that inspire editorial enthusiasm.
2. **WRITE THE COMPS SECTION ROUGH DRAFT.** Gaining an understanding of comparable and competing titles will inform every other part of your proposal.
3. **CREATE A DRAFT OF YOUR BOOK’S TABLE OF CONTENTS.** Structure your book while the organization of comparable titles is fresh in your mind and the books you’ve just analyzed are still on your desk or in your Kindle.
4. **DRAFT THE BOOK SPECS.** Immediately after drafting the book’s table of contents, jot down objective features like the estimated length, your writing style, and the content structure.
5. **DRAFT THE AUTHOR BIO AND PLATFORM SECTIONS.** Why now? For most writers, creating an author bio is relatively easy. You could work on it at any time throughout this process, but tackling it after the book specs provides a break after the more intense organizational thinking required for the previous steps. Also, platform ideas will flow naturally from the research you’ve done to write your bio.
6. **WRITE ABOUT THE AUDIENCE.** You’ve just documented your platform, which is the means you have in place to reach your audience. Describing that audience will now be a straightforward task.
7. **WRITE THE DETAILED OUTLINE, AND ADD DESCRIPTIONS TO YOUR TABLE OF CONTENTS DRAFT.** Here’s a welcome change: Leave marketing behind,

and reenter the world of your book. You've flash-written some manuscript pages and determined your book's structure by this point in the proposal-writing process. Using this material to flesh out your outline is less daunting—and speedier—than coming to it cold.

8. **WRITE THE OVERVIEW.** You now know your book, your audience, your platform, and yourself. Finally you've collected the information needed to craft a strong introduction that summarizes your proposal.
9. **REVISE YOUR FLASH WRITING.** Because you have planned your book's structure and style, you can now productively revise your flash writing into sample chapters.
10. **ADD PIZZAZZ.** With most section drafts completed, you're equipped to make an informed judgment about whether to add an attention-getting opener.
11. **CRAFT ADDITIONAL SECTIONS AND SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL.** Your proposal may include extra sections and closing supplemental material. The order in which you write remaining sections won't affect your efficiency.

FINALIZE YOUR PROPOSAL

For many people, moving draft sections into a custom structure, getting input from others, and revising (and revising) along the way is kind of ... fun! Yes, these are intense processes that don't happen overnight, but you're no longer dealing with blank pages and uncertainty. At this stage, you're working on something *real*. We hope you find that encouraging.

Let's begin.

1 Find a downloadable version of this checklist at www.writersdigest.com/book-proposals.

Part Three

PROPOSAL BREAKDOWN

Section Guides, in Recommended Writing Order

Customizing for Prose- and Promotion-Driven Books

Samples from Sold Proposals

Remember! Start with Your Strongest Argument in Every Section You Write

Remember! Store Sales Brainstorms in Your Folder Buckets

9

PIZZAZZ

<input type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">PIZZAZZ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One image, one sentence, or several pages • Not named in your proposal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material* ¹	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Pizzazz: Arresting material placed at the front of your proposal to intrigue editors.</p>		

“What I’m seeing in the publishing industry today fills me with delight.”

—**MICHAEL PIETSCH, CEO, HACHETTE BOOK GROUP**

Open your proposal with a bang. Grab our attention! Make your proposal stand out from the crowd. Just don’t make any final decisions about opening material quite yet.

Pizzazz² is an optional stand-alone element placed at the beginning of your proposal, just after the title page. It highlights something about your work that is incontestably captivating. It can telegraph the essence of your work, like the chocolate treat tied to a gift’s bow or the orange and cinnamon simmering on the stove, filling a home with surprising fragrance, or more literally, like the curious epigram on a book’s first page.

For now, skim this chapter to learn what devices can trigger editorial enthusiasm. As you draft the other sections in your proposal, record pizzazz brainstormers in your folder buckets. Understanding this crucial piece of the publisher mind-set will influence your writing choices in every subsequent section. Read this chapter now for direction, understanding, and

inspiration. Come back when your ideas have ripened. We'll describe several types of pizzazz in this chapter:

1. The book hook, including sales handles
2. The mission statement
3. The blurb
4. The intriguing related fact or quotation
5. The bulleted list (benefits, key sales points, or tip sheet)
6. The illustration
7. Material from the book itself

HOT TIP

Just one or two of these elements usually suffices. You're writing a book proposal, not an infomercial.

BOOK HOOKS AND SALES HANDLES

Your book hook is a descriptive one- to two-sentence attention-getter. Most often used in promotion-driven nonfiction, it helps sell your book from proposal through publication and beyond.

The words *hook* and *handle* (or *sales handle*) are used interchangeably in the industry. They are not precise terms; talk to three different publishing people, and you'll get four different interpretations. In this book, we use the label *hook* to encompass the whole category of attention-grabbing one-liners. For your proposal, nobody cares what you call it—proposals don't include the headings "My Hook" or "The Handle" or even "Pizzazz." What matters is that the text you choose to open your proposal suits and promotes your work. If you're writing a memoir, a slick hook is inappropriate. If you're writing a how-to book with a clear market, an objective sales handle is a fitting opening. You'll find more instructions in the breakdowns that follow.

Hook Style One: *Bambi Meets Godzilla*

The classic Hollywood pitch often combines two movie titles: "It's *Deadpool* meets *The Martian*!" (That would be interesting, wouldn't it?) *Kirkus Reviews* used two nonfiction bestsellers to describe W. Bruce Cameron's novel *A Dog's Purpose*: "It's *Marley & Me* meets *Tuesdays with Morrie*."

Comparing your book to one or more well-known books or authors can help editors immediately grasp the concept. Be warned: This device can cause some major editorial eye rolls if the comparisons aren't apt, so choose carefully. Even better, put the comparison in someone else's mouth: Get a big name to say it for you in a blurb (more on blurbs later in this chapter).

Here are some more examples of hooks that use comparisons directly or indirectly.

- *A Fast Food Nation* about the fashion industry
- *A What to Expect When Your Dog Is Expecting* (that's not a bad idea, says Mike, at least for an article)
- A book in the high-energy, freewheeling style of Tom Wolfe.

Hook Style Two: The Sales Handle

Your proposal-opening hook doesn't have to be a slick tagline; it can be a concise, memorable description that explains why your book merits publication.

Sales handles vary in length, but as with everywhere else in your proposal, the fewer the words, the better—in this case, go for fifteen at most. As Broadway impresario David Belasco once warned playwrights, “If you can't fit it on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea.”

THE SALES HANDLE TEMPLATE

Fill in the blanks to begin structuring your straightforward handle (and then pare it down):

[TITLE] is the first book to [UNIQUE ACTION]. People who love [TITLE OF COMPARABLE BOOK] will buy my book because it provides the [KEY BENEFIT UNIQUE TO YOUR BOOK] sought by readers today.

Here's a pruned variation on the template.

Meeting My Meat: Adventures of a Tender Carnivore

by Catherine Friend (Da Capo/Hachette)

Meeting My Meat: Adventures of a Tender Carnivore by Catherine Friend³ will be the first book to tell readers about the lives of animals and still support their choice to eat meat.

Sales-Handle Models and Inspiration

Find examples of concise sales handles created by industry insiders on the “deals” pages of Publishers Marketplace (www.publishersmarketplace.com). Agents and publishers craft these to get the attention of foreign publishers and film people—and to make the rest of the publishing world jealous. Here's an example.

Carry On, Warrior by Glennon Doyle Melton: “The writer and personality behind the popular website Momastery.com, Glennon Doyle Melton's first book, *Carry On, Warrior*, features new material and some of Melton's most beloved essays on faith, family, marriage, motherhood, addiction, and recovery, carrying Momastery's messages of hope, forgiveness, humor, and redemption.”

For a narrative nonfiction work, a one-paragraph synopsis can be used to add intrigue, especially if the subject is not well known. Such synopses are the exception to the fifteen-word

goal.

Hetty: The Genius and Madness of America's First Female Tycoon

by Charles Slack (Ecco Books/HarperCollins)

Synopsis

During the late nineteenth century, America produced captains of finance and industry on a scale not seen before nor since in the history of the world. It was the age of Andrew Carnegie, Jay Gould, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and the Vanderbilts. In a climate of few taxes and even fewer regulations, they built railroads and steel empires, organized great banks and brokerage houses, and amassed staggering personal fortunes. Amid this cadre of powerful men stood one woman who matched or surpassed their grit, their financial genius, their toughness—and their eccentricity. She was America's richest woman and most notorious and colorful miser. Her name was Hetty Green. More than a few people called her “the Witch of Wall Street.” This is her story.

Find more examples of skillfully written hooks in the first or last lines of book reviews in reputable publications like *Kirkus Reviews* (www.kirkusreviews.com), *Library Journal* (lj.libraryjournal.com), or *The New York Times Book Review* (especially the reviews in brief).

THE MISSION STATEMENT

HOT TIP

Money doesn't rule publishing; passion does. It's contagious, but it starts with you.

Although uncommon, a compelling first-person paragraph that demonstrates your passion for your topic can make for some appealing pizzazz. Expressing your enthusiasm and commitment to your book will affect how agents and editors respond to it. Your ideas, style, and promotion plan must excite them, but your passion for your book has to inspire them. Here are a few mission statements.

Climbing the Corporate Ladder in High Heels

by Kathleen Archambeau (Career Press)

Climbing the Corporate Ladder in High Heels builds on a lifetime of work helping women transform their lives from victims to victors, from pink ghetto girls to highly paid professionals, from corporate clones to self-actualized women. I'm committed to empowering women through my writing, teaching, and lecturing.

How to Write a Book Proposal

by Michael Larsen (Writer's Digest Books)

This is Mike's mission statement for earlier editions of this book.

Helping writers shape their ideas and develop their proposals are two of the pleasures of being a literary agent. So I must make this book as effective as I can to do my job. My desire to make each edition of the book more helpful is also fueled by letters from writers thanking me because the book enabled them to sell their proposals. They inspire me to keep making the book better.

THE BLURB OR ENDORSEMENT

HOT TIP

Blurb bottom line: Use a quote from someone publishers admire.

A blurb can break through the noise like nothing else, for any type of book. Go for three: Use one as pizzazz, and include two others in your platform section. However, a blurb from someone the publisher won't recognize will backfire. Better to have no quote at all than a rave from your next-door neighbor. Here's an effective blurb.

Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder

by Lucy J. Miller, Ph.D. (Putnam/Penguin Random House)

Dr. Lucy Miller is the preeminent scholar in the world on Sensory Processing Disorder, but a well-known paperback on the subject had already captured the market. So how could Dr. Miller remove any "Oh, it's already been done" resistance? She opened the proposal with a quote from her main competition—and nabbed a six-figure advance.

"At last, Dr. Miller has merged her encyclopedic knowledge, her experience as an occupational therapist, and her empathy for children and their families to explain Sensory Processing Disorder. Right here, in one sensational book, is everything you want to know about the science, the art, and the heart of this complex disorder."

—CAROL STOCK KRANOWITZ, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, *THE OUT-OF-SYNC CHILD*

THE INTRIGUING RELATED FACT OR QUOTATION

We agree with agent Jeff Kleinman of Folio Literary Management, who says you can draw in the reader with key facts or quotes that immediately personalize or humanize your concept. His example: If you're writing a book on health insurance, consider starting with a quiz that helps the reader determine how much insurance she needs.

For narrative nonfiction, intrigue the editor with an unexpected quotation or a bit of engaging information. Dean King used this technique in his seven-figure proposal for *Skeletons on the Zahara*, opening with increasingly unexpected facts about the Sahara desert. This pizzazz showed he could make an obscure story relevant much more effectively than if he had simply written, "I will make an unknown tale relatable."

Skeletons on the Zahara

by Dean King (Little, Brown/Hachette)

Desert Facts

The Sahara is the world's largest desert, occupying the northern third of Africa.

Only one-fifth of the Sahara is covered in sand. The rest is covered in hard, arid soil and stone.

One of the Berbers' principal units of measure on the desert is the distance at which a camel can be seen clearly on the horizon, about two kilometers. A lesser unit of measure is the distance a goat can be seen, about one kilometer.

Today the Western Sahara, where Captain Riley and his crew were enslaved, receives virtually no rainfall. When it does rain, every six years or so, massive outbreaks of influenza occur and camels drink themselves to death.

Hotter than the air, the sand's temperature can reach up to 150° F. Just inches below the surface, however, it is cooler, so the wise traveler will dig a trench when resting. In the battle of Metarfa, native foot soldiers refused to lie prone on the sand's surface to fire, and remained standing in spite of orders. All were killed.

[Facts continue.]

THE BULLETED LIST: BENEFITS, KEY SALES POINTS, OR TIP SHEET

Agents and acquiring editors have varied reactions to a proposal-opening list of sales-related information. Such overt selling dissuades some Big Five editors, especially those who publish upmarket narrative nonfiction. One vice president said she finds it "extremely irritating to

wade through a lot of marketing stuff before I've read anything about the book." Charlie Spicer, executive editor at St. Martin's Press, says, "I'm always suspicious when I'm looking at a proposal and all the marketing information comes first and the meat of the proposal comes later. It makes me think the actual writing isn't strong enough."

On the other hand, agent Regina Ryan, who sells a lot of commercial nonfiction, is a big fan of up-front marketing points: "I like the sales matter up front. ... It's more convincing." Mark Gompertz, group editorial director at Skyhorse, agrees: "Anything [up front] that makes it easier for the editor to sell their supervisor or their supervisor's supervisor on the book can give you an edge."

The takeaway: Use common sense. If your book is prescriptive or product-like, provide bulleted lists of sales information early in the proposal; when proposing more literary works, be circumspect about using them.

Bulleted List of Benefits

Mike says, "People don't buy books—they buy benefits." He suggests making your book more salable by showing, in a proposal-opening list, how it will help your readers. He also advises you to keep this distinction in mind: "*Features* are contained in your book; *benefits* are what your features do for your readers. Features create benefits; benefits create fans."

Guerrilla Trade Show Selling

by Jay Conrad Levinson, Mark S.A. Smith, and Orvel Ray Wilson (Wiley)

Guerrilla Trade Show Selling will:

- Maximize readers' trade-show investment.
- Enable readers to avoid image-damaging, business-killing show behavior. Some companies will be better off if they don't participate in trade shows.
- Give readers control over their trade-show-sales results, leaving little to chance. Include ideas to salvage shows with poor exhibit placement, wrong show selection, missing exhibits, and seven other problem situations.
- Enable small companies to compete with larger, well-established competitors. Large competitors often don't prepare their exhibit sales staff properly. A small, well-trained exhibit staff will beat a large, unprepared staff every time.
- Save time, money, and energy in creating in-house training programs or researching the scattered information on trade-show selling. This will eliminate the need to hire sales trainers—perhaps inexperienced at trade-show selling—or expensive consultants.
- Repeat the investment in this book thousands of times over.

List of Key Sales Points

Some proposals open with a list of key sales points that combine features *and* benefits.

You Mean I'm NOT Lazy, Stupid or Crazy?!: A Self-Help Book for Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder

by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo (Scribner/Simon & Schuster)

A version of this list of key sales points opened the proposal for this self-published book, which Jody sold at auction for a substantial six-figure advance. The book has gone on to sell more than 400,000 copies.

- Authors Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo have become the faces of ADD in everyday life through their eloquent speaking, their constant advocacy, and this self-published book. They are passionate and informed laypeople who both have ADD.
- The book is endorsed by John Ratey, M.D., co-author of the bestseller *Driven to Distraction*: “A much-needed addition to the ADD bookshelf.”
- Publishing History:
 - Self-published one year ago
 - 5,000 copies, first printing
 - 15,000 copies, second printing
 - 20,000 copies, third printing
 - Sales to date: 25,000 copies
 - Rate of sales: 2,000–2,500 monthly, with jumps wherever authors speak
 - Availability: trade paperback only, not distributed through Ingram Content Group
- This is the first practical book on ADD for adults. We know what ADD is. Now, with this book, adult sufferers learn how to live with it: on the job, as parents, in relationships.
- Foreword by Larry B. Silver, M.D., author of the popular book *The Misunderstood Child* and the forthcoming book for clinicians: *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Clinical Guide to Diagnosis and Treatment*.
- Adult ADD sufferers are forming support groups and grassroots organizations by the thousands online (see appended list).
- Adult ADD has only recently burst onto the public consciousness; before the publication of *Driven to Distraction*, the common belief was that kids “grow out of it.” They don’t.

The Tip Sheet

A one- or two-page at-a-glance list of key sales information about the book, called the tip sheet or title information sheet, is used by every publisher during the publication process, sometimes even before acquisition. Tip sheets present data in a bulleted list or an otherwise abbreviated form where possible in order to convey information quickly. They typically include the following.

- Title, subtitle, and author name
- Word count, illustration count if you have illustrations, time needed to complete
- Sales handle
- Key sales points in list form
- Expanded description (one to three paragraphs)
- Platform
- Author bio
- Comp titles

Some agents recommend that authors write their own tip sheet and place it at the beginning of the proposal. Tip sheets for practical nonfiction can be very appealing to an agent or small publisher. Larger houses may feel such an effort is overreaching, so seek your agent's advice. If you think a tip sheet might be right for you, check out agent Roger Williams' advice and example on his website (www.rogerwilliamsagency.com/how-to-write-a-title-information-page). It's very clear and thorough. Roger recommends including a short "Catalog Line" or branding slogan in addition to the elements listed above.

THE PHOTOGRAPH OR ILLUSTRATION

A proposal-opening photo or piece of art can pull editors into the book's world, especially for narrative nonfiction. Go for evocative imagery rather than literal.

The Seashell on the Mountaintop

by Alan Cutler (Dutton/Penguin Random House; reissued by Author Planet Press)

Triple pizzazz helped sell this six-figure proposal: a scene-setting illustration, an arresting quote, and sample writing from the book's prologue.



“Happy is the man whose lot is to know the secrets of the Earth.”

—EURIPIDES

MATERIAL FROM THE BOOK

Many narrative nonfiction writers open their proposals with a few captivating pages of writing from the book: the book’s prologue, the author’s note, or an absorbing scene from the heart of

the text. This is a great way to engage editors when the writing is spectacular and the author isn't well known.

CUSTOMIZE THE PIZZAZZ

PROSE-DRIVEN PIZZAZZ

- Use blurbs to show that reputable authors admire your writing.
- Experiment creatively with literary quotations or other scene-setting text.
- Story is what narrative nonfiction editors most want to see first.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN PIZZAZZ

- Establish your fame with big-name blurbs.
- Consider the value of key sales points in the form of a bulleted list.
- Provide a short selling handle or hook.
- Use impressive stats if your platform is your strongest suit.

1. Sections in every chapter-opening chart, like this one, are listed in the order they commonly appear in proposals. Each section is checked off when completed, and highlighted when discussed.
2. By the way, you won't find "pizzazz" in any official publishing handbook. Lots of writers use it, but as far as we know, nobody else has named it. As Jody's mom says, that and a metro card will get us a ride on the subway.
3. The final title for Catherine's book was *The Compassionate Carnivore*. Mike's partner Elizabeth's idea for the title was *Hi, My Name's Fluffy. I'll Be Your Lamb Chop Tonight*.

10 COMPS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">COMPS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to three pages • Third person • Sometimes called: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Comparable Books ◦ Competitive and Complementary Titles ◦ The Competition ◦ Market Position ◦ Comparable Books in the Marketplace ◦ Comps and Audience ◦ Related Titles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Comps: Descriptions of three to ten books that compete with or are otherwise comparable to your book, usually published within the past five years. Should clearly define a market position for your book relative to other published titles.</p>		

“If you can’t discern why your book is going to be different or better from what’s out there, that’s problem number one. Because if you can’t answer that, then who else can?”

—**RENEE SEDLIAR, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, DA CAPO LIFELONG BOOKS AND
SEAL PRESS, DA CAPO/HACHETTE**

If you sincerely want to get published, you must learn what other books have been written on your subject and how those books have performed in the marketplace.

There are many reasons to research your comps section before digging into the other proposal sections, but here’s the biggie: Publishers and book buyers trust authors to be expert and passionate; this covenant gives books their value. If you’re not personally driven to learn everything you can about your subject and how others approach it, perhaps this isn’t the right topic for you.

Penguin Books executive editor Meg Leder says she spends more time with the comps section of a proposal than any other part; this is common. Publishers seek books that offer something fresh and desired, relative to other books in the marketplace—a new voice, a new system, new scholarship, a broader platform, a new format.

A well-constructed comps section will convince publishers that you:

- are an expert on the subject
- are professional in the way you approach the project
- can judge your book accurately (proven through your astute assessments of other titles)
- have a verifiable new slant
- understand the professional needs of traditional publishers and will therefore probably be a reliable colleague

HOT TIP

The books in your comps section prove your book is *similar* enough to existing books to find a ready audience, yet *different* enough to stand out.

HOW TO WRITE THE COMPS SECTION: RESEARCH, READ, PRUNE, WRITE

Effective comparisons dig the hole your book will fill. Here's how to assemble and present your list.

Research

Start by compiling a large list of books that might be shelved close to yours in a bookstore. You'll prune this list later. Look for the following.

- **COMPETITIVE BOOKS:** Books that might be bought instead of yours.
- **COMPLEMENTARY BOOKS:** Books that might be bought along with yours or that seed the market for your book.
- **COMPARABLE BOOKS²:** Books that help editors understand facets of your book—like design or voice—that are best described through example.

Look for comps in more than one place. Start with online searches for books in your subject area. Then get out of the house, and talk to people on the front lines: booksellers and librarians.

- On **GOOGLE** (www.google.com), search for the “Top Books in [Your Category].” Yes, this is an obvious step, but it’s also an effective shortcut. You may find that someone reliable has written a roundup of the year’s top books in your subject area.
- **AMAZON** (www.amazon.com) is a must-search website, but it can be deceiving. Comps you find in your topic area may be influenced by Amazon algorithms to show Amazon-published books and mask others. Confirm that books you find on Amazon meet the requirements for comps (found later in this chapter).
- **BARNES & NOBLE**’s website (www.barnesandnoble.com) is less sophisticated than Amazon’s, but it contains a nifty tool to find the one-hundred best-selling books in twenty or thirty broad categories.
- **INDIEBOUND** (www.indiebound.com) won’t help you do general research. Go there anyway to research and buy specific books; it’s the online sales site for independent bookstores. Support for indie bookstores keeps publishing alive.
- **PUBLISHERS MARKETPLACE** (www.publishersmarketplace.com) is an enormous online database of publishers, agents, and book deals. A one-month subscription costs about twenty-five dollars. You’ll find published books, plus insider info on forthcoming books that are not yet announced to the general public.
- **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY** (www.publishersweekly.com), the industry’s weekly trade journal, posts deals, reviews upcoming books, and publishes summer, fall, and winter announcement issues in which publishers list their new titles.
- **GOODREADS** (www.goodreads.com) hosts customer-generated “lists,” in which passionate readers compile their favorite books in a wide range of categories. Use the tool to search for your topic. Goodreads is owned by Amazon.
- **BOOKSELLERS** sell books in your genre in person. Ask about current titles they might consider competitive with your idea. The question will be a welcome change from the usual “I’ve self-published my book; will you stock it?”
- **LIBRARIANS** can be reached by phone or in person; either way, reference librarians can be excellent sources of information about comparable books.
- **BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF COMPETING BOOKS** can point you toward other books that will compete with yours. Study bibliographies in the comps you find.

Read

Certainly *you*, dear reader, will actually read—or at least skim—the books that might compete with yours. But for all those *other* people: *Read the comparable books*. Skim first for relevance. If a book could merit inclusion in your comps section (see below), read it analytically. Note points of differentiation for your comp section, and record in your files ideas that the book inspires on structure, voice, length, and market position.

HOT TIP

If all comps on your subject were published by small presses, this may mean your subject lacks sufficient commercial appeal or is too far ahead of its time. If you disagree, provide arguments to counter these objections in the introduction to your comps section.

Prune

Narrow your list down to the three to ten books that best make your case for the marketability of your concept. Use the following checklist to decide what to include in the final list. Remove books for the following reasons.

- **THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED BY A MAJOR PUBLISHER.** Small-press and academic books, unless they've sold well, aren't generally considered competitive. If you find scores of small-press books on your subject, write about them as instructed later in this chapter.
- **THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED BY A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER.** Self-published books, unless they're strong sellers available in bookstores, don't belong in your comps section.
- **THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS.** Although there are exceptions, generally publishers want to know about recent books.
- **THEY HAVE NOT SOLD WELL.** Books on your subject that didn't sell disprove your market. However, you must address titles published recently by major publishers. Take care to explain—factually, convincingly, and briefly—why your book will succeed despite the evidence of similar books' failure.

A Word About Bestsellers

You will encounter people who advise you to include *only* bestsellers in your comps section. One agent, in an online instruction sheet, writes, “Books in your comps section should have sold at least 100,000 copies.” But Jody urges caution. The single most common proposal complaint among all the editors she interviewed for this edition was “too many bestsellers in the comps section.” Here are some anonymous examples from the cacophony:

“We *know* what the bestsellers are. Use some discrimination.”

“Everybody is using the same comp. It’s irritating. Not everyone can write like Cheryl Strayed.”

“Writers need to be more realistic.”

“The really good proposals come up with clever ways to talk about the comps; they go beyond the obvious.”

“Whatever the ‘book du jour’ is, it seems everybody wants to list it in the comps section of their proposals. It’s more helpful to have fewer, more accurate comparisons. A comps section full of bestsellers can make authors look foolish because it’s not likely your book is the next major bestseller.”

—**MINDY WERNER, EDITORIAL CONSULTANT, WERNER EDITORIAL, AND
FORMER EXECUTIVE EDITOR, VIKING/PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE**

Of course, if you don’t include obvious bestsellers in your category, your comps section will look incomplete, so you must include them if they’re *truly* comparable. But include other books as well, and be self-aware as you describe the bestsellers.

Finding and Assessing Sales Figures

While overloading your proposal with bestsellers can backfire, your comps must nonetheless include the sales leaders in your subject area. You, like most writers, probably wonder: What does success look like in book sales, anyway?

The answer, unfortunately, isn’t straightforward. Sales numbers considered “good” vary with the publisher, the format, the subject matter, and the context. For example, let’s look at two hypothetical books that each sold fifteen-thousand copies in their first year of publication. One was seen as a success and the other a failure.

Book A, *How to Clean Your Fish Tank in 150 Easy Steps*, was published with great fanfare by a major house. Bookstores ordered so many copies in advance that the publisher's first printing was thirty-five-thousand copies. This meant, since only fifteen thousand were sold, that twenty-thousand unsold copies were returned to the publisher at the end of that first year.

Book B, *Overcoming Fish Tank Cleaning Phobias*, was published quietly by a small press. Bookstores ordered cautiously, and the book's first printing was five-thousand books. People fell in love with this book, and bookstores had to constantly reorder to keep up with demand. At the end of the first year, no books were returned, fifteen-thousand copies were sold, and orders from bookstores and online retailers continued to flow into the publisher.

Book A is perceived by the publishing community as a dismal failure, a signal that the market is uninterested in fish-tank cleaning. It's a book that belongs in your comps section but with much explanation. Book B, with its increasing sales velocity and obvious demand, is viewed as a striking success, a reason to publish more such books and a gem that not only belongs in your comps section but will also get publishers very excited about your book. So numbers are fishy³ things.

Here are rules of thumb about how publishers view actual sales numbers: Sales of fewer than ten-thousand copies in any format and trending down aren't very impressive and don't generally belong in your comps section (yet are the norm). Books that have sold more than twenty-five-thousand copies over a few years, with sales trends that are stable or trending up, will prompt any publisher to look more closely; those books are comps.

But how can you find the numbers?

While publishers endlessly analyze specific sales figures, industry pros assume you won't have insider numbers. But you are expected to know, at least generally, which books are selling well enough to be on publishers' radars and therefore belong in your comps section. Use these tools.

- **AMAZON SALES RANKINGS:** Books in your subject area—in the format in which you hope to be published (e-book, paperback, or hardcover)—that consistently rank in the top 2,500 or so of all books Amazon sells are musts; books that rank up to 25,000 are worth a second look. Books that consistently rank outside the first fifty thousand aren't usually considered competitive by publishers. Look also for category rankings between one and one hundred. Double-check the format of the book you're investigating; rankings may be different for e-books, paperbacks, and hardcover editions.

Product details

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; Reprint edition (April 12, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316159352

ISBN-13: 978-0316159357

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: ☆☆☆☆☆ (389 customer reviews)

Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #21,108 in Books (See Top 100 in Books)

#3 in Books > History > World > **Slavery & Emancipation**

#10 in Books > Travel > Africa > **General**

#23 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > **Ships**

If you are a seller for this product, would you like to **suggest updates through seller support?**

Figure 10.1: Amazon sales for Dean King's *Skeleton's on the Zahara*, an older book whose ranking suggests current relevance.

- **AMAZON BEST-SELLER SEARCHES:** It takes some digging to find the top-selling category-specific books. Use the “bestselling” filter in the “Relevance” box on Amazon’s “Advanced Search” page in the “Books” department. The results update hourly and may include momentary, anomalous big sales but will show you which books consistently appear.

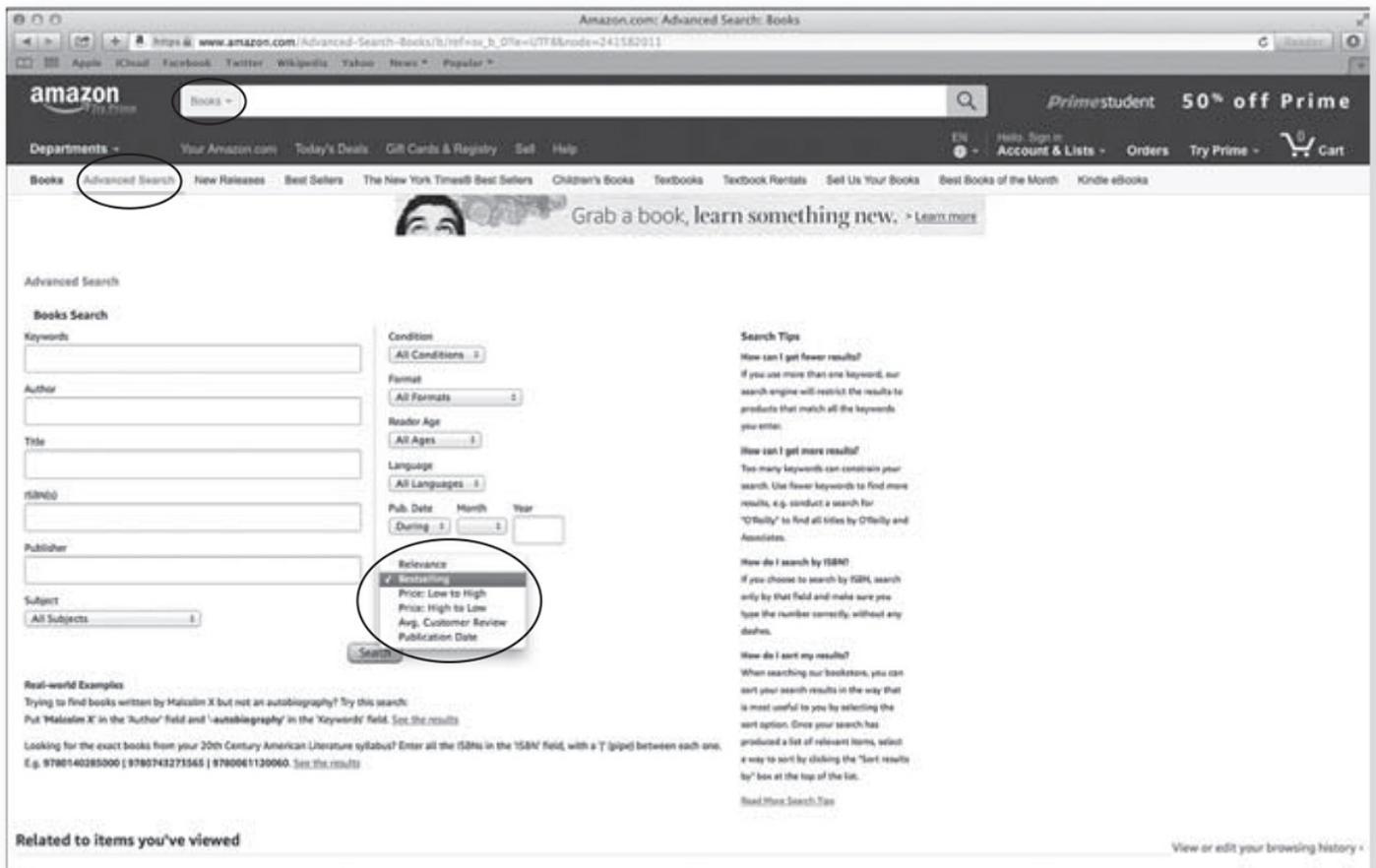


Figure 10.2: Search by “bestselling” through the “Advanced Search” page on Amazon.

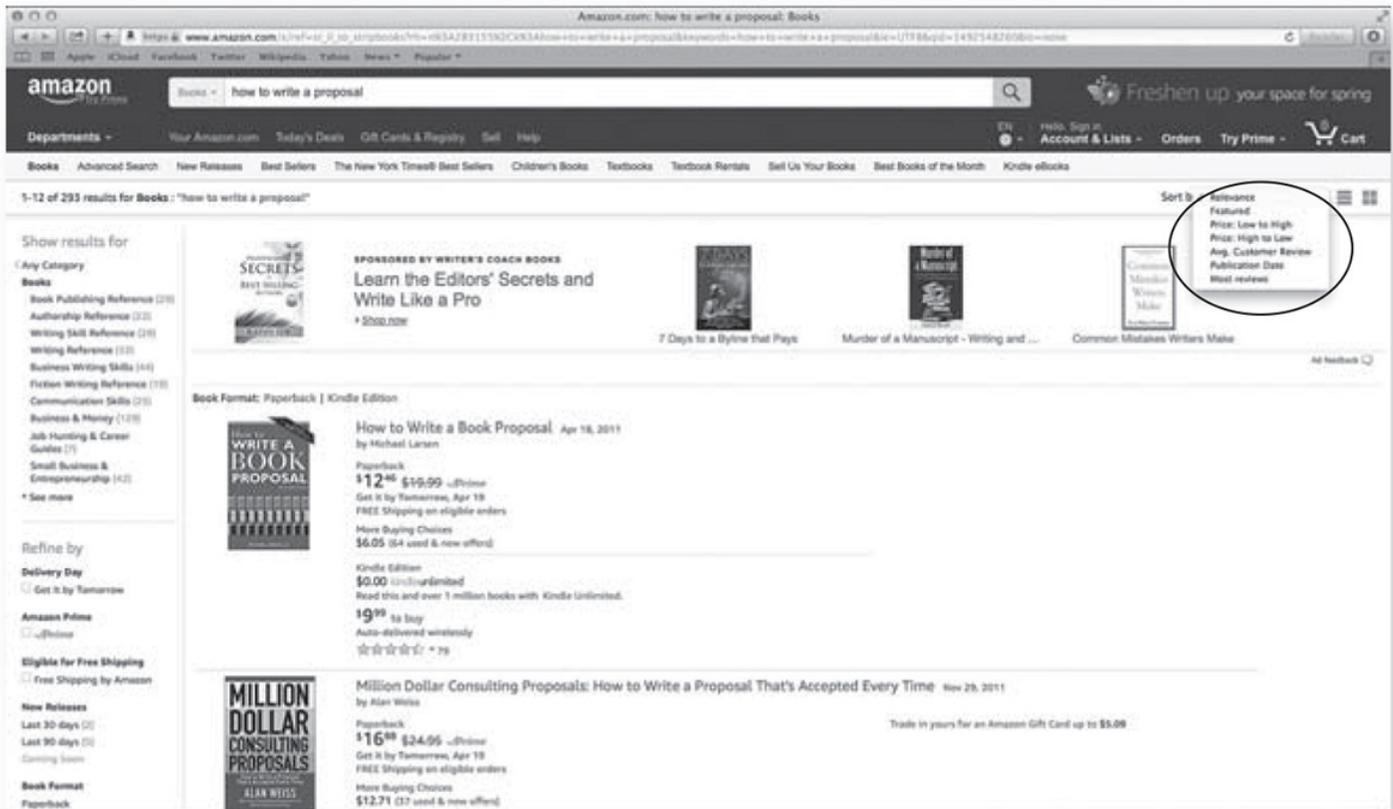


Figure 10.3: "Sort by" options in a general search in the "Books" department don't allow you to search by sales.

- **PUBLISHERS MARKETPLACE:** Search for books in their category-specific best-seller lists.
- **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY:** Look for your topic in their seasonal and annual lists of bestsellers.
- **POPULAR MEDIA:** Articles about your subject matter in popular media sometimes include sales figures; *Forbes* (www.forbes.com) blogs, for example, often cover roundups of top titles in many categories of business books.
- **SEARCH ENGINES:** When you search for your topic on Google, Bing, or your preferred search engine, what books appear on the first or second page?
- **THE NUMBER OF PRINTINGS:** Books are published in discrete quantities based on expected demand, and publishers go "back to press" to print a bunch more books when sales justify it. The decision to reprint has of late been complicated by the option to print individual books on demand, but in any event any book that has frequently been reprinted is a viable candidate for your comps section. And guess what? You can find the number of printings on the copyright page of every book professionally published. Look on the

copyright page for an ascending line of numbers. The highest number is on the far left of this series, and the lowest number is on the far right. The lowest number indicates the latest printing. The higher the number, the more printings and the greater the sales.



Figure 10.4: The copyright page of this book.

HOT TIP

Interested editors will verify sales numbers on comp titles you list, either through their company's records or through expensive software called "BookScan." BookScan's numbers, while helpful, are incomplete, only showing sales through major retail outlets, which amount to between 50 and 70 percent of total sales. You likely don't have access to BookScan, but you should know that it exists (and that any sales figures you provide will be checked!).

Write

Here's an effective organizational structure for your comps section:

1. Start with a one- to three-paragraph introduction that explains where your book fits relative to similar titles. Show that comparable books have sold well but have not saturated the market and that your book is a much-needed and unique addition to the field. If many related small-press books have been published, mention and dismiss them in a few sentences, like so: "Many books on my subject have been published by small presses, but none have been broadly distributed."
2. List three to ten books in the following format.
 - *Book title*, author, publisher, publication year, format that matches your proposed book's format (mass market, trade paperback, e-book, hardcover, audiobook), current price of format listed, trim size (if illustrated)
 - A one- or two-sentence description of the book
 - A one- or two-sentence comparison statement that positions your book, showing why your book is different *and that a market exists for that difference* or demonstrating why the success of the comp is a good indicator that your book will be successful as well

THE COMPARISON STATEMENT

These prompts will help you craft that one- or two-sentence comparison. Choose the *one* prompt that best suits each comparable title. We crafted the prompts to provide concrete but generic ways to think about comparing. Use your own words and your own voice in your proposal.

My book, compared to [COMP TITLE], fills a real need in the marketplace because:

- It is **more/less in-depth**. Its audience demands a more exhaustive/easier approach because ...
- It includes more **up-to-date** research. Its audience is hungry for more knowledge because ...
- I am **more knowledgeable** than the competitive author. My audience has been looking for an authority because ...
- I am **better known/have a stronger platform** than competitive authors. My audience has been looking for a book from me because ...
- I am telling a **personal story**, and readers and the media have demonstrated a keen interest in people who have encountered my problem through ...
- My book focuses on an **aspect of the topic** nobody has yet explored. Its audience is particularly interested in this angle because ...

- My book is **physically different** from other books [it has more white space or more illustrations, or it's more interactive]. Its audience will find this difference appealing because ...
- My book brings a **unique perspective** to the issue. Its audience is eager to read about this perspective because ...

Dos and Don'ts for Comps

- **DO** provide clear points of differentiation from similar books.
- **DON'T** be afraid to list books that are very similar to yours.
- **DO** list bestsellers cautiously, explaining specifically why the comparison is appropriate.
- **DON'T** insult any book on your comps list. Chances are the editor who is reading your proposal may have been involved in its publication. Instead, turn flaws into information: A book isn't "poorly written," but rather it "didn't explore key issues that are of keen interest to readers, such as ...".
- **DO** list books in the same format as the book you're proposing.
- **DON'T** blame the packaging for poor sales of one of your comps. The cover or jacket was designed by the publisher, who may end up being *your* publisher.
- **DO** list books from several publishers, if they are comps. Some companies prefer comps from their own lists, but that's for your agent to determine.
- **DON'T** list too few books. Leave out an important comp, and you lose the reader's trust. "I always get a sinking feeling in my stomach when I find similar books that the author didn't know about," says Laurie Abkemeier, an agent at Defiore & Company.
- **DON'T** list too many books; try to stop at ten.
- **DO** keep your descriptions short and concise.

In spite of everything we've written, if you're passionate about your project, don't let the existence of a few competitive books discourage you. Nothing is really new; that's why you can't copyright an idea. Originality is in the expression, the point of view, the fresh angle. Books break through the noise all the time.

CUSTOMIZE THE COMPS

PROSE-DRIVEN COMPS

- The comps section can be puzzling for memoirists, as nobody else has written about your subject (you). It's therefore tempting to only compare your book to best-selling memoirs. But not every memoir is the next *The Glass Castle* or *Love Warrior*. If you must list a bestseller, do it in terms of an aspect of the book that is truly comparable; for example, explain how you aspire to the tone or writing style of the comp. Don't make a global comparison that implies, for instance, that because *Eat, Pray, Love* sold a bazillion copies, publishers should jump to fund your next vacation.
- Because narrative nonfiction books often don't face head-on competition, the comps section is frequently used to define the audience (replacing the audience section) and provide stylistic models. Comps are described in positioning paragraphs, with only a few books—sometimes none—listed individually.
- Narrative writers have much more license to include older books that continue to sell.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN COMPS

- Commercial nonfiction comps are straightforward: List the market-proving comparison, how and why your book differs, and why it will sell. Done.
- Current books are your currency with promotion-driven books.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Narrative Nonfiction

The Lakota Way: Stories and Lessons for Living

by Joseph M. Marshall III (Viking/Penguin Random House)

Here's a contrary presentation: This author's comps section, voice driven and presented in paragraph form, lists few specific books. The author's confidence and knowledge, shown in this brief excerpt, garnered a six-figure, two-book deal.

Competition

... the time for this book is now. There are many books of Native American stories and many about Native American life and philosophy—most written by non-Indians. Books as a source of spiritual information and guidance dominate the best-seller lists.

Yet there is nothing that combines spirit and story like *The Lakota Way*. It is time that this culture, known for its depth of spiritual understanding and its appreciation of the Earth and our place in it, be given its voice in an accessible book—written by a Native American schooled in traditional Indian ways from childhood—designed to convey for the lay public the Native American answer to the search for meaning.

[Competition continues.]

Narrative Nonfiction: Themed Essay Collection

The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes and Other Stories

by Lucy H. Spelman, DVM and Ted Mashima, DVM (Putnam/Penguin Random House)

The authors of this six-figure proposal embed their specific comp titles within their discussion of the audience. Rather than assess each book individually, they list many titles—including a few novels and video games—and then address where their book fits in the market. While such a technique is unusual, note how the authors still accomplish the goals defined in this chapter. They demonstrate the popularity of their subject, the needs their book would meet, and their own authority.

As Americans spend more on healthcare for their pets (sixty-nine-million households spent eight-billion dollars in [date] on veterinary bills), they also expect more information. Veterinary clinics and professional organizations have expanded their websites, offering details about common medical problems. Zoos and aquaria have done the same. Over 150 million Americans visit these attractions in person each year; millions more visit via the Web. Many sites offer updates on the condition of specific animals. Some publish profiles of their veterinary staff.

Finally, veterinary medicine remains a popular—and highly competitive—career choice, especially among young women. Think of the number of times you’ve heard someone say, “I always wanted to be a veterinarian.”

The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes and Other Stories will appeal to adult readers who love wild animals and want to know more about what it takes to care for them. It will also appeal to readers interested in zoos, conservation, animal science, medicine, and animal welfare. A quick glance at the size of the “Animal” section in any bookstore reflects the broad audience for this book.

Perhaps the best known first-person accounts of veterinary medicine are the books in the classic series by James Herriot beginning with *All Creatures Great and Small*, originally published in 1972, reissued in 1998, and still selling well (St. Martin’s Press). For those interested in veterinary medicine as a career, there are several options (e.g., *I Want to Be a Veterinarian* by Stephanie Maze, Harcourt Press, 1999; *ER Vets* by Donna Jackson, Houghton Mifflin, 2005). Two recent video games, *Zoo Tycoon* and *Zoo Tycoon 2* (Microsoft Corporation, 2001 and 2005) and *Zoo Vet* (Vivendi Universal Interactive Publishing, 2005) have also become popular.

On the specific topic of zoological medicine, adult readers can find a number of memoirs written by veterinarians. Titles include *Life at the Zoo: Behind the Scenes with the Animal Doctors* by P.T. Robinson (Columbia University Press, 2004), *Wrestling with Rhinos: The Adventures of a Glasgow Vet in Kenya* by Jerry Haigh (ECW Press, 2002), and *Appointments at the Ends of the World* and *Memoirs of a Wildlife Veterinarian* by William Karesh (Warner Books, 2000).

The proposed book differs substantially in format and tone from these memoirs, most of which include a good deal of “old news” history. *The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes and Other Stories* will bring the reader behind the scenes into the modern-day world of zoological medicine via the perspective of two dozen veterinarians. These experts work in a variety of clinical settings at some of the world’s best-known institutions; they represent the cream of the crop among veterinarians who treat ill or injured wild animals. Collectively, their stories will offer a comprehensive view of this challenging branch of medicine—and the people behind it.

Practical Nonfiction, Parenting

Bringing Up Geeks: How to Protect Your Kid's Childhood in a Grow-Up-Too-Fast World

by Marybeth Hicks (Putnam/Penguin Random House)

This proposal shows how to position a commercial book in a crowded field. Marybeth designed her comps to answer the obvious objection: "Another parenting book? Really?" She employed positioning paragraphs along with lists of key titles, and she divided the section into subsections to make her book's position clear. She also demonstrated keen understanding of the publisher's needs.

The Market: Competitive and Comparable Books

Periodically a parenting book comes along whose message both galvanizes readers and makes a mark on the cultural landscape. Think of *Unplugging the Plug-In Drug* by Marie Winn and *Loving Your Child Is Not Enough* by Nancy Samalin and Martha Moraghan Jablow. *Bringing Up Geeks: How to Raise Happily Uncool Kids* is that kind of book. With courage and a no-nonsense attitude, Marybeth Hicks gives parents permission to say, "Enough." It's time to give children back their childhoods. This book fits into three major categories of parenting books: those that address concerns about today's culture, those about popularity and social status, and those outlining faith-based parenting philosophies.

Books About Parenting in Today's Culture

There is a strong market for practical books that help parents instill values in their children amid today's popular culture. These books generally rebuke the "self-esteem" trend of the past few decades and instead advocate personal responsibility, accountability, and even a return to "traditional" values or a strict style of discipline in parenting as the path to authentic self-esteem. However, most are problem focused, and none offer the "advice from the parenting trenches" personal approach of *Bringing Up Geeks*.

Family First: Your Step-by-Step Plan for Creating a Phenomenal Family by Dr. Phil McGraw, hardcover, The Free Press.

Dr. Phil, the popular television therapist of *Oprah* fame, sets out to fix what is wrong in today's families with common-sense advice for people who need remediation in rearing their children. The book's tone is serious, written in the voice of the therapist. It is different from the mom-to-mom voice in *Bringing Up Geeks*, which outlines a parenting philosophy for all families based on "geeky" values and offers insight into the geek lifestyle.

The O'Reilly Factor for Kids: A Survival Guide for America's Families by Bill O'Reilly, hardcover, HarperCollins Publishers.

In this book, the conservative cable news talk-show host offers opinions on a variety of topics. This book reads like an O'Reilly "talking points memo" aimed at kids, not parents—more of a lecture than an advice book.

Your Children Are Under Attack: How Popular Culture Is Destroying Your Kids' Values, and How You Can Protect Them by Jim Taylor, Ph.D., hardcover, Sourcebooks.

Dr. Taylor is a noted psychologist and parenting expert who attributes the erosion of values in children to the insidious influence of popular culture. While this book makes similar assertions about the effects of the culture on children that *Bringing Up Geeks* does, its focus on the broad issue of popular culture is quite strident and doesn't provide the friendly overall parenting philosophy that *Bringing Up Geeks* conveys.

Books About Popularity and Social Status

[Comps continue.]

1. Choose whatever section title makes sense for your proposal, or invent your own. Here and in the following chapters, find ideas we've used and seen used.
2. "Comparable" has both broad and narrow meanings in publishing. It's a blanket category that encompasses all the books that can be compared to yours for any reason, and it can also mean books on other topics that model something specific that your books have in common.
3. Insert fish-tale pun here. Better yet, send Jody a fish pun at coach@jodyreinbooks.com, and she'll give you a quick personal review of your query letter.

11

BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS ¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One page• Third person• Sometimes called:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Table of Contents◦ Tentative Table of Contents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Book Table of Contents: A table of contents for your book, formatted in your proposal as it will appear in your book.</p>		

“No good book is ever too long, and no bad book is ever too short.”

—ANONYMOUS

You’ve written your flash thirty pages and studied your competition; you know where your book fits on the bookshelves. It’s time to roll up your sleeves and map out its structure in the form of a draft table of contents. Obviously, this effort requires careful thought and planning. You’ll find a few springboards in this chapter, but there’s no better catalyst than the comps you’ve just studied.

Surround yourself with your physical comps, open to their table of contents. For unpurchased digital books, view contents through the online “Search Inside the Book” function. Print out screen shots on which you can scribble ideas. Are there structures you would like to emulate? Did your research convince you that your fresh organization will help your book stand out from the crowd in a way that appeals to your book’s audience?

HOT TIP

COLLECT DATA FOR OTHER PROPOSAL SECTIONS

Don't do double work; take notes for other sections while your comps are handy.

- **AUTHOR BIOS:** Put copies of these in your author-bio folder.
- **BACK-COVER OR FLAP COPY:** Put copies of these in your overview folder.
- **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:** Put these in your agent-and-publisher folder.

Write chapter and part titles that flow naturally, creating a sense of continuity in tone and structure. If you're not sure what to call your chapters, err on the side of clarity rather than cleverness; one man's joke is another man's "Huh?" Editors do turn down proposals where wordplay doesn't work for them, but never because the chapter titles are descriptive rather than witty. They'll expect chapter titles to evolve as the book is written.

It's difficult to generalize about book structures, so you'll find subject-specific tips in Parts Four and Five.

ASSEMBLING THE BONES

These three techniques will help you structure your book.

Start with the Parts

Start with three parts, and expand from there.

Whether prescriptive or narrative, many nonfiction books can be broken down at the most fundamental level into an archetypical three-part structure. Your book's final structure may be much more complex, but three parts will get you started:

THREE-PART PRESCRIPTIVE NONFICTION

PART ONE: information, explanation

PART TWO: practical tools, advice, recipes

PART THREE: wrap-up, next steps

THREE-ACT NARRATIVE NONFICTION

BEGINNING: exposition through instigating event

MIDDLE: rising action to a climax

END: resolution and dénouement

Consider, too, giving your book a superstructure by layering in parts even after your table of contents is written. Part titles can provide important context for editors. Proposals aren't read the same way books are; editors read proposals and want to say *yes* but look for reasons to say *no*. A crystal-clear structure provides a story arc that engages harried editors. Once a proposal becomes a book, we all read with more patience and an open mind.

Jody asked her client Mark Obmascik to create a three-part structure within the tentative table of contents in his narrative nonfiction proposal for *The Big Year*, a book about a yearlong bird-watching competition. She anticipated this editorial objection: "A whole book about bird-watchers? Sounds like a snooze: Guy sees bird; guy sees bird; guy sees bird; guy sees bird" Mark layered in three parts to provide dramatic shape to the concept; in doing so, he highlighted a filmic beginning, middle, and end that proved bird-watching could drive a story:

PART ONE: Man vs. Bird

PART TWO: Man vs. Man

PART THREE: Man vs. Himself

The sale of that proposal was one of those you hear about: an exciting seven-publisher auction that extended over several days. DreamWorks optioned the proposal, and later the book was optioned again by Fox 2000 Pictures, who made it into a movie starring Jack Black, Steve Martin, and Owen Wilson.

The final book? It wasn't divided into parts at all.

Index Card Organization

Go old school, and get off the computer. Use index cards for the big ideas that will form your parts or chapters. Shuffle and reshuffle them until they fall into the right order. You may be surprised at how much easier it is to come up with constructive organizational ideas when you're working with physical cards. The same task that can trigger frustration on the screen ignites creative neurons when you literally hold all the cards in your hands.

Mind-Mapping

Author Sam Horn recommends mind-mapping to stimulate your creativity:

- Draw a circle to represent the book. Draw lines extending from the edge of the circle like strands of hair waving in the breeze.
- Along one side of each line, write a word or phrase that describes the idea for each of your chapters or parts.
- Draw perpendicular lines off those lines to list words or phrases for the next structural level (either chapters or sections within chapters).

CUSTOMIZE THE BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROSE-DRIVEN CONTENTS

- If your chapters are numbered only, do map out the contents now with one-sentence descriptions, to be fleshed out in the detailed table of contents.
- Evocative chapter titles in narrative nonfiction powerfully highlight voice and intent.
- A narrative book's contents are crucial demonstrators of an interest-sustaining story arc.
- A creatively structured book signals a thoughtful writer.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN CONTENTS

- Your contents must demonstrate that you've anticipated all logical questions: Do your cookbook's contents include both introductory material and recipes? Does your practical guide provide sufficient help, or does it rely too heavily on background facts and figures?

1. Your proposal also contains a “Proposal Table of Contents,” see [chapter thirty-two](#).

12

BOOK SPECS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">BOOK SPECS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to two pages • First or third person • Sometimes called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ About the Book ◦ Book Specifications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Book Specs: Often included under a subhead at the end of the overview, describes important stylistic and objective aspects of your book and its creation.</p>		

A clear and professional book specs section sells the book, and it sells you as the kind of writer who thinks through your book in depth.

The work you’ve done to structure your book’s contents likely triggered thoughts about length, voice, and style. Those elements are described in the book specs section, so draft it now and capture your ideas while fresh. In this section, which is usually placed as a subhead within the overview section, talk directly to the publisher about your vision for the book, especially regarding those elements that aren’t quickly evident from the sample material. Is the voice uncommon? Is your structure significant? What is the book’s length, and how long will it take to write?

Use subheads such as “Voice,” “Structure,” and “Research Methodology” in this section to orient readers and prevent the writing from appearing disjointed as you jump from element to element.

ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER FOR BOOK SPECS

- Voice (tense, style, humor)
- Structure
- Research methodology
- Design
- Illustrations, charts, graphics, etc.
- Special features, foreword, and back-matter content
- Length
- Time needed to complete

VOICE AND HUMOR

“Communication and information are entertainment, and if you don’t understand that, you’re not going to communicate.”

—**JOHN NAISBITT, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *MEGATRENDS***

Your writing may be esoteric, conversational, or somewhere in between. Don’t make editors guess about your writing goals; describe them directly and confidently. If your cookbook is written for the novice and you have therefore decided to use simple, direct language and recipes that never include more than ten steps, say so. If your experimental memoir deliberately juxtaposes past and present tense, alert editors ahead of time so your sample chapters don’t confuse them. (See [chapter thirty-three](#) for more on voice.)

Explain the style of your personal anecdotes or why you open each chapter with a joke. A side note on humor: Mike believes that most books benefit from humor. As the late Norman Cousins said, “Laughter is inner jogging,” and we all need a good workout.

HOT TIP

If you do use humor, include it consistently throughout your proposal, proportionate with the amount of humor in the book.

STRUCTURE

Is your book framed in an unusual manner? Does the structure echo or enhance the content? For example, Jody’s client firefighter Hersch Wilson is developing a proposal for his inspirational book on what firefighters can teach us about finding joy in a catastrophic world. Hersch is a storyteller, a philosopher, and a teacher all wrapped up in a soot-covered, neon-striped, fifty-pound firefighter’s jacket. After much experimentation, Hersch found his authentic voice as an essayist, unbound by a single writing focus. Because his essays vary so greatly—some tell stories, some provide practical advice, some are philosophical—he organized them into four clear sections that flow thematically: (1) the universe according to firefighters, (2) where firefighters find hope, (3) life’s daily struggles, and (4) thriving through catastrophe.

If the way you have organized your material is important to the reading experience, is a selling point, or requires explanation, describe it briefly in this section.

HOT TIP

DESCRIPTIVE WORD PROMPTS

Stumped for descriptors? Mike suggests using one or more of these words in your book’s specs if they apply: *anecdotal, prescriptive, storytelling, inspirational, advocacy, narrative, how-to, interactive, descriptive, lyrical, prosaic, instructive, graphic.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Some books, especially narrative nonfiction, require research that merits explanation. If you need to tell editors things about the book that aren’t in the book—like how deeply you plan to fact-check your memoir or how many trips you plan to take to Alaska to research Inuit culture—provide this info here. If you do, title this section “About the Book” rather than “Book Specs.”

DESIGN

Design may be an important part of your vision even if you’re not a designer, and that’s okay. You can still explain design goals to editors and perhaps provide a mock-up to convey your vision. For example, you could write, “My book holds reader interest visually through pullout

quotes consistently placed in each chapter. A mocked-up demonstration of my concept is included with supplemental material, although the final design is at the publisher’s discretion.”

HOT TIP

Suggest a design *without mandating it* and only if it’s an essential element of your book concept. Publishers reserve the right to design a book’s interior in the contract and can be touchy about this.

ILLUSTRATIONS, CHARTS, GRAPHICS, ETC.

If you plan to include photographs, illustrations, maps, charts, or other graphics in your book, describe them here, but choose your words cautiously. You will be expected, by contract, to find and pay permissions fees for whatever you promise in your proposal. Promise only graphics that are essential to your concept and that you are willing to pay to reuse. If something requiring permission is preferable but not essential and you would include it only if the publisher pays, you can say as much in your proposal. For instance, write: “The author believes book sales will be optimized if each chapter opens with a line drawing (sample illustrations attached). If the publisher agrees and will provide a budget for the art, the author will obtain permissions and work with the artist to provide art acceptable to the publisher.”

SPECIAL FEATURES, FOREWORD, AND BACK-MATTER CONTENT

HOT TIP

Add special features to make your book more helpful, visually appealing, and pleasant to read.

Mike loves a cartoon by Harley Schwadron that depicts a patient on a hospital gurney and a nurse standing over him saying, “They’re going to take you back to surgery, professor. Dr. Bickel got confused and removed your glossary instead of your appendix.”¹

Does your book include a foreword from a well-known writer? Exercises? Checklists? Boxed information? A bibliography? A glossary? A resource directory? Endnotes? List those

elements, with brief explanations, in your book specs section.

Librarians like back matter because it adds to a book's value as a research tool. School, college, and public libraries are major customers for most publishers, so publishers want to keep them happy.

Offer to put your back matter on your website and the link to it in your book if your publisher wishes. This will shorten the book and lower the cover price.

LENGTH

In every proposal, no matter the category, you must provide a word count for your book. Publishers understand this is an estimate and use it when drafting your contract. An 80,000-word count in your proposal will translate into a 70,000 to 90,000-word range in the publishing agreement. If you're negotiating your own contract, be sure you list a range rather than the exact count in your proposal.

Most nonfiction manuscripts run between 50,000 and 100,000 words. Prescriptive and inspirational books are on the shorter side of this range, and memoir, narrative, and other upmarket nonfiction are on the longer side.

HOT TIP

Express your estimated length in number of *words*, not number of *pages*. The number of pages will vary with the design of the book and therefore means little to publishers.

TIME NEEDED TO COMPLETE

Don't provide an actual calendar date on which you promise to deliver your material: You may not want to begin writing until you have a contract or even your first payment in hand. You won't be able to determine a delivery date until your negotiation is completed, which happens long after you've written your proposal.

Instead, provide the *length of time* it will take you to complete your work and deliver your manuscript. Here are a few ways to express this in your proposal.

- “The author will deliver the manuscript X months after receiving the advance, due upon signing the agreement.”
- “The author will deliver the manuscript X months after the contract is signed.”
- “The author will need X months to complete the manuscript.”

Your publisher will write a definitive delivery date into your contract based on the manuscript development time included in your proposal and any other subsequent negotiations. You may ask your agent or publisher to extend the delivery date if the advance is small. The more time you need to spend earning the income to live on while you write your book, the longer it will take you to deliver your manuscript.

Estimate a Delivery Date Based on Your Writing Habits

If you're struggling to estimate a word count or a delivery date, do it after you've created your detailed outline, while you're writing a sample chapter. Here's how to estimate your book length and the amount of time you'll need before delivering the manuscript (warning: math ahead!).

1. Figure out how many words you write per hour. Time yourself when you write a sample chapter, and note how long it took you. Use your word-processing software to count the words. Divide the number of words in the chapter by the hours it took you to write them. Let's say you wrote 5,000 words in twenty hours. Divide 5,000 words by twenty hours; you get 250. In this example, you learn:
 - Your chapters are about 5,000 words long.
 - You write about 250 words per hour (that's fast!).
2. Multiply the number of chapters by the number of words in each chapter. That will give you the total number of words in your book: twenty chapters multiplied by 5,000 words is a 100,000-word manuscript.
3. Divide the total words by the number of words you write per hour (in this scenario, that number is 250) to discover how much time you need:
 - 100,000 words divided by 250 words per hour equals four-hundred hours of writing time.

- If you write forty hours a week, you can crash that baby out in ten weeks (four-hundred hours divided by forty hours a week). Except ...
- You must factor in twice as much time to research, revise, seek critiques from readers—and attend to your day job, family, and other responsibilities. And, sorry to say, nobody we know writes forty hours a week *or* 250 words an hour.

Though you're faced with many variables, start with objective numbers by extrapolating from the facts of your writing life.

In your proposal, don't underestimate the time needed to complete the manuscript. It's much better to cite a realistic amount of time in your contract, plus padding, than to have to ask for more time when the book is due, the publisher has scheduled its publication, and many people have begun setting it up for success.²

CUSTOMIZE THE BOOKS SPECS

PROSE-DRIVEN SPECS

The book specs section provides a great opportunity to set up and clarify your sample writing. Writers often use book specs for the following reasons.

- Explaining a complex structure
- Referencing books that are stylistically comparable
- Describing and justifying the voice
- Looking smart and thorough by defining research methodology

PROMOTION-DRIVEN SPECS

- Describe your specs in the context of the audience for your book. If you've chosen to write a book that is shorter than the norm, explain why: "This book is 40,000–50,000 words, designed to appeal to the busy parent."
- Don't belabor the specs unless you must. A creativity workbook like *Wreck This Journal* by Keri Smith, designed with just a few words on each page, needs an explanation; most commercial books' contents are made clear in the outline and sample chapters.
- Humor can be a great addition in promotion-driven books; note your use of it in your specs. The effective combination of humor and content will also lead to success on the speaking circuit.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Teaching Savages to Fly

by Logan Ward (Sold to Riverhead Books/Penguin Random House)

In this book specs section, the author described his research methodology. Here's some context for this excerpt: The Waorani are an indigenous tribe in Ecuador, mostly untouched by modern civilization. Steve Saint is a missionary and inventor, the third generation of his family to attempt to minister to the Waorani. Instead of converting the Waorani, Steve discovered that what they desired was a car that could fly over the rain forest for supplies and limited trade. So he made one.

About the Book

Teaching Savages to Fly combines a synthesis of historical sources with fresh reporting to tell the full story of the Waorani's efforts to learn to operate Steve Saint's flying dune buggy and thereby regain their independence.

The book falls naturally into three parts, each corresponding with three periods in the Waorani's rapid and turbulent transition from isolation to societal integration: first contact (Nate Saint, 1948–1956), Christian subjugation (Rachel Saint, 1956–1994), the struggle for independence (Steve Saint, 1994–present). Steve, the only Saint whose life overlaps all three Waorani periods, serves as the book's connective tissue, along with Wao Mincaye, who has become a tribal father figure to Steve.

Except for the first-person prologue and epilogue, the book is written in the third person and cuts back and forth between intimate, detail-rich scenes to a more global analysis of events, all supported by thorough endnotes.

Author Logan Ward has spent considerable time with Steve Saint and in [date here] will accompany him to the Oshkosh Air Show in Wisconsin, where Steve will exhibit the Maverick. Earlier in July, Ward embarked on the first of several reporting trips to the Ecuadorian Amazon, where Dayuma, Tementa, and three of Nate Saint's killers, including Mincaye, still live.

Teaching Savages to Fly will draw also from a rich diversity of archival sources—from early accounts by Spanish missionaries, such as Dominican friar Gaspar de Carvajal, who accompanied Spanish explorer Francisco de Orellana in 1541 on the first expedition into the Amazon Basin, to the pocket notebook found on Nate Saint's spear-riddled body. Other sources include private letters, the diaries of the murdered missionaries, Nate Saint's flight logs, audio recordings, photos, and 16-mm film footage of first contact with the warrior nicknamed "George," a stack of anthropological studies on the Waorani dating back to the 1970s, legal documents from oil-company lawsuits, and hours of video interviews with Rachel Saint recorded by Steve Saint.

You Can Draw It in Just 30 Minutes!

by Mark Kistler (Da Capo Press/Hachette)

This is a design-intensive commercial book for which "Book Specifications" is a subhead of the overview. The overview closes with a discussion of future books, also reprinted here.

Book Specifications

Draw It In 30 MINUTES! comprises twenty-five to thirty six-page drawing lessons, a personal introduction, photos and illustrations for each lesson, and an appendix of drawing tools.

Each lesson—one per chapter—incorporates Mark’s consistent step-by-step system, developed specifically for this technique and this book. The lesson chapters contain these basic steps:

- Introduction
 - Deconstruction
 - Art hacks
- Instruction
 - Create blueprint (five minutes)
 - Modify blueprint (ten minutes)
 - Add shading (ten minutes)
 - Finish (five minutes)
- Learn more

Mark’s unique, playful voice permeates the book, and he includes handwritten, enthusiastic tips and encouragement. Drawings are in no particular order. Readers can choose any sketch and begin immediately. Student sketches, as well as Mark’s own works, are included.

Production

Mark will provide all text, drawings, and photographs but does not plan to design the book. However, if the publisher wishes to outsource the design, Mark would be glad to provide a bid. (The attached sample chapter is not proposed as a final design; it is only a general indication of text and illustration placement.)

The attached sample chapter contains black-and-white and color illustrations. The book does not need to be in full color. Two colors, however, may make the instruction easier to provide graphically.

The final number of lessons (between twenty-five and thirty) will be determined by author and publisher through consideration of optimal length and price point.

More Books

Mark envisions *Draw It In 30 MINUTES!* as the anchor for multiple single-subject spin-offs, where “It” is replaced with a single drawing-subject area (ex: *Draw Cats in 30 Minutes! Draw People in 60 Minutes! Draw Faces in 45 Minutes!*)

The proprietary teaching system of “art hacks” introduced in *30 Minutes!* will become the foundation of other exciting books down the road.

1. Jody says, "That's a dad joke, Mike." Mike looks puzzled.
2. Mucho mea culpa to our lovely and patient editor, Rachel Randall.

13

AUTHOR BIO

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">AUTHOR BIO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to two pages (longer if platform is included) • First or third person • Sometimes called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ About the Author ◦ [Author's Name] ◦ Author and Platform ◦ My Background
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Author Bio: Your biography as it relates to your book, often leads directly into the author platform.</p>		

“I often read the author bio first. I want to know why the author is writing this book and why he’s passionate about it.”

—BIG FIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND SENIOR EDITOR

“Who’s the author?”

Agents and publishers ask this question the instant they hear a topic that grabs them, and it’s your job to tell them—concisely, interestingly, and astutely. Be relevant: Publishers don’t care where you went to elementary school or whether you won the local barbershop quartet sing-off. They do, however, care about the following.

- That you’re qualified to write this book and passionate about doing so
- That you’re able to promote it
- Whether and where you’ve already been published

The author bio isn't a résumé, although it may include bullet points or lists. It should be written in the tone of your book. If you're writing a humor book, be funny. If you're writing a how-to, be clear. If you're writing a memoir, be personal.

Don't be shy in developing this biographical sketch. Think of it objectively: Agents need it to pitch, editors need it to sell your book to their bosses, publishers need it to convince bookstores to stock the book, bookstores need it to gain consumer trust, and potential readers need to be convinced that the author knows what he's talking about. "Err on the side of tooting your own horn too loudly," says literary agent Daniel Greenberg of Levine Greenberg Rostan Literary Agency.

HOT TIP

If first person suits your book but you're uncomfortable bragging about your own achievements using "I" statements, write your first draft in the third person. Sometimes psychological distance can jump-start the process. You can change the point of view when you revise.

AUTHOR BIO MODELS

Go to your bookshelf. Every book lists a brief biography of its author. A proposal bio is more detailed, but reading book bios will give you a feel for tone, and especially for which parts of the author's life the publisher decided would convince consumers to purchase the book.

Even better, find models in publishers' sales catalogs. Do an online search for "Simon & Schuster fall catalog," for instance, to find thousands of author bios. These bios are also shorter than your proposal bio but again, very instructive as they're written by publishers for booksellers.¹

For lengthier professional bios, read the "Author Page" on online bookstores, Goodreads, and authors' personal websites. Stick to bios of traditionally published authors; self-published author bios won't help.

ELEMENTS IN YOUR BIO

Talk about your qualifications in descending order of importance. Don't focus so much on the book that you overlook your own strengths! Consider including the following:

- **AN AUTHOR PHOTO:** We live in a visual world. The goal of your author photo is to assure publishers you are presentable and professional. It shouldn't be striking in any other way—no silly poses or cats.
- **A LINK TO AN AUTHOR VIDEO:** Videos are powerful tools—but no video is preferable to a bad one. If you have a convincing video, link to it. If the video is a part of your platform (such as a film from a TED Talk or a popular YouTube video series), mention it here and include a link in your platform section.
- **RELEVANT DEGREES AND EDUCATION**
- **PUBLISHING HISTORY**
 - **BOOKS:** List or describe any books you've published; include the title, publisher, publication year, sales figures if they're impressive, and subsidiary rights sales.
 - **REVIEWS:** Include brief excerpts of positive reviews of previous books from respected people and publications, and link to the full review online. If you have more than two or three, mention them here, but put the excerpts and links in your supplemental materials (see [chapter twenty](#)).
- **AWARDS:** Mention literary or otherwise relevant awards you've been given.
- **MEMBERSHIPS:** Include your involvement or membership with large relevant organizations.
- **APPEARANCES:** List appearances you've made on major media outlets.
- **ARTICLES:** Provide a list at the end of your bio of any articles in major publications, by you, about you, and quoting you, with links for every listing. If there are many, mention them here but provide the list, along with excerpts if they're impressive, with your supplemental materials.
- **CORPORATE AND OTHER MAJOR SPEECHES OR SPEAKING COMMITMENTS**
- **RELEVANT BUSINESS ACCOLADES AND EXPERIENCES**
- **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES:** Editors love an engaging and authentic personal story that explains your motivation to write the proposed book.
- **OTHER CONTRIBUTORS TO YOUR BOOK:** Significant contributors to your book should be named and described at the end of your author bio section, under a subhead. These might include:

- your co-author
- the famous person who has agreed to write the book’s foreword
- the ghostwriter

HOT TIPS

- Place text that may disrupt reading—such as full articles or a full CV or résumé—at the end of the proposal, in a supplemental materials section.
- Avoid the words *currently* or *at present*. Using the present tense suffices.

DISTINGUISHING THE AUTHOR BIO FROM THE PLATFORM AND PERSONAL PROMOTION SECTIONS

The info in your author bio often overlaps with info in your platform and personal promotion sections. This is because bio info, or *what you’ve done* (“I’ve taught millions of people how to tie their shoes”) relates to platform info, or *where you’ve done it* (“my shoe-tying YouTube channel has 100,000 subscribers”) and also to personal promotion info, or *how you plan to exploit it* (“I will create a new series of shoe-tying videos to coincide with the book’s publication”).

This poses a different writing challenge for each author; we can’t provide a one size fits all model. But here’s the good news: Editors don’t care how the material is labeled as long as it’s logically organized, concise, and nonredundant. The following distinctions will help:

- **AUTHOR BIO:** focuses on your qualifications, especially the credentials and experiences that establish your expertise.
- **AUTHOR PLATFORM:** focuses on quantifiable assets, like established social media followings, well-trafficked websites, and standing lecture invitations, that position you to reach your audience.
- **PERSONAL PROMOTION:** focuses on actions you will take to promote your book.

AUTHOR BIO Q&A

Q. I don’t understand where I should include links.

A. List links at the ends of related sections (the end of your author bio section, for instance), or the end of your supplemental material section). Links within the copy can disrupt the reading experience.

Q. Do I use first person or third person?

A. Bios are generally written in the third person, but first person can be used for memoirs and personality-driven books.

Q. I've appeared in a lot of publications. How do I decide what fits and what doesn't?

A. Choose only those publications that will be well known to editors, or niche publications that have large and dedicated followings. *Do not* include community newspapers or unknown blogs.

Q. My previous books didn't perform well (or were self-published). How do I address that?

A. Include them in your publishing history. If an agent or publisher discovers you've been deceptive in any way, you can count on the relationship to end. Provide context but with minimal explanation. Don't be defensive, and don't blame the publisher. The following are some good ways to handle this situation.

How to Tie Your Shoes with Velcro, No Lace Publishers, 2012, \$25, e-book, ISBN 123456789

My first book, now out of print, unfortunately appeared just as the anti-Velcro movement forced all Velcro shoes out of production.

How to Darn Your Own Darn Socks, self-published, 2014, \$10, e-book, ISBN 123456789

I self-published this work but stopped publishing when the promotional burdens became too great. I sold 1,500 copies, mostly through word of mouth as I had no social media presence at the time. The work has been unavailable for three years.

Q. I can't decide whether I should make an author video.

A. Video is the strongest promotional tool available today. If your book is promotion driven, publishers will expect easy access to a professionally made video of you speaking at a conference or seminar, a national media demo reel, or a link to your million-subscriber YouTube channel.

If you're not famous, a charming and professional video may convince a publisher to take a chance on you. It can backfire badly if it shows you're *not* good on camera,

so have someone objective review it before you link it.

If you're writing upmarket nonfiction that's not promotion driven, publishers don't expect a video but will be impressed if you happen to have a clip from your interview with a known and respected media outlet. If you don't have film, the editor will often want to meet you in person or on a video call before acquiring your book. Agents always want to see you in person or virtually.

CUSTOMIZE THE AUTHOR BIO

PROSE-DRIVEN AUTHOR BIO

- Writing credentials dominate biographies of folks who write narrative nonfiction. While platform-related credentials help, they're far less important than proof that the writer has paid his dues in academic or writing-related fields.
- Passion is prime. Editors want to know why this subject—whether it's your life or a part of history—captivates you.
- Voice matters. Whether your bio is written in the third person or first person, it must read as part of a larger whole, written in a voice that is unique and connected to the voice of the book you propose.
- Writers from academia often include a CV. This doesn't replace the author bio; it's referenced in the bio and included with supplemental materials.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN AUTHOR BIO

- The platform is often combined with the bio when the platform is key to the writer's identity. In these cases, open with one paragraph describing your background, and follow with a subhead about each part of your platform (see [chapter fourteen](#)).
- Voice matters in bios of promotion-driven writers, too. If you're writing an upbeat diet book or work of pop psychology, your bio will sell publishers on you as an appealing spokesperson for your program.

See [Appendix C](#) for examples of author bios.

1. Not long ago, publisher catalogs were only available to industry insiders. Now we can all see them. Thank you, Internet!

14

AUTHOR PLATFORM

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">PLATFORM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two to three pages¹• First or third person• Sometimes called:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Social Media Presence◦ Author's Visibility◦ Author's Network
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
Platform: The systems you currently have in place to reach your readers.		

Show you are continually visible to—and engaged with—the audience for your book.

Agent Madeleine Morel of 2M Communications, Ltd., says, “Publishers expect you to have developed a means to reach your readers, online or off, prior to writing your book proposal, especially if you’re proposing a prescriptive book.” In other words, platform is the social media you have in place, the speeches you have lined up, the well-connected people who admire your work, the media, magazines, and blogs with which you have relationships—everything and everyone who can be mobilized to get the word out about your book.

While the importance of platform varies with each book and publisher, all publishers seek authors who will make building their readership a permanent part of their career. The challenge is in creating a critical mass of passionate readers who will convince enough other readers to buy the book. It’s said that it takes seven mentions of a product to convince people to try it—much more exposure than a listing in a publisher catalog or a two-week publicity blitz provides.

Your platform sets the stage for a cumulative impact on readers who, after hearing about your book from a variety of sources, find themselves drawn to it without quite knowing why.

Seen through that lens, platform is straightforward, but many writers still get jittery just thinking about it. “I’m a writer, not a marketer,” is a common refrain. Try looking at it differently:

- The word *platform* hasn’t always been part of the publishing vernacular, but the concept is as old as the business of printing and selling books. Long before the social media explosion, familiar faces—popular speakers, well-known or well-respected specialists, and writers or experts featured in newspapers, television, or magazines—had a leg up in securing publishing deals. The difference today is that many people try to put the social media cart before the substantive content horse. (See our next point.)
- The most successful platforms *form organically* out of your passion, experience, and expertise. We can’t emphasize this enough: A contrived platform doesn’t work. If you’re devoted to something—including writing—chances are you *already* have developed relationships with other experts and are known for your proficiency. You may need to refine your brand, for instance, by building a more attractive website or moving from Twitter to Instagram. But that’s just window dressing if you’ve spent the requisite years sharpening your writing or researching your subject.

ENGAGEMENT: THE HEART OF THE SUCCESSFUL PLATFORM

Writers often ask for a magic number: “If I have ten thousand Twitter followers, is that enough?” Magic numbers don’t exist. Marian Lizzi, editorial director of TarcherPerigee/Penguin Random House, says, “Sometimes social media numbers are not accurate; sometimes people buy followers. If I’m interested in a proposal, especially if it’s promotion driven, I will look and see if there’s a lot of *engagement*.”

Publishers want clear indications that a writer is continually interacting with an identifiable community that in turn is passionate about the writer.

That’s not to say numbers aren’t important. The more documented, verifiable ears and eyeballs you have reading, watching, and listening regularly, the more books you’ll likely sell, the more publishers will pay to acquire your book, and the more money they’ll invest in

promoting it. But numbers alone won't convince publishers who have been burned in the past by authors with smoke-and-mirrors platforms. If your only YouTube subscribers are twelve-year-olds who have little interest in buying your associated book, a publisher probably won't bite, even if those followers number in the hundreds of thousands.

PARTS OF A PLATFORM

THE GOLDEN RULE FOR EVERY PART OF YOUR PLATFORM

Include only those platform elements that are impressive, established, and ongoing.

Write subheads in your platform section for each type of media in which you are fully engaged. List those headings in descending order of your outreach's size. Under each heading, list what you have done and are doing to make potential book buyers aware of you and your work. Use this checklist to ensure you're covering all appropriate bases:

- Professional or academic credentials in your book's subject area
- Traditional and online media (TV, radio, newspapers, major blogs)
- Literary media
- Social media (website, e-mail subscriptions, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Ongoing speaking engagements
- Writing and other awards
- Personal network

Professional and/or Academic Credentials

Agent Linda Konner of Linda Konner Literary Agency says credentials are “mandatory” if you want her representation. We wholeheartedly agree. You'll find it virtually impossible to sell your book to a traditional publisher, large or small, if you can't demonstrate through an objective outside source that you have credibility in your field. Readers expect writers to know what they're writing about. If you developed your expertise through the school of hard knocks, that's okay, but you still must find some quantifiable way to document your authority.

Choose which credentials belong in the platform section and which in the author bio, based on whether the credential actively helps you reach readers. A college degree isn't a platform, but a degree plus active involvement in the alumni association or consistent invitations to lecture at the college fits the bill.

Your credentials can include membership, especially leadership positions, in professional trade organizations. If you're writing a book on woodworking and you're a past president of the American Woodworking Society, terrific. If you're a past president of the National Scrapbooking Association ... not so much.

Traditional and Online Media

Include only those media for which you:

- write regular and/or frequent articles or columns
- have an open invitation to contribute or appear
- are seen by a large, definable audience
- make regular and frequent appearances
- are regarded as a premier source of information on your subject matter, even if you're not nationally known

Introduce this section with a few sentences defining aggregate numbers: how often you appear, how much media coverage you get per year, and so on. Follow the introduction with a list of outlets. For each entry, provide the outlet name, circulation or viewership statistics, and information about your affiliation.

Literary and Trade Media

Writers of literary nonfiction may reach potential readers through outlets that have limited circulation but avid followers, such as literary magazines or journals. If such publications are well respected, list them. A small, passionate audience is more powerful than a large, diffuse one.

If you're a doctor, lawyer, psychologist, scientist, or other professional, relevant trade and research journals that recognize your work are impressive additions to your platform.

Social Media

When we talked with various publishing professionals about platform, we received some skeptical views on social media. Mark Gompertz, group editorial director at Skyhorse, says, “The social media platform certainly can’t hurt—a lot of commercial nonfiction writers have some sort of online presence or YouTube channel—but to us, it’s not as crucial. We really care more about expertise.” (If you’re overwhelmed by platform generally, this may reassure you: Mark went on to say, in fact, that “the *P* word is not used that much at Skyhorse.”)

Agent Janet Rosen of Sheree Bykofsky Associates adds, “I’ve talked with editors who say, ‘Yeah, I know we always ask for social media, but I don’t really think that’s what sells books.’”

Our take on social media is in line with agent Rita Rosenkranz’s: “There’s such a baseline of expectation now, that whether [social media presence] sells books or not is almost inconsequential. It’s just conspicuous if you have no social media platform. Publishers think you’re out of the loop.”

Publishable writers of commercial or prescriptive nonfiction must use *some* form of social media. If they aren’t talking about their subject online at all, publishers see this as a negative sign of their level of commitment to their subject.

In this section of your proposal, provide a brief introduction and then list, quantify, describe, and defend only those outlets where you meet most of the following criteria.

- Your followers (or likes) number in the thousands.
- Your numbers show real, consistent, rapid growth.
- You regularly and actively engage with others, and they with you.
- Your opt-in e-mail list—very valuable—shows real numbers and growth.
- Your website or blog has been covered by national media.

Publishing consultant Jane Friedman puts it another way: “It’s typically not enough to say you have visibility. You have to show how and where you make an impact and give proof of engagement. This could be quantitative evidence (the size of your e-mail newsletter list, website traffic, blog comments) or qualitative evidence (high-profile reviews, testimonials from A-listers in your genre).”

“Rather than follow the next shiny object online, take time to consider what social media platform(s) make sense for your audience. Just because a social

media platform exists or there's an app for it doesn't mean you have to use it. Do a little research on the demographics for each social media platform, and match it with your audience."

—**FAUZIA BURKE, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, FSB ASSOCIATES**

HOT TIP

AS IN ALL THINGS, MODERATION

Jody recommends you focus your social media efforts in two key ways:

1. **FIND OUTLETS YOU ENJOY USING:** For each active Twitter account, there are fifty dormant accounts. If the tool isn't fun for you, you're not going to use it and might even start feeling inadequate because of that. Let it go, and focus your energies where you feel more comfortable.
2. **USE OUTLETS FREQUENTED BY THE AUDIENCE FOR YOUR BOOK:** We hope that your interest in your subject drives you naturally to those sites where most folks similarly passionate about your subject hang out. If your book is about retirement plans, you'll be better off focusing on something other than Snapchat, no matter how much you like decorating pictures with butterflies and puppy noses.

Speaking Engagements

Popular speakers get book deals. That's because (1) speaking sells books and (2) to a potential publisher, an author who is in demand as a speaker is in all likelihood articulate, charismatic, and professional, with a keen understanding of branding and the language keys that engage listeners. Speeches listed in your proposal can be in person or online.

For this section, write an introductory paragraph telling publishers the number of talks you have done on your subject, the number you do in a year, and the number of people you speak to in a year. Put recent speeches into a separate list if one or more of the following apply.

- You spoke to major corporations or nonprofits, either individually or regularly.
- You did a TED Talk to popular acclaim. (Note: A local TEDx Talk doesn't have the same impact as a global TED talk. It will work against you if nobody watches your talk or if it's not impressive. Still, if it's easily found online, you must mention it and provide a reason for its lack of popularity or poor quality.)
- You're a member of a well-regarded speakers' bureau.

- You command large speaking fees (list the fee if you're free to do so).
- You sell something well. Explain how many products you sell and your sales average per talk or per year.
- You're a regular speaker at conferences in your field.

As noted in [chapter thirteen](#), a video can convince publishers that you're promotable. Include links to stellar video clips, either in your author bio or in this part of the platform section, but skip the video if it doesn't show you in your best light.

HOT TIP

You will be Googled. Before you send out your proposal, conduct an online search for yourself. Review everything about you that appears online. Make sure your online presence looks professional. Website pages must load quickly, links must work, amateurish videos should be taken down, political rants should be removed, and cat videos should be purged.²

Writing and Other Awards

List notable, known awards. If the awards are respected in your field but less known to the general public, briefly define them for the publisher in the context of other famous people to whom they have been awarded.

Personal Network

To get the world talking about your book, publishers send out advance copies to what they call a "Big-Mouth List." It sounds funny, but word of mouth is key to connecting books with readers. List names, titles, affiliations, and, if possible, contact information for well-connected people *who have agreed in advance* to help promote your book, whether through blurbs or by hiring you to speak or network. If blurbs are already written, reprint them here; if they're spectacular, use one or two as pizzazz.

CUSTOMIZE THE PLATFORM

PROSE-DRIVEN PLATFORM

- Many proposals don't include a separate section called "platform" and instead list platform elements at the end of the author bio.

- Platform headings at the end of the bio directly describe the content area covered: “Literary Awards,” “Author’s Personal Network,” or “List of Publications.”
- If you do have a website and are active in social media, tell publishers. There’s nothing *wrong* with having a platform. Most journalists, for example, have active Twitter followings.
- If you’re not on social media, don’t despair. Publishers seek credentials, education, and expertise; platform is secondary to story.
- That said, you still must appear promotable to publishers. That means publishers must feel confident you can speak eloquently about your subject. If this isn’t evident in your proposal, publishers will want to meet you personally or virtually. If you’re not sure you’ll be able to hold up your end of a potential interview on NPR, get some training before sending out that proposal.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN PLATFORM

Everything in this chapter.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Narrative/Advocacy Book

2048: Humanity’s Agreement to Live Together

by Dr. John Kirk Boyd, Esq. (Berrett-Koehler)

The author combines professional credentials with market visibility.

The Author’s Platform

The author is the executive director of the 2048 Project, a project within the Institute for Global Challenges and the Law at the University of California Berkeley School of Law. His position enables him to keep the book in the public eye and accomplish the mission of the book and project:

- Kirk gives more than twenty talks a year at universities, conferences, and nonprofit organizations, as well as at events planned by students, peace groups, and service organizations such as Rotary International.
- He has made more than seventy-five presentations internationally at conferences, lectures, discussion panels, and media events, including radio and television.
- The author has appeared before the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council for seven of the last eight years and spoken in Norway, Spain, Russia, Brazil, Serbia, and India.
- The 2048 Project is organizing regional and international conferences with the participation of academic, government, and business leaders. The first international conference was held in 2008 and was the first of several international celebrations commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration.
- The next international conference will be February 2010 and will be held in Dubai. The Project has been awarded a \$200,000 grant by the Dubai Human Rights Association to commission one-hundred papers from top scholars, business

leaders, and government representatives to revise the Arab Charter on Human Rights and to consider the fit of the Arab Charter within an International Convention on Human Rights. The papers will be presented at the conference, and the author will edit them into a book.

- The law school has launched the project as a “sustained research project.” The university has a multiyear commitment to dedicate faculty, student, and financial resources to the project. It’s designed to continue for the next forty years, so there will be continuing opportunities for the author to sell the book in the United States and abroad.
- The project is a membership organization. As a premium, new members receive *2048* and a quarterly e-newsletter that will encourage them to forward it to as many people as they can.
- Kirk has more than twenty-one years of teaching and practice. He has built an extensive network that includes the networks of the co-directors, an advisory board, and drafters, many of whom are renowned in their field and have extensive contacts that they will use to promote the book. The advisory board is a group of scholars, judges, lawyers, and professional people who participate in strategic planning, fundraising, and supervising the drafting of documents. The board has seventeen members, including a Nobel laureate.

Upmarket Prescriptive Book

Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder

by Lucy Jane Miller, Ph.D. (Putnam/Penguin Random House)

Dr. Miller included “special markets,” sometimes listed under personal promotion, in the platform section of this six-figure proposal.

Platform

Thirty years of research, publishing, and promoting the understanding of Sensory Processing Disorder have laid an enviable foundation for Dr. Miller to deliver *Sensational Children* to this huge and needy market. Marketing vehicles already in place include the following:

Public Visibility

In the last three years alone, Dr. Miller has made more than forty public appearances at workshops, conferences, and other events for fellow scientists and/or parents. This high level of visibility will help position *Sensational Children* as the definitive title for professionals working in the field of Sensory Processing Disorder and as the authoritative guidebook for parents of children with SPD. Dr. Miller also is routinely interviewed by the mass media as an expert on SPD, generating exposure with audiences many times larger than those before which she can personally appear. Upon publication of the book, she will use her in-house staff to expand her visibility to the mass media and will increase her public-appearance schedule to include more conferences in more markets.

KID (Knowledge in Development) Foundation

Dr. Miller's 501(c)3 nonprofit public charity based in Littleton, Colorado, operates the largest informational website (www.SINetwork.org) about Sensory Processing Disorder anywhere on the Web. Information is extensive and is targeted at parents, occupational therapists, physicians, and others who live or work with sensational children. The site receives an average of ten-thousand hits a week, an impressive number that will increase dramatically as the foundation's National Resource Directory comes online early this spring. This registry of professionals and community resources providing services to children with SPD is the only comprehensive source of resources for parents of children with SPD and is expected to attract thousands of parent visitors on a continuing basis. The KID Foundation website is listed as a resource in *The Out-of-Sync Child*, promoted heavily in specialty-product catalogs and given exposure by numerous other lecturers at conferences nationwide. It enjoys a strong, existing affiliate program with Amazon.com. *Sensational Children* will be promoted heavily in this venue.

Sensory Products Manufacturers

A number of thriving specialty companies concentrate on producing and/or distributing books, videos, music, therapy equipment, play equipment, and other materials for use by parents, professionals, and schools working with children with SPD. Dr. Miller enjoys existing commercial relationships with several such companies, and they have long urged her to write the definitive book about the heart and science of SPD. They are eager to add her title to their product lines.

Sensory Resources Inc. (Las Vegas, Nevada) distributes a wide range of written materials, equipment, and other products to parents, therapists, and schools through its website and at the estimated twenty conferences it hosts yearly. It is the single largest distributor of *The Out-of-Sync Child* and is committed to distributing and promoting Dr. Miller's book as well. The conferences that Sensory Resources hosts and Carol Kranowitz and Dr. Miller co-teach have proven to be a highly effective venue for selling books related to SPD and for staging book signings.

Abilitations/Integrations, a division of Sportime International, which is a subsidiary of School Supply (Atlanta, Georgia), is another corporate partner with Dr. Miller. Abilitations distributes more than 700,000 product catalogs quarterly and is eager to market and distribute a book on SPD by Dr. Miller. The company has contracted with her to write columns and advice in its catalogs and is one of the major underwriters for the National Resource Directory described above.

PlayAway and TheraPlay (Bear Creek, Wisconsin), **Sammons Preston** (Bolingbrook, Illinois), and **Southpaw Enterprises** (Dayton, Ohio) are other major specialty distributors who have existing relationships with Dr. Miller and are committed to promoting and distributing her book in their catalogs, on their websites, and at public events such as national conferences where they market their materials. Smaller but significant niche distributors who also can be counted upon to promote and distribute the book include Therapro (Framingham, Massachusetts), Pocket Full of Therapy (Morganville, New Jersey), and Sensory Comfort (Portsmouth, New Hampshire).

Specialty Publishers

Publishers of tests to assess children with Sensory Processing Disorder are a specialty group with a well-established market among the professionals who evaluate and treat children with SPD. They are capable of and eager to distribute a popular book by Dr. Miller, who is already well known within this market as the author of several widely used assessment tools. These test publishers would routinely insert promotional material about the book into each test related to SPD that they sell.

The Psychological Corp. (TPC) is the oldest and largest test publisher in the world, publishing among other scales the Wechsler IQ scales. TPC publishes five of the seven norm-referenced standardized tests that Dr. Miller has developed. The company will advertise and distribute *Sensational Children* as an extension of its own product line, which includes the textbook *Sensory Integration in Diverse Populations* and several other SPD books. TPC displays at numerous trade shows where *Sensational Children* would find a ready market.

Western Psychological Services (WPS) publishes Dr. Ayres's test, the *Sensory Integration and Praxis Test*, and is reissuing Ayres's book, *Sensory Integration and the Child*. WPS is the publisher of Dr. Miller's newest test, Lifespan Independent Function Evaluation, also known as LIFE (2005). This excellent preexisting relationship between Dr. Miller and WPS ensures that WPS will be eager to advertise *Sensational Children* alongside Dr. Ayres's tests and books, as well as to market the book at the numerous trade shows related to SPD that the firm staffs.

1. If you don't have enough material in your platform to fill two pages, your platform does not warrant its own section. Draft the copy now, and when you pull your sections together, create a "Platform" subheading under the author bio section.

2. Purrrrged—get it? Sorry.

15

AUDIENCE

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">AUDIENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One page • First or third person • Sometimes called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Audience and Special Markets ◦ The Market and Comparable Books ◦ The Market ◦ Target Market
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Audience: The people who are likely to buy your book and where they can be found.</p>		

Include as many empirically documented potential buyers as you can to prove the depth, diversity, and durability of the audience for your book.

The most telling statement of the last century may be “Follow the money,” coined by William Goldman in his screenplay *All the President’s Men*.

Your proposal must enable an editor to convince her bosses that publishing your book will make money. How? By identifying the people who will be highly motivated to buy it. Follow that money in your proposal: List the people and organizations who have already spent money on books and products closely related to your topic.

The best proof that your book will appeal to a specific audience are sales figures for similar books and products. “My book will appeal to readers who purchased *Dancing with Cats* by Burton Silver and Heather Busch, which has sold ten-thousand copies and was recently reissued in hardcover” is a much stronger argument than a generalization like “A billion people own cats, so if 5 percent of them buy my book, we’ll sell fifty-million copies.”

HOT TIP

If you're having trouble identifying your audience, you may have stumbled upon a red flag. Publishers expect you to know who will most likely buy your book. If you don't, it's time to either (1) stop everything and find out, or (2) self-publish.

DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE: WHO, WHERE, AND WHY

“Pitch only the book you know has a firm spot in the marketplace. Do not pitch a book, expecting that the publisher will bring the audience to you. It’s the other way around.”

—JANE FRIEDMAN, PUBLISHING CONSULTANT

Begin your audience section with an introductory paragraph or two that defines *who* will buy your book, *why* they will buy it, and *where* they can be found. Follow with a list of facts that prove your points. Use up-to-date, round figures from reliable sources.

Who? Define Your Reader

The most successful writers know exactly who their typical readers are,¹ but in your proposal, list only those attributes that provide insight into your book's appeal. Don't tell publishers that the reader of your cookbook for working parents is a middle-class thirty-year-old; publishers already know that. However, publishers would welcome statistics about how many of those thirty-year-olds subscribe to your newsletter or attend one of those combination book-group/play-group events you claim are sweeping the nation.

As agent Andy Ross of the Andy Ross Literary Agency says, in your proposal, “you need to be able to distinguish between an ‘audience’ and a ‘demographic.’” If, as you research your *My Little Pony Collector's Almanac*, you discover that a shocking number of adult males are rabid fans of *My Little Pony*,² a description of that unexpected male reader, with stats on where he can be found, certainly belongs in your proposal.

Still not sure? If in doubt, keep it in. Better to have more audience documentation than less. Agents and editors need such data to convince publishers of the size and accessibility of your

book's audience. Publishers will share it with their marketing and publicity departments, who will use it to develop sales strategies later.

- If relevant to your book and verifiable, consider listing characteristics about your reader, such as:
 - age
 - gender
 - location
 - income—for example, upmarket (*The Truffle Sniffer's Cookbook*) or down-market (*473 Ways to Use Spam to Stuff a Turkey*)
 - occupation
 - number of professionals in the field
- Consider whether your readers' interests in hobbies, sports, or other leisure activities, as well as their religious, political, or cultural beliefs, are related to their motivation to buy your books.
- Think about the benefits your book offers that will compel your readers to purchase it. Be specific. Is there something about the book that will create evangelists?

Where and Why? Audience Documentation

Prove to the publisher that your audience is highly motivated and easily found.

- List numbers of people who have the problem your book addresses.
- Identify special-interest communities. We live in a world where people form tribes and are drawn together by passionate interest in specific subjects. Does your topic appeal to a tribe that has already formed, is large and actively engaged with the topic and each other, and is *reachable* through organizations or social media groups? Excellent! That's what publishers want to see.
- List statistics on sales of related books, magazines, services, or merchandise.
- Provide statistics on popular, directly related blogs, websites, hashtags, and other market-proving social media. Caution: Hits or visits to a website don't completely document an audience. Visits that translate into sales of related materials or e-mail sign-ups are more convincing. Here are some examples of compelling website statistics:

- “Fifty-thousand people have subscribed to my opt-in e-mail list in the past two years, and the number of sign-ups increases by 10 percent each month. See chart in Supplemental Materials.”
 - “Five-hundred thousand people each month read the ‘Trials and Joys of a Mixed-Race Family’ column I have written for the *HuffPost* since 2011. My column consistently ranks among the top five most read on the site. In the comments section, I’ve been asked by 17,500 readers to ‘please write a book!’”
- Show the growing awareness of your subject in related television programming, films, advertising, the news, or social media.
 - Document your audience (people who follow you) as well as your topic’s audience (people interested in your subject area).
 - Include attendance figures for related events: conventions, conferences, and speeches.
 - List membership numbers of related large organizations.

HOT TIP

If the audience for your book can *only* be identified as people who have purchased similar books, combine the audience and comps sections.

SPECIAL MARKETS

Your audience may be found in academic institutions, specialty retail outlets, and even foreign countries.

Institutional Audience: Course Adoptions

If you know your book will be adopted by schools or other institutions, list the names of the teachers and schools who have committed to use your book. Do not say, “My book will be of great interest to colleges.” At the risk of sounding like broken records, we must reiterate: Don’t speculate in your proposal. Stick to the facts.

Special-Interest Retailers

Large publishers are generally well aware of specialty stores that attract book buyers, from clothing stores like Anthropologie to pet-store chains like PetSmart, so listing book buyers who go to PetSmart won't strengthen your case for your dog-training book—although it won't hurt, either. However, some specialty outlets may not be on the publisher's radar, and some small publishers may not be aware of the large potential outreach of a specialty chain with worldwide franchises. Publishers considering your book on hemp baskets may be surprised to learn, for instance, that in medical marijuana dispensaries in twenty-five states, books account for 60 percent of their non-pot product sales. Use the common-sense test: List special-interest retailers if you feel their inclusion will truly help the publisher understand the audience for your book and where they can be found.

FOREIGN MARKETS AND OTHER SUBSIDIARY RIGHTS

There's a *New Yorker* cartoon by Victoria Roberts showing a man and a woman at a church altar exchanging their vows. The woman says, "I'm delighted to love, honor, and obey, but I'm keeping my electronic rights."

When we talk about "getting a publisher" in America, we usually mean a deal is made in which the publisher licenses the *primary publication rights* from the writer. This contract gives the publisher the right to publish your book in North America, in multiple print and e-book editions.

Publishers love when writers give them additional publication rights, like the rights to publish the book in other languages and formats, from video games to calendars to movies and more. These rights are called "subrights," "subsidiary rights," or sometimes "secondary" or "ancillary rights."

You may believe your work will find eager audiences in other countries and editions. Typically, subrights are *not* mentioned in proposals sent by agents to major publishers. If they do enter the conversation, it's because the agent is saying, "Sorry, Charlie, you can't have them." It's not always in your best financial interest to license both the primary and subsidiary rights for your book to your U.S. publisher, as you get a smaller piece of the financial pie when a publisher sells such rights than you do when your agent sells them.

However, it's better to make some money than no money! Selling subsidiary rights without an agent is tough, so if you're representing yourself, it may be wise to list realistic subrights audiences in your proposal. Your rule of thumb: Mention potential subrights sales in your

proposal *only if you want the person reading it to sell those rights for you*. The language you use to discuss subrights in your proposal depends on where you plan to submit your proposal:

- **BIG HOUSES** won't look at your proposal unless it comes through an agent. Your agent will help you decide how or whether to mention subrights.
- **AGENTS** want to know if you have a large, realistic audience for a specific subsidiary right. In your proposal for agents, say, "Spanish-translation rights may be valuable, as I lecture in Spain three times a year at W, X, and Y and have personal contacts at Z publishing company" or "Steven Spielberg has read my manuscript and would like to obtain an option; the e-mail exchange is attached."
- **MIDSIZE AND SMALL PRESSES** are happy to learn about likely subrights opportunities. Instead of saying, as you would in your proposal for agents, that the rights "*may be valuable*, as I lecture in Spain ..." say, "A Spanish-translation sale *is likely*, as I lecture in Spain ...". The former invites discussion; the latter is an objective statement.

CUSTOMIZE THE AUDIENCE SECTION

PROSE-DRIVEN AUDIENCE SECTION

- Your audience is frequently discussed in the comps section, proven through sales of related books.
- However, even with a literary focus, you're writing about *something*, and that something may well bring a slew of identifiable book buyers who will be productive targets for book promotion. People who buy Jon Krakauer books might include reachable communities of adventure travelers, Alaska residents, and mountain climbers. Purchasers of memoirs like *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert might be found among members of organizations dedicated to meditation, yoga, the Italian language, travel, or recovery from divorce—in fact, one reason that book broke into best-sellerdom is the ease with which its publisher could market to multiple target audiences.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN AUDIENCE SECTION

- Platform and audience can intersect. Write the sections independently; combine them if needed to avoid redundancy when you pull together the proposal.
- As we've said, a platform is *not* an audience. Audiences are the people who interact with your platform. If you've sold fifty-thousand T-shirts to people who have clicked through your heavily trafficked website, you've got an audience in which publishers can believe.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 2.0

by David Perry and Jay Conrad Levinson (Wiley)

Job hunters will obviously look for books on the career shelves in bookstores. But David Perry and Jay Conrad Levinson described the markets for Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 2.0 with a list that symbolizes how much job hunting now takes place online. This also affected their promotion plan, which you'll find in [chapter sixteen](#).

Here are nine of the affinity groups for *Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 2.0*.

1. **Top 185 employment blog:** The top 185 blogs on employment are already linked to David's Guerrilla Job Hunting blog, guerrillajobhunting.typepad.com. About twenty thousand employment blogs exist.
2. **42,000 online job boards:** Monster.com, with all its presence, only accounts for three-quarters of 1 percent of the market share. The smaller boards are clamoring for content to post on their sites. Nearly all job boards have affiliate links to Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, allowing them to recommend books and receive royalties through online purchases.
3. **158,000 headhunters:** The vast majority of headhunters prep their candidates for interviews before they send them to a client. The book will appeal to both the headhunters and their candidates.
4. **20,000 temp agencies:** According to *Staffing Today*, American staffing firms hire more than 11 million temporary and contract employees a year. *Guerrilla Marketing* is an ally for employment counselors who need to prep their temps to avoid humiliation.
5. **College and university guidance counselors:** Nearly 1,200 community colleges and more than 1,700 universities have about twenty million full- and part-time students. The authors will reach them through CollegeRecruiter.com and other job boards. CollegeRecruiter.com, the most-used job board for college students, has agreed to post a Guerrilla Marketing Fast Fact once a week for the first year.
6. **Career counselors** at 62,000 elementary and high schools
7. Outplacement professionals **across America**
8. **Subscribers to trade magazines** in human resources, technology, healthcare, manufacturing, finance, natural resources, public service, counseling, and career management would likely be interested. According to Burrelles, there are almost eighty publications covering HR and personnel. There are hundreds more for industries like engineering, healthcare, and government, which all strive to keep their readers up to date with articles and advice on career matters.
9. **E-zines**, such as *Executive Recruiters Exchange*, *Recruiters On-line*, and *Recruiters Network*, all of which send daily bulletins to their subscribers

Comfort Zone Investing: Build Wealth and Sleep Well at Night

by Ted Allrich (St. Martin's Press)

Editors like to jump on bandwagons, so if you can document a pattern of growth through the numbers you present, mention it. Do so thoughtfully, though—a trend that is currently popular has already peaked in the eyes of publishers, who are planning more than two years in advance.

Books on investing keep appearing because people keep buying them. More than half of American households own stocks or mutual funds. That's more than eighty-million adults. Most of them have a strong desire to learn more about how to invest better, what makes the stock market move, how the capital markets work, and how to make sense of economic news. They are searching for a way to get comfortable with investing.

This book will have information that will help 90 percent of investors, from the most naïve to the most sophisticated. Through the knowledge in *Comfort Zone Investing*, they will reach new levels of understanding about the markets in general and stocks in particular.

The book will also help newly divorced men and women, recent college graduates, about-to-retire workers, sons and daughters inheriting wealth, and workers who lose their 401(k) plans and must manage their own retirement accounts.

Many stockbrokers—and there are almost seventy thousand of them—need help understanding the markets. They are given research reports but don't usually understand how the economy or the stock market works.

1. Yes, dear reader of this book, we see you out there. Don't take your glasses off; you look great as you are. We don't mind the sweats. Just tell your cat to get off the laptop—you have writing to do.
2. Far-fetched example, think you? Think again. Male "My Little Pony" fans are called "Bronies."

16

PERSONAL PROMOTION

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL PROMOTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One to three pages• First or third person• Sometimes called:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Personal Marketing◦ Promotion◦ Author-Supported Promotion◦ My Promotion Plans◦ Marketing and Promotional Opportunities◦ Special Marketing and Promotional Opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		

Personal Promotion: Specific actions you will take on your own time or at your own expense, with the approval of the publisher, to promote sales of your book, often placed immediately after or within the platform section.

“Writing is 10 percent; marketing is 90 percent.”

—**JACK CANFIELD**

Nothing excites a publisher more than a book that comes wrapped in the gift box of author-created promotion. The commitment you make to invest your time and money in marketing and promotion can increase the value of your proposal and in turn, increase the efforts the publisher will make to support the book.

Your promotion contributions influence:

- where your publisher positions your book on its list¹
- how many copies bookstores order
- your next book (the better your first book does, the more your second book will be worth)

- your writing, speaking, and business opportunities (the more visible your book, the more offers you'll get)
- your appeal to fans, booksellers, other authors, and media

HOW TO WRITE ABOUT PROMOTION

“For business books, publishers want a road map of promotion—where the writer has spoken last year, where their projected audience is for the upcoming year, what gigs they have, where they are, the size of the audience, whether the gig is renewable or regular, how many books they expect to sell—all spelled out.”

—**RITA ROSENKRANZ, AGENT, RITA ROSENKRANZ LITERARY AGENCY**

Commercial nonfiction writers, especially of business or prescriptive books, often include formal strategic promotion plans in their proposals. But many writers don't include a full-blown plan and instead list, in clear and objective detail, those promotional efforts they will undertake.

Regardless of your approach, take extra care in how you describe your efforts; blue-sky brainstorming or plans that fall within the publisher's domain can read as hollow or amateurish. That's why we like the section title “Personal Promotion” as opposed to “Promotion”; this sends the subtle message that you're not trying to do the publisher's job (even if you sort of are).

On a related note, when speaking of your promotion or sales efforts, the fastest way to win a publisher's respect is to acknowledge their role in promotion decisions. Include such verbiage as “With the publisher's approval, I will” This signals a level of professional courtesy welcomed by publishers of all sizes.

INVEST YOUR TIME

Life in the Digital Age has turned into one black hole of do-it-yourself time-sucks. We arrange our travel; type, track, mail, and file our correspondence; craft our project plans; calculate our bookkeeping; do our taxes; repair our software—and promote our own books—all because

inexpensive technology exists to facilitate the work. But where in the world are we supposed to find the time or expertise to do it? No wonder our stress levels have soared.

Rant over. All those once outsourced tasks mentioned above—*other than* the book promotion—makes Jody very cranky. Book promotion is different. Authors have historically been expected to contribute significant amounts of time to the promotion of their books; this isn't new. Authors are inseparable from their books; they are better positioned than publishers to reach their readers, and most enjoy interacting with their readers and vice versa. Book promotion is one of the few areas that technology—social media, e-mail, online research, and administrative software—actually does make easier and arguably less time-consuming than it was a few decades ago. So cheer up, and consider including in your proposal the following promotional efforts that cost only time.

Mention Special Sales

Special sales are large orders placed by corporations or institutions. For example, the slow-cooker company your neighbor owns has contracted with you to purchase ten-thousand books to include with cookers in its Christmas promotion. If you've stumbled upon a great break like this, list it here—and feature it in the opening pages of your proposal. Don't expend a lot of effort pursuing such partners, as they're not easy to find prior to publication.

List Presentations and Speeches

To succeed in the book business, you must build relationships with booksellers and with your audience. You can accomplish a lot by creating communities online, but there's nothing like meeting people face-to-face. But here's the catch-22: Publishers don't support many bookstore tours these days, and bookstores prefer to work directly with publishers, so you can't appear at bookstores on your own.

How to get around this? Commit in your proposal to arrange creative events that tie in with the topic of your book, such as a talk, a discussion, or a demonstration. Your publisher may be willing to work with you to *also* set up a signing or to liaise with the local bookstore so that it sells books at your event.² Jody's client Dean King wrote the definitive book on the Hatfield and McCoy feud, aptly titled *The Feud* (Little, Brown/Hachette). He arranged his own speaking appearances at universities and Hatfield and McCoy festivals throughout the southeastern United States. His publisher then arranged book signings and cross promotion with nearby booksellers to support his efforts.

In your proposal, list those speeches you have *already* lined up and those events with which you're *already* connected. List future events only if there is a documentable likelihood they will occur (for instance, you have personal connections to the people in charge, or you've presented at the same event for years). Consider the following venues:

- corporations
- universities
- national and local speakers' organizations
- professional conferences (ideally keynotes)
- book clubs or book groups (Plan a promotion only if you are actively involved with many groups; for example, you're an artist who maintains a list of art-related book groups on your website with whom you regularly interact. Say that you plan, with the publisher's permission, to attend one meeting each via Skype or Zoom or the like.)

HOT TIP

BE SPECIFIC

Details matter. Writers often tell Mike they're "willing to give as many talks as it takes." This is no help to publishers. Instead write: "I will continue to give X talks to Y people through Z speaker's bureau each year."

Put Your Online Platform to Use

Your online platform (see [chapter fourteen](#)) is the means you have in place to directly reach your readers. List your plans to *use* that platform to promote your book here—not your plans to *build* your platform. Don't say, for instance, "I will create a Facebook group." *Do* say, "I will send my Facebook group, which has 2,500 dedicated members, a monthly quiz related to my book." Here are a few other examples.

- I have been invited to participate in a blog tour by X blogs with a readership of Y people.
- With the publisher's blessing, I will follow up on these open invitations to appear on X radio and TV shows.
- I will, in coordination with the publisher:
 - promote my book regularly on X forums, chat rooms, and message boards I belong to
 - run the following promotions through my website:
 - a coupon offering X
 - a raffle for Y

- use social media in the following ways ...
- promote the book on my blog by ...
- use my newsletter to ...
- e-mail X sites with which I have reciprocal links about the book
- teach X teleseminars (webinars, etc.) per year

Support the Publisher's Efforts

Small and midsize publishers may appreciate when you handle tasks that overlap with their efforts. Even if your ideas don't appeal to the small publisher, they'll respect the effort if you present those ideas professionally.

- Offer to ask for a purchasing commitment from specialty stores frequented by your audience, such as music, sporting goods, hardware, stationery, or gourmet-cooking stores. If they already work directly with publishers and distributors, you'll have a tough time developing a relationship, but you also might strike gold.

HOT TIP

CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SALE

Author-entrepreneurs Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen obtained distribution deals with beauty parlors, gas stations, and other outlets that don't typically sell books. Their efforts contributed in large part to the sales of more than one-hundred million Chicken Soup for the Soul books. It was a win-win-win deal: The stores and the authors profited, and so did the charity each book supports.

- Create a virtual media kit (see [Appendix B](#)).
- Create a book trailer, or provide audio or video clips of one of your speeches or interviews.
- Remember that "Big Mouth List" we suggested as part of your platform? You can refer to that list here, suggest that the people on it be sent promotional copies, and say that you will write personal cover letters to each. Influential organizations and publications can also be on this list, as long as you know the person receiving the book.³
- Provide a mailing list of review sources in your field—specialized places your publisher is unlikely to know.

INVEST YOUR MONEY

Your book is your baby. You give birth to it twice: once when you conceive and write it and again when you and your publisher bring it into the world and nurture its success. Contributing financially to its promotion can be part of that process. If you have the means, commit to add to the promotional pot in one or more of the following ways.

Hire an Independent Publicist

Publicizing a book means driving attention to it, online and off. Tell publishers you will hire an independent publicist to support their efforts. Include a specific budget and examples of the firms from which you will choose your publicist “after obtaining input from the publisher.”

Publishers are open to authors working with independent publicists. They’re aware that authors can get very upset over what they perceive as a poorly publicized book. Sometimes author discontent arises from the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of any publicity campaign, especially as the impact of publicity may not show up in sales until months after the fact. Sometimes books are underpublicized, as hardworking in-house publicists have hundreds of books to promote and very short windows in which to do so.

For these reasons, your commitment to hire a publicist can take a big burden off of the publisher.

HOT TIPS

PUBLICIST-HIRING POINTERS

- At large publicity firms, the people you first meet may not be the ones who will work with you. Be sure to meet with the person assigned to your book before engaging the firm.
- Find a publicist who has publicized books on your subject for major publishers.
- Ask a publicist’s previous clients about his results, reliability, and personality.
- Request written proposals from publicists.
- If online promotion is the most important part of your campaign, find a publicist with proven effectiveness specifically in online promotion.
- Consider whether you prefer working with one large firm with different people who handle different types of publicity or hiring specialized firms for tasks like social media management and off-line event planning.
- Consider less expensive regional firms for local events. A concentrated homegrown campaign can sell more books than a one-off on national media.
- Hire a firm who understands what sells books and what doesn’t. Beware of companies who promise hundreds of radio interviews or blog appearances; if your targeted audience isn’t listening, your books aren’t selling.

- You don't have to do this alone; you can commit in your proposal to hiring a publicist and later ask your publisher for recommendations.

Commit to Book Buyback

Some authors commit to purchasing bulk quantities of their books to resell to their established markets: business-book writers purchase books to sell during speeches, restaurant owners sell books in restaurants, and instructors sell books at conferences. A Wiley editor told us that business authors often sell books themselves to 25 to 30 percent of their audiences.

If you plan to purchase books for resale, state the number of books you will buy. A large or midsize house won't usually be impressed by a number smaller than three thousand. Smaller houses may be satisfied with whatever number you provide or by knowing you will buy back some books.

Your publisher will hold you to that number by contract, so be realistic. Commit only to what you are sure you can resell. Base this quantity on the number of talks you give, the average attendance at your talks, and research with peers. Include a time line for your purchase plan, for example: "I will purchase two-thousand copies upon publication and two-thousand copies one year after the initial publication."

Traditional publishers love author buybacks but have no interest in becoming vanity presses. A promised buyback won't convince them to acquire a book in which they're not interested.

Promise to Pay for Some Promotion

Some of Mike's clients have made commitments to spend a specified amount of their own money promoting their books and have asked the publisher to match that budget. If you can afford this and the publisher buys into the idea, you're in an ideal position; you have the credibility and distribution of a traditional house, plus the promotional control your own money affords.

If your publisher says it will match your promotion budget, ask about their specific plans. Publishers have ways of fudging these numbers; they may claim to "match" your budget with money they would have spent anyway on things like listing your book in their catalog or promoting it with all their other books at book conferences.

Publishers won't acquire your book because you have a budget or reject it because you don't. Mike represented an author who committed to spending seventy-thousand dollars to

promote her book, but he still couldn't sell it to a publisher.

You may be an expert in one particular type of promotion—such as using Google AdWords or Facebook Ads—and wish only to commit to spending money in that area in your proposal. Go for it!

HOT TIP

GET IT RIGHT

Be specific about how you will spend your budget—and be accurate. If you say you have a promotion budget of one-thousand dollars to mail one-thousand books to corporate CEOs, publishers will know you have drastically underestimated the mailing costs and your whole proposal will lose credibility.

Personal Promotion Dos and Don'ts

- **DO** write this section in a manner that tells agents and publishers you are professional, realistic, and easy to work with.
- **DON'T** use the passive voice. Instead of writing, “Bloggers in the field will be e-mailed,” write: “The author will e-mail the one-hundred most-popular bloggers in the tie-dying field ...”
- **DO** include names, facts, and figures. What is the name of the speaker's bureau that represents you? Who do you work with? How many books will you purchase? What conference invites you back each year, and how many people attend? How much money will you spend on your own publicist? Who have you hired to film your book-related YouTube instructional series?
- **DO** use the word *will*. Publishers want to know what you *will* do, not what you are *eager*, *hoping*, or *available* to do.
- **DON'T** offer to set up your own bookstore tour; you're in no position to negotiate the cop advertising or front-of-store display purchasing that typically falls within the publisher's domain. However ...
- **DO** mention preexisting relationships with booksellers. For instance, if you are best friends with the local bookseller, who has offered to hold two signings and a launch party and send out invitations to ten-thousand people, say so.

- **DO** tell publishers how you will make good on your promises, if it's not already obvious. For example, write, "The author will e-mail the one hundred most-popular bloggers in the tie-dying field as determined by Alexa rankings. The current list is attached in Supplemental Materials."

CUSTOMIZE PERSONAL PROMOTION

PROSE-DRIVEN PERSONAL PROMOTION

- Editors can be turned off by too much focus on marketing. However, consider whether your topic may lend itself to literary events at colleges or speeches or keynotes at conferences, which publishers will welcome.
- Most prose-driven writers don't commit to pay for promotion or to buy back large quantities of books for resale. However, committing to hire a publicist is a different matter, valuable to you and welcomed by publishers. Publicizing narrative nonfiction and memoir isn't easy. It calls for clever, dedicated, outside-the-box thinking, consistent follow-up, and grassroots contacts that take time in-house publicists often lack.

PLATFORM-DRIVEN PERSONAL PROMOTION

- Personal promotion can make or break the sale of a platform-driven book, especially to a small- or medium-sized publisher. Strongly consider including a formal personal promotion plan in your proposal.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLE

Creative Visualization for Writers

by Nina Amir (Writer's Digest Books)

Writer Nina Amir, represented by Gordon Warnock of the Fuse Literary Agency, wrote an extensive formal promotion plan. While she could have been even more specific in some areas (such as in providing ranking stats and specific names of blogs she planned to approach), the well-thought-out details and general savvy behind this plan instills confidence that Nina will be a respectful colleague and a promotional force of nature. She provided links within the copy rather than listing them at the end of the section. As much of this section comprises linked resources, that choice makes sense.

Pre-Publication Promotion Plan

To prepare for publication of *Creative Visualization for Writers*, the author has begun implementing a promotional plan. She will step up these efforts three months prior to publication.

The author:

- purchased a subscription to www.expertclick.com, the publishers of *Yearbook of Experts*, where she is listed as a writing and publishing consultant and speaker and a human potential speaker. This gives her the ability to list thirty-nine keyword areas of expertise for each of these categories, including *publishing, editing, speaking, writing, book publishing, journalism, writing coaching, and publishing consulting*. She is listed as a speaker who lectures for pay or for travel expenses.
 - This service allows the author to help journalists find her, show journalists the issues about which she is writing and speaking, and ensure that media professionals know she welcomes their contact.
 - It also allows her to send news releases, make articles available, post events, and have updated information pushed to search engines. Each news release posted on www.expertclick.com offers a chance to promote her book. The news releases the author posts using this service reach out in ten ways, including:
 - daily and weekly headline feeds going to more than eleven-thousand journalists
 - via LexisNexis, the leading professional search resource
 - via Google News
 - instant posting at the News Release Wire website
 - instant linking to her www.expertclick.com profile and to her website
 - via the www.expertclick.com search system
 - in the printed *Yearbook of Experts*
 - at radiotour.com for audio releases
 - at reviewbook.com for book releases
 - via search-engine ranking
- negotiated a membership at www.speakerfile.com to ensure she can be found and apply for related speaking engagements.
- responded to media queries regularly at www.haro.com, www.pitchrate.com, and www.reporterconnection.com.
- prepared a media/speaker's kit (available online and off) to solicit speaking engagements and media appearances. It includes a bio, a head shot, endorsements, and speaking topics.
- built her visibility, readership, and mailing list through the use of her blogs, *Write Nonfiction NOW!*, *How to Blog a Book*, and *As the Spirit Moves Me*.
- built a strong Internet presence using social networking, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google Plus, and LinkedIn, and by commenting on related blogs and online articles.
- joined www.tribrr.com, where she has a reach of 2,812,800 on Twitter; she will promote presales of the book via blog posts spread by her "tribemates."
- wrote regularly for www.the-bookdesigner.com, an award-winning self-publishing blog, for sixteen months, starting in February 2014.
- added features to her website to draw interest, publicize her work, capture e-mail addresses, and build her e-mail list.
 - As soon as she has secured a contract, she will create a page on her website devoted to *Creative Visualization for Writers*; it will include the introduction and an invitation to be notified about book-release information. This page will be used for book preorders as well. (It could also include artwork and an exercise.)
- will conduct prerelease events to produce presales of the book, such as a review tour, contests, and guest posting.

- will publish blog posts related to the book.

Post-Publication Promotion Plan

In addition to her prior-to-publication promotional efforts, after publication the author will, with the publisher's approval:

- conduct a virtual book tour to fifteen to twenty-five high-profile, highly trafficked writing-, creativity-, or self-help-related blogs and podcasts within the first thirty days of release.
- arrange a radio tour.
- secure promise from bloggers with whom she has personal relationships to promote the book upon release in their blogs.
- blast release information using her own social networking already set in place on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google Plus, and LinkedIn.
- promote the release of the book via blog posts spread by her "tribemates" at tribrr.com.
- secure webinar gigs with at least three prominent online marketers to promote the book and a related course.
- write related promotional blog posts and publish them on her three blogs: Write Nonfiction NOW!, How to Blog a Book, and As the Spirit Moves Me.
- announce the release of *Creative Visualization for Writers* at her speaking engagements, classes, and book tour.
- create and print postcards featuring the cover of the book and order information to hand out at all her speaking events.
- increase the number of articles about the book published in her e-newsletter and send out additional information and incentives to her mailing list.
- employ the service of Bostick Communications, a press-release-distribution company, to send a news release about her book's publication. By utilizing this service that targets print, radio, and television reporters, she will hit thirty-thousand possible media outlets.
- send regular releases via www.expertclick.com.
- send press kits to local media in the cities where she is scheduled to speak, or hire a publicity firm to do so for her.
- give a minimum of twelve talks per year around the country, virtually, and locally.
- pursue speaking engagements by sending out letters and/or speaker's kits monthly to organizations.
- sell books by offering them at all her lectures, talks, seminars, and workshops as well as on her website.
- continue the subscription she has purchased with the Yearbook of Experts at www.expertclick.com.
- continue her listing with www.speakerfile.com.
- send article pitches to relevant newspapers, magazines, and a radio program database she has purchased. A promotional copy of the book will be sent to all interested radio and television contacts.
- offer columns, essays, and articles to e-zines and print publications in exchange for a promotional bio.
- target with query letters, essays, and news releases online and print publications.
- set up a speaking tour to professional speaking and writing organizations across the country and in Canada, sending out letters and/or speaker's kits monthly to obtain engagements locally, nationally, and internationally.
- contact writing conferences and organizations to arrange for speaking engagements or placement of the book in their stores or sales venues.
- offer teleseminars, workshops, and classes related to the book, publicizing them with news releases and online-seminar listing services.
- ask the San Francisco Writers Conference to publicize the book's release in its newsletter.
- continue to add features to her website to draw interest in and publicize the book. Use the page devoted to *Creative Visualization for Writers* for book orders. The home page will feature the book prominently and offer a way for visitors to purchase the book. Plus, the site will include a "tour" page listing all the sites the author visited during her virtual book tour.

- contact the following opinion makers for book endorsements.
 1. Sark (*Sark's Journal and Play!Book: A Place to Dream While Awake*)
 2. Shakti Gawain (*Creative Visualization*)
 3. Michael J. Gelb (*Creativity on Demand: How to Ignite and Sustain the Fire of Genius*)
 4. Rich Frishman (Author101)
 5. Brian Tracy (*Get Smart!*)
 6. Jonathan Maberry (*Patient Zero*)
 7. Lisa Tener (book coach)
 8. Carolyn Howard-Johnson (*How to Do It Frugally*)
 9. Linda Joy Myers (*Don't Call Me Mother*)
 10. Joel Friedlander (thebookdesigner.com)
 11. Carla King (*The Self-Pub Bootcamp*)
 12. Andy Ross (literary agent)

The author's promotional and publicity efforts will be coordinated with those of the publisher.

1. Publishers invest more time and money in books they position as “lead” titles. The rich get richer, even in book publishing.
2. If you buy books from the publisher and sell them at your speech, you make more money per book. If your local bookstore comes in to sell books, you make less but you may develop a friendship that will last throughout the life of your book and your future books. You will also be supporting local bookstores and may end up on a best-seller list.
3. You'll be surprised at publishers' willingness to send out free books to people who will spread the word.

17

DETAILED OUTLINE

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">DETAILED OUTLINE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three to six pages• First or third person• Sometimes called:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Detailed Table of Contents◦ Working Contents◦ Detailed Outline with Sample Writing◦ Narrative Outline◦ Chapter Breakdown
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Detailed Outline: An expanded table of contents for the proposed book, with brief compelling descriptions of each chapter's content.</p>		

“Prose needs to be built like a cathedral.”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

Think of the detailed outline of your book as the blueprint of the cathedral your prose will build. Just as you would not leave a room out of your blueprint, your detailed outline must provide a complete sketch of what your book will cover.

The detailed outline is not necessarily a showcase meant to dazzle editors, but every word must count and every description must compel. It proves that your subject and your approach to your subject have the heft to sustain readers' interest for the many hours you'll ask them to devote to reading your book. It demonstrates your knowledge of the subject and your ability to transform your idea into a book that you, your publisher, and your audience will feel proud to be associated with for years.

A too-thin outline invites problems. If you don't thoroughly plan your book, you'll have trouble finding a publisher; even if you do find one, you'll find less enthusiasm in house—and

a lower advance. Writing the book will probably require more research, travel, interviews, and time than you thought. A comprehensive outline is the best way to prevent costly, time-consuming surprises.

Different books lend themselves to different styles of detailed outline. None of the outline styles described in this chapter are written in stone; play with formatting and content to find the best expression for your vision.

HOT TIP

THE DETAILED OUTLINE AS A GIFT

Ace freelance writer Hal Zina Bennett, with whom Mike wrote *How to Write with a Collaborator*, believes a well-written outline can make writing your book “almost as easy as painting by the numbers.”

STANDARD DETAILED OUTLINE AND CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

Most detailed outlines expand the book's table of contents, which you have written (see [chapter eleven](#)). To create the detailed outline, write each chapter title in boldface, and follow it with a brief and compelling chapter description. How you describe each chapter is up to you; editors are accustomed to seeing everything from straightforward paragraphs to bulleted breakdowns. Here's how one imaginary book's chapters can be described in several different styles. The following variations each describe the same chapter in a lighthearted cookbook written by a brother-and-sister team.

The Chapter Described in One or Two Paragraphs

Here, the description is straightforward and written in complete sentences.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NOVICE ROASTS A CHICKEN

In [Chapter One](#), Sally, a hapless beginning cook, and Fred, her more experienced brother, are introduced to the reader. Fred provides instructions and recipes for catching (largely tongue-in-cheek), choosing, preparing, and roasting a chicken, followed by Fred's techniques and recipes for mashing potatoes. Sally's naive questions, answered by Fred, follow each set of Fred's instructions. Humorous anecdotes are sprinkled throughout the chapter, such as Sally's mistaking a rooster for a hen. Two recipes for roast chicken are provided, as well as four mashed-potato recipes, ranging in difficulty from basic to expert. Instructions are accompanied by line drawings and photographs. (Kosher-butcher techniques are described in [Appendix A](#).)

Open the Description with the First Lines of the Chapter

To demonstrate voice and grab attention, you can start each chapter description with the first line or three of the chapter as it will appear in the book. Follow with phrases, in italics and separated by ellipses, describing the rest of the chapter's content.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NOVICE

I couldn't believe my sister, Sally, so accomplished in her professional life, had never roasted a chicken. I felt a brotherly obligation to share my expertise. That was my first mistake. *Basic*

chicken catching instructions ... Sally bags a rooster ... roasting instructions and recipes ... Sally's questions, answered ... what's up with Sally? ... potato-mashing techniques ... four recipes for mashed potatoes.

Use a Bulleted List After the First Sentences

A variation on the previous style: Begin the chapter description with the first lines of the chapter *or* a compelling full sentence describing the chapter. Follow with descriptors of the rest of the content as a list.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NOVICE ROASTS A CHICKEN

I couldn't believe my sister, Sally, so accomplished in her professional life, had never roasted a chicken. I felt a brotherly obligation to share my expertise. That was my first mistake.

- Chicken-catching instructions (tongue-in-cheek)
- Sally bags rooster
- Roasting instructions and recipes
- Sally's questions, answered
- What's up with Sally
- Potato-mashing techniques
- Four recipes for mashed potatoes

Combine Styles

Describe the chapter in a paragraph, but break the details into phrases instead of complete sentences. Or create a new style all of your own. As long as the description is succinct and interesting, there are no rules.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NOVICE ROASTS A CHICKEN

In [Chapter One](#), the reader meets Sally, an inexperienced cook, and her brother, Fred, who is an accomplished chef. Sally, along with the reader, learns the basics of catching and cooking a chicken as well as mashed-potato techniques and recipes. The chapter covers the following topics: *Chicken-catching instructions ... how to roast a chicken ... Sally's questions, answered ... what's up with Sally ... potato-mashing techniques ... four recipes for mashed potatoes.*

HOT TIP

THE TALKING CHAPTER

Do your best to avoid personifying chapters by writing “this chapter discusses.” Chapters don’t talk. A few instances of “this chapter discusses” won’t get your work rejected, but the construct makes agents and editors of upmarket nonfiction cringe a little. Instead, try: “In this chapter, I discuss” or “The text in this chapter addresses.” Admittedly, it’s hard to find an elegant solution.

Keys to an Effective Detailed Outline

- Establish goals for each chapter description.
 - What dramatic or inspirational impact do you want to achieve?
 - How much humor, if any, do you want to convey?
 - How many anecdotes do you want to include?
- Mention juicy content.
 - Weave into your chapter descriptions revelations that enhance your book’s salability: “Revealed in the next part of the chapter is ...”. Vary the wording.
- List illustrations or other features below each chapter description if they are important to call out to editors. (Also describe them in your book specs section.)
- Write as if you’re talking directly to the agent or acquiring editor.
- Write in the present tense.
- Consider dividing chapter descriptions into parts, chunks, modules, steps, ways, or stages that serve as the organizing force of the chapter.

CREATIVE STRUCTURE WITHIN CHAPTERS

Consider conceptualizing the information in your chapters in the form of an image, a symbol, or a metaphor that captures the essence of the chapter in a unifying, memorable way. Mike’s book on agents has chapters about a terrible day and a terrific day in the life of an agent. He begins each chapter in the morning and runs through a sequential composite of horrible—or wonderful—things that have befallen his agency. Judging from the feedback he gets from readers, those are the two most memorable chapters in the book.

ALTERNATIVE OUTLINES

For certain kinds of books the breakdown styles listed above would be inappropriate. Some books don't even have chapters, while others are more aptly described in a literary style. But books must have *some* structure, and that structure must be accurately described. Here's how.

Outlines Without Chapters

- **BOOKS DIVIDED INTO SECTIONS:** When Mike wrote the proposal for *Painted Ladies: San Francisco's Resplendent Victorians*, he divided the book into four sections covering Victorian houses in different parts of the city. Later, he added another element to the book's structure by arranging the house photographs in the order of an architectural tour.
- **COMPILATIONS:** If you are writing a compilation of information, such as an almanac, a dictionary, or an encyclopedia, list the topics the book will cover instead of a chapter-by-chapter breakdown.
- **SIMILARLY STRUCTURED CHAPTERS:** If your book will consist of a series of chapters, each with the same structure and each presenting the same kind of information, you don't have to prepare an in-depth outline. Instead, describe the consistent elements in each chapter, followed by a list of chapters.

The Narrative Outline

You can write longer, more comprehensive chapter explanations—up to two pages—instead of one paragraph or a short bulleted list. Many narrative nonfiction writers use some variation of this technique.

Some writers take the concept further by moving the sample writing into the detailed outline ([chapter nineteen](#)). In this approach, chapter descriptions vary in length. Some include long excerpts that read as if they've been pulled directly from the book; others objectively describe the chapter's content.

Pulling together this *narrative outline* takes skill and empathy. Mixing different material can be confusing, and it's your job to anticipate and preempt this reaction. Writers often include contextual notes to the editor in brackets and/or italics that provide explanations like “[End of excerpt]” or “[Chapter continues with Newton's wife's reaction to his discovery of gravity].”

For the prose-driven writer, a narrative outline that incorporates sample text from the book can be freeing. Many memoirists and journalists write out of sequence to develop their ideas.

When they sit down to write their proposals, they find themselves without full sample chapters but with excellent material from all over the book. If this sounds like you, the narrative outline can be your salvation. You can include the parts of the book you're most drawn to or have researched most thoroughly, even if they aren't complete chapters.

The effective narrative outline creates an immersive and moving reading experience. However, be warned: Many editors are not fans of proposals that don't include full sample chapters. When Jody asked, "Do you like the narrative outline form?" more than one editor said, "Not really." One explained, "I worry about the cherry-picking of the best text, and I suspect the rest of the book won't hold up." But the same editors, in every case, also said, "But I did pay a lot of money for X book or Y book, which was proposed with a narrative outline." So, in this rare instance, Jody doesn't heed the editors' protests. Outstanding books proposed with narrative outlines continue to sell for big bucks (see our thoughts on what we call the "narrative letter of passion" in [chapter twenty-eight](#), which builds further on the narrative outline approach). Although the narrative outline is most often used for narrative nonfiction, it can work for commercial nonfiction if the book has a distinctive voice and the writer has excellent credentials.

CUSTOMIZE THE DETAILED OUTLINE

PROSE-DRIVEN DETAILED OUTLINE

- Bulleted lists and sentence fragments are not often used.
- Longer chapter descriptions, from two paragraphs to two pages, are the norm.
- Narrative outlines combined with sample writing can work well if constructed thoughtfully and empathetically.
- First-person point of view is acceptable for memoir or voice-driven narrative nonfiction.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN DETAILED OUTLINE

- Bulleted lists and other at-a-glance presentations are very effective.
- Editors need to know that the proposed book has substance in each chapter, especially when the book is concept driven. Keep descriptions short but content rich!
- Consider describing each chapter in terms of the benefits it provides the reader.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Traditional Chapter Descriptions in Detailed Outlines

Buy Ketchup in May and Fly at Noon: A Guide to the Best Time to Buy This, Do That, and Go There

by Mark Di Vincenzo (Harper Perennial/HarperCollins)

Author Mark Di Vincenzo spent twenty-four years as a journalist before starting a public relations agency. His proposal was sold by Michelle Wolfson at the Wolfson Literary Agency. The book had a five-week run on The New York Times best-seller list.

Chapter Five: Health and Wellness

The chapter on health includes answers to questions about the best time to exercise, burn fat, walk and run, stretch, wean a baby, have a pap smear, weigh yourself, do a cardio workout, go to the doctor, take a multivitamin, have a heart attack, call 9-1-1, get a massage, have surgery, and get a physical.

Jolt Your Life! The Power of Intentional Change in a World That's Constantly Changing

by Phil Cooke (Thomas Nelson)

Phil's descriptions were short, but each boasted the added punches of an attention-getting quote and a catchy title.

Jolt #13

Creativity: The Real Wonder Drug

"Creativity is a drug I cannot live without."

—CECIL B. DEMILLE, DIRECTOR OF *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*

The critical need for creativity in our personal lives and its impact on change. The five reasons organizations lack creativity. The secrets to being more creative in our personal and business lives and the keys to brainstorming. This chapter is a textbook on creative thinking that can help readers transform their thinking and see every aspect of their lives as a compelling adventure.

Chapter Descriptions in Standard Narrative Outlines

The Probiotics Revolution: Using Beneficial Bacteria to Fight Inflammation and Chronic Disease—and Live a Longer, Healthier Life

by Gary B. Huffnagle, Ph.D. and Mairi C. Noverr, Ph.D. (Random House/Penguin Random House)

The authors enlisted Sarah Wernick, a well-known ghostwriter, who wrote a first-person narrative outline, combining the author's comments with practical advice taken from the chapter described. Ace agent Ted Weinstein got them a six-figure deal.

Chapter Ten

Food Sources of Probiotics

Most of us—unless we do something about it—have probiotic levels too low to improve health. Because probiotics have difficulty competing with other microbes, they need our help to thrive. We can influence our microbial balance by altering our diets.

As the importance of probiotics becomes clearer, food manufacturers are beginning to feature them on product labels. To understand these labels, you must learn relevant microbe names (which are, of course, Latin). *The Probiotics Revolution* will describe more than two-dozen probiotics found in food.

Yogurt and Other Dairy Products

Élie Metchnikoff, the Nobel Prize–winning microbiologist, studied Bulgarian peasants one-hundred years ago. These impoverished peasants lived longer than any other Europeans, and Metchnikoff wondered why. He concluded that their unusually long lives resulted from a diet that featured yogurt and other fermented foods—all of which contain probiotic bacteria.

Selecting a Yogurt

Look for yogurt whose label says “contains live bacterial cultures” or “active cultures.” The label should list specific probiotic bacteria. Since they work in somewhat different ways, look for a diverse mixture. No yogurt is sugar-free since all contain a small amount of sugar from the milk, but try to avoid yogurts that add sugar in the form of sweetened fruit or jam because sugar favors growth of harmful bacteria in the gut, countering the yogurt's benefits. Because of other health concerns, I don't recommend artificially sweetened yogurt except to people with diabetes.

[Chapter description continues.]

Fermented Foods

Certain fermented foods contain high levels of probiotics or the health-promoting compounds they manufacture. Examples include sauerkraut, pickles, olives, wine, and dark beer. I'll walk readers through the options.

How Much Do I Need?

The book will provide detailed information on daily requirements, plus a table presenting portion sizes and probiotic content of the foods listed in the chapter.

The Seashell on the Mountaintop

by Alan Cutler (Dutton/Penguin Random House; reissued by Author Planet Press)

Author Alan Cutler used a narrative approach in this proposal, which resulted in North American rights being sold in a major auction and translated rights being sold around the world. Alan also included a sample chapter and the book's prologue.

Part One: A Six-Thousand-Year-Old World

Chapter One opens in 1659 with a vignette from Steno's student days at the University of Copenhagen. Denmark is at war with Sweden. It is the dead of winter, and Copenhagen is under siege. Not long before, there had been horrific fighting in the streets, in which Steno and other citizens helped repel the Swedes. But now he is standing quietly in the bitter cold, watching snowflakes float down from the sky to settle on his coat sleeve. The war is the farthest thing from his mind. He is mesmerized, studying the exquisite symmetry of the snowflakes. Though the University has been closed for months, Steno has kept up his studies on his own, war or no war. He is out in the snow to confirm the theories of Johannes Kepler on the crystal structure of snowflakes. This is Steno: a man engaged in the world (his participation in the city's defense) yet always seeking the transcendent (the mathematical beauty of the crystals). As a student he was earnest and dedicated to his work (maybe a bit of a grind, actually) but also fiercely independent minded (on the subject of snowflakes, he didn't even take the famous Kepler's word for it). He diligently kept a journal, titled *CHAOS*, in which he describes his studies (including the snowflake outing) and his impressions of the major scientific figures of the time, particularly Galileo and Descartes. **Chapter One** will use excerpts from *CHAOS* to develop Steno's character and as springboards for describing the contemporary intellectual and political climate.

Chapter Two continues these themes, focusing on Steno's growing interest in the philosophical issues raised by science and the uneasy truce between science and religion since the trial of Galileo. Equally important was the growing conflict between ...

[Outline continues.]

18

OVERVIEW

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">OVERVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two to four pages • First or third person • Sometimes called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Introduction ◦ Summary ◦ Abstract
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Overview: A persuasive introduction that expresses the reasons your book will appeal to a large and reachable audience who is eager to purchase it.</p>		

Lead with your strongest suit. Excite editors about your subject, and keep them hooked.

You've studied models and mapped out the content of your book. You've determined its position—and yours—in the marketplace. You've kept notes on your key sales points. It's time to go back to the beginning.

Organize your most compelling sales points in descending order of strength. If you don't have many notes in your brainstorm file, review the sections you've already written and pull from there. You now have a framework for your overview.

THE FIRST WORDS OF YOUR OVERVIEW: INSTANT GRABIFICATION

HOT TIP

The overview is usually the first section the publisher or agent reads, and as such it can make or break your proposal from the opening sentence. It must be compellingly written in a confident style that mirrors the tone of your book. It sets the standard for the tone, style, and quality of what follows.

Each editor and agent seeks that indefinable something that will remind her why she loves her job (it ain't the money; we promise). But here's the thing: Your proposal is just one of scores she must wade through, usually at the end of a long and stressful day. If she's not hooked right away, she'll shift focus quickly from your proposal to the rejection letter she's already composing in her head so she can move on to the next submission, pack up, and go home.

It happens that fast.

That's why you must start the overview with a *bang*—the single most exciting thing you can write about the subject that makes your book sound new, needed, and timely.

You can jump right into the text with a killer first sentence and a knockout first paragraph, or you can hook editors with a callout, such as a quote, an event, a statistic, or a sales handle.

If you have one-hundred thousand opt-in e-mail addresses, that's your lead. If you're the world's foremost expert on your subject, lead with that. If your subject itself is its own best argument, tell us. If your book has had a successful life as a self-published book, brag about it first thing.

Agent Jane Dystel of Dystel, Goderich & Bourret LLC suggests opening the overview with a brief dramatic anecdote. For example, if you are writing a how-to book, consider starting with an anecdote about how someone used your technique to solve a problem or improve his life. Then provide a round, accurate figure for how many other people face the same problem. For a business how-to book, the story might be about how the Wide-Open-Spaces Company in Wherever, Texas used your technique and increased its sales by 100 percent in six months. Your next sentence can mention the number of other companies that can benefit from the same approach.

United Press International tells its journalists that if they hook readers with the first six words, readers will read the first paragraph. If they read the first paragraph, they will read the first three paragraphs, and if they read the first three paragraphs, they'll finish the story.

If you write literary nonfiction, consider this: Big Five publishing execs want to see from the start why you're driven to write this book. As Charlie Spicer, executive editor at St. Martin's

Press, says, “Why is the author passionate about this subject? What, in other words, is the story behind the story?”

You might be wondering, *If my overview is a summary of all the information in the sections that follow, won't it get boring?* Repeating yourself verbatim is a no-no in book proposals. The flavor and tone in the overview section is different from that in the individual sections that follow. The overview *engages, summarizes, and sells*; subsequent sections *define, expand, and support*.

OVERVIEW VS. PIZZAZZ

Pizzazz, described in [chapter nine](#), is an optional independent element placed before the proposal contents page. Separate from the body of the proposal, it kick-starts your reader's attention into high gear but doesn't replace the overview and doesn't transition into the rest of the proposal.

The overview summarizes and introduces the proposal. It can open with any compelling element, such as a pullout quote or hook. The overview feels connected to the rest of the proposal; pizzazz stands alone.

AFTER YOU'VE HOOKED 'EM: THE REST OF THE OVERVIEW

HOT TIP

THE OVERVIEW OVERVIEW

Your overview must convince readers your book will have what it takes to succeed in an increasingly competitive marketplace: a *salable idea* that you can *write well* and *promote*.

After you hook editors with your overview opening, ensnare them with a summary of the book's essential information in descending order of significance. If you're not sure about structure, try this outline.

1. **GRAB WITH THE OPENING.** Craft a hook built around your strongest sales point, either within the text or set off typographically before the first overview paragraph.

2. **DEFINE YOUR CONCEPT.** Describe what the book is about.
3. **DECLARE YOUR PASSION FOR THE CONCEPT.** State the “why” behind the book.
4. **JUSTIFY YOUR AUTHORITY.** List your background and credentials.
5. **CONVINCE US YOU’RE NOT ALONE.** Identify your audience.
6. **PROVE THERE’S A PLACE FOR YOUR BOOK IN THE COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE.** Allude to your book’s models.
7. **BUILD EXCITEMENT ABOUT YOUR OUTREACH.** Talk about your platform or promotional plans.
8. **LIST YOUR BOOK SPECS AND SPECIAL FEATURES UNDER A SUBHEAD.** See [chapter twelve](#) for more on this topic.

HOT TIP

Find books similar to yours in publishers’ online catalogs, and paste their descriptions into your overview draft pages. Study them. Yours will be longer, in your voice and written in a style appropriate to your concept, but notice and emulate those assets book publishers choose to emphasize in their pitches to the publishing industry.

VARIATIONS AND OPTIONS

Overviews are as unique as the people who write them. A different structure may better suit you and your book. Here are a few options we’ve encountered.

Go Long

Some people use a three-part superstructure for their proposals, and they label the first part of the proposal the “overview.” In this framework, the overview includes all the marketing and sales subsections. [Part Two](#) is the detailed outline, and [Part Three](#) is the sample writing. Headings on the proposal contents page break down like this:

- Overview
 - Author Bio
 - Platform

- Etc. (marketing and sales subsections continue)
- Detailed Outline
- Sample Writing

Early editions of this book recommended this structure, but it has one drawback: It's missing the opening summary we have called the "overview" throughout this book. Most editors now expect an introduction of this nature in proposals; it's especially important in digitally read proposals. If you find this "go long" three-part structure logical and pleasing, use it, but make one change: Add a section that serves the purpose of the overview as defined in this chapter, and call it an "Introduction" or "Summary." The proposal contents would thus look like the following:

- Overview
 - Summary
 - Author Bio
 - Platform
 - Etc. (marketing and sales subsections continue)
- Detailed Outline
- Sample Writing

Go Short

We've seen a few overviews that separate key elements into extended, sometimes bulleted, lists of information. This works for commercial nonfiction, especially for business books, but not so much for narrative nonfiction. Contents remain the same: key sales points listed in descending order of importance.

Overview Dos and Don'ts

- **DO** include the full title of your book early in your overview; use a shortened version of it throughout your proposal.
- **DO** include "book specs" as a subhead at the end (see [chapter twelve](#)).
- **DON'T** overuse the words *I*, *we*, *us*, and *our*. Editors are open to proposals written in the first person, but keep the focus on the book, even while writing passionately about your vision.

- **DO** use round, accurate numbers and statistics in your overview whenever you can. Reliable stats lend credibility to your contentions and to you as an authority, put the subject into context, and prove there will be interest in the subject when your book is published two years from now.

HOT TIP

Provide three to five fresh tidbits of information that educate the editor.

CUSTOMIZE THE OVERVIEW

PROSE-DRIVEN OVERVIEW

- Focus more on storytelling than sale-making, although you should weave key sales points into the narrative.
- Passion is essential. Your well-reasoned passion for your subject must infuse the overview.
- Your distinctive voice should be evident, whether you write in first or third person.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN OVERVIEW

- Commercial book overviews often open with sales handles.
- Answer the three key questions publishing consultant Jane Friedman describes:
 - So what? This is the reason for the book's existence, the unique selling proposition that sets it apart from others in the market.
 - Who cares? This is your target readership. A unique book is not enough—you must show evidence of need in the marketplace for your work.
 - Who are you? You must have sufficient authority or credentials to write the book, as well as an appropriate marketing platform for the subject matter or target audience.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

Overview Openers

Stooples: Office Tools for Hopeless Fools

by Kevin Reifler, Adam Najberg, and Nick Vacca (St. Martin's Press/Macmillan)

The authors cleverly set the stage for this humor book by quickly establishing the ubiquity of the business they're spoofing and then jumping right in to their clear concept.

American businesses receive millions of catalogs a year from Staples, Office Max, Office Depot, and others. They support an office-supply market that spends \$325 billion a year and grows by 4 percent a year. The leader of the pack is Staples, a juggernaut with more than five-hundred stores in nine countries and annual sales of more than \$3 billion.

But what if a Staples catalog went off the deep end? What if instead of pens, pencils, and computers, it offered Office Massacre Defense Systems, Rubick's Cubicles, Snivel Slacks, Disappointing Revenue Ritalin, and Accent Decoders? What if every product was highlighted by a humorous photo that made good-natured fun of the ineptitude and wackiness of businesses large and small?

Then you'd have *Stooples: Office Supplies for the Rest of Us* by Kevin Reifler, Adam Najberg, and Nick Vacca.

Comfort Zone Investing: Build Wealth and Sleep Well at Night

by Ted Allrich (St. Martin's Press/Macmillan)

Allrich expresses his attitude (relatable and open to irony) toward his topic (personal investment), with a funny yet specific quotation that hooks editors at the top of his overview.

"The best time to invest is when you have money."

—SIR JOHN TEMPLETON, FOUNDER, TEMPLETON FUNDS

With that great insight, people know when to invest. But *how?* and *where?* are the better questions. People fear that if they invest, especially in stocks and bonds, there's a chance all or most of their money will disappear. *Comfort Zone Investing* will help readers overcome anxieties through understanding and knowledge and guide them to investments within their comfort zones.

Most people don't know enough about investing. Too often, individual investors get a hot tip from a friend or hear about a stock from a talking head on TV. With little to no research or without an understanding of the stock market, they buy a stock and hope for the best. But there is no hope in the stock market

Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor

by Robert Stinnett (The Free Press/Simon & Schuster)

This proposal opens with a concise yet thorough callout.

Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor will be the first book to prove that FDR knew in advance about Pearl Harbor and approved it. The manuscript will be 80,000 words with forty-three illustrations, and the author will deliver the manuscript nine months after receiving the advance.

The Everyday Advocate: Standing Up for Your Child with Autism or Other Special Needs

by Areva Martin (NAL/Penguin Random House)

A quote from Dr. Phil opens this overview. Need we say more? Well, a little. Notice also the choice to lead with a disarming first-person story that establishes voice, credentials, attitude, and topic, all in just a couple of sentences.

“If your family is facing special challenges, Areva Martin’s new book is *THE* guide for getting the best possible life for your child. Her personal and professional experiences with autism make her expertise invaluable.”

—DR. PHIL

I’m no stranger to hardship. You don’t go from being a young girl raised by a disabled grandmother and a night-shift janitor to being a Harvard law honors graduate who runs a successful law firm in LA, without a lot of sweat and tears. After coming so far, I assumed the toughest challenges were behind me; I thought I could handle anything. Then I had an autistic child

Narrative Nonfiction

The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession

by Mark Obmascik (Simon & Schuster)

As noted earlier, this proposal generated a multipublisher auction. Film, foreign, and audio rights were also sold from the proposal.

They rise before dawn on weekends. They take ten-thousand-dollar vacations on desolate Alaskan isles and pray for foul weather. They wait for a phone call in the middle of the night, then rush to the nearest airport for the next red-eye flight.

And through it all, they compete.

Every year on January 1, a dozen or so people abandon their day-to-day lives to join one of the world’s quirkiest contests. Their goal: to spot the most species of birds in North America in a single year. Braving bug-infested swamps, snow-packed mountains, broiling deserts, roiling oceans—and some of the lumpiest motel mattresses known to mankind—the most obsessive of America’s top birdwatchers travel more than 250,000 miles with the hopes of glimpsing some rare bird in some improbable location. It’s usually fun but sometimes vicious, absurd to outsiders but deadly serious to the participants. This competition, as well as the book by Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Mark Obmascik, is called *The Big Year*.

The Big Year documents the greatest birding competition of all time—the 1998 Big Year. Because of freak weather conditions and the subsequent shutdown of a key government-controlled wildlife outpost in the Bering Sea, ornithologists say the bird-watching records set that year likely will stay unbroken. The memories will last, too. In fact, at last report, one pair of plum-colored birding pants, stripped from a contestant who told too many bad jokes, was still flapping from a flagpole in the Aleutian Islands, an enduring testament to the thrills of the 1998 event—and the power of polyester.

... The Big Year competition may focus on exotic feathered animals, but it’s the *Homo sapiens* in this book who will capture readers. Through the characters tracked in *The Big Year*, author Obmascik explores a big question: What happens when you

surrender to your obsessions? This bizarre contest reveals much of the human character in extremis: There's passion and deceit, fear and courage, a fundamental craving to see and conquer mixed with an unstoppable yearning for victory—no matter how low the stakes.

[Overview continues.]

19

SAMPLE WRITING

A Q&A Session

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">SAMPLE WRITING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Twenty to forty pages• First, second, or third person• Sometimes called:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Sample Text◦ Sample Chapters◦ Additional Sample Text
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		

Sample Writing: Text that reads as if taken directly from your book, selected to engage and excite potential publishers.

Blend style and content into a delectable slice of your book that leaves editors hungry for more.

Mike once saw a T-shirt that said, “Life is one audition after another.” Your sample writing is your audition for the role of author. Your writing must deliver what the rest of the proposal promises.

Many editors, once their appetites have been whetted by your overview, head to the sample writing before examining anything else. Vanessa Mobley, executive editor at Little, Brown, says, “I jump right to the sample writing to see how the author will signal his views to the world. The voice has to make sense to me so it can make sense to other people—and that has to be clear in the first few pages of his writing.” No matter how compelling your argument for your book, if the writing doesn’t prove you have the talent and craft to deliver what you

promised, the editor won't buy it. Conversely, if your writing soars, publishers will forgive a multitude of sins and omissions in the rest of your proposal.

Writing instruction is beyond the scope of this book, so we thought we would diverge from the structure of previous chapters, and instead provide guidance by compiling and answering common questions our clients and students ask about sample writing in their proposals.

SAMPLE WRITING Q&A

A cartoon by Edward Koren in *The New Yorker* shows a sedan speeding away from a bank robbery with the police in pursuit. The driver reassures a bystander, "I'm only doing this to support my writing." However you support your habit, it's time to do what you came here to do. Use your flash-writing and your detailed outline to jump-start your work. The answers to the following questions may remove any remaining writer's blocks born of confusion.

Q. Can I skip the sample chapter?

A. If you've already published an article in a known periodical or other well-received books on your subject or if your credentials are impeccable (as in, you've just won the Nobel Prize), you may not need a full chapter, but this is very uncommon. In these rare cases, a long descriptive letter or a detailed outline submitted with a copy of your previous work may suffice (see [chapter twenty-eight](#)).

If you're selling your first book or a book that is in any way different in subject or tone from other books you've written, you must include sample writing, either as a sample chapter or two or woven into your narrative outline (see the [previous chapter](#)).

Q. How many chapters should I prepare?

A. Many books are sold with one sample chapter, but the right answer for you depends on how long your chapters will be and the kind of book you're writing.

- You can sell most commercial, promotion-driven books with about 10 to 15 percent of the manuscript.
- For prose-driven works, 15 to 20 percent of the total length is the norm.
- If your book includes very different kinds of writing, include chapters to illustrate each style. Most prescriptive books, for example, include expository

writing in the beginning and practical writing (recipes, exercises) later on. Provide two sample chapters: one expository and one prescriptive.

- For narrative nonfiction, provide more sample writing than for commercial nonfiction.
- If you're a published author writing a book similar to your previous book, submit less sample writing than the norm.
- If you're writing a memoir, some agents and publishers want to see the whole manuscript; others don't. The only consensus is that (1) you need to send enough writing from your memoir to definitively prove your talent and clearly express your vision for the whole book and (2) there's *no* consensus as to whether that can best be accomplished through a manuscript or through a proposal.

Jody thinks the split is about half and half between agents who want to see full manuscripts and those who prefer proposals. In fact, it can even vary with each submission. We strongly recommend you write a proposal, no matter how much of the book you've finished. If an agent requests your memoir, ask her if she prefers to review the manuscript or the proposal. The reason some editors like full manuscripts is that they've been burned after acquiring books that don't sustain the promise of the first few chapters—the writer knew how to begin his story but couldn't effectively conclude it. A well-crafted detailed outline (see [chapter seventeen](#)) will do much to allay that concern.

HOT TIP

Ask yourself this question: Will including the additional chapters you're contemplating generate enough excitement to justify the time and effort of writing them?

Q. How many chapters should my book have?

A. That depends on your subject and your models. Ten to twelve chapters are common for a 200- to 250-page manuscript, but shorter chapters are a trend. The number of chapters must fit the needs of your audience and your writing style.

Q. How long should my chapters be?

A. Serious books have longer chapters than books aimed at a mass audience. Your chapters should not be one word longer than it takes to say what you want to say. One of the books Mike represented, Chérie Carter-Scott’s *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules*, became a number one *New York Times* bestseller in part, he maintains, because her chapters averaged two pages each.

Maintain a balance between chapters so thin that readers ask, “How could he leave that out?” and so long that they sigh, “How much more is she going to pad this thing?”

HOT TIP

Trust that your editor understands that a chapter from the middle of the book will read as if it’s from the middle of a book. He’ll forgive unanswered questions. If the issue isn’t covered in your proposal’s detailed outline, add a concise explanation in brackets.

Q. Which is the best chapter to submit?

A. Choose the chapter that illustrates what is most innovative and stimulating about your subject. Surprised, informed editors are happy readers.

Ask yourself: How do you want editors to feel about your writing and your book when they finish reading your chapter? Use the chapter that will most effectively make them feel that way. If you can’t decide, go with the first chapter.

Q. Is it okay to submit parts of different chapters?

A. Sometimes, but do so with care. Most editors say they prefer complete chapters; however, many writers of prose-driven books have sold proposals with narrative outlines that include large chunks of several chapters rather than one or two complete sample chapters (see the [previous chapter](#)). Some write their entire proposals as long letters of passion (see [chapter twenty-eight](#)). As a rule, for commercial, promotion-driven nonfiction, write one or two complete chapters. For narrative nonfiction, present your work in the most engaging manner possible. Remember, though, that if you don’t write complete chapters, you will probably write *more* words, with sample writing from *more* chapters.

Q. What if my book will have short chapters?

A. Include the number of chapters that constitute at least 10 percent of the book's total word count.

HOT TIP

There is definitely such a thing as too much sample writing! Leave editors wanting more—not because the information is incomplete but because what you've provided is just that good.

Q. What if my book is depressing?

A. Your book is your book. The sample writing should demonstrate that you write well and appropriately. Commercially published books about depressing issues, from global warming to political corruption, don't exist simply to relate horrific events; they serve a larger purpose. A book's literary merit or social value will overcome a dark subject.

Q. Should I send the introduction?

A. If the introduction does a beautiful job of setting up your book, send it. If the introduction essentially repeats your proposal overview, don't. Repetition creates boredom; boredom creates rejection.

If you send the intro, also send a chapter from later in the book that is representative of its content.

Q. What if I've finished more of the book than I submit?

A. Most writers have; it doesn't affect your proposal. If an agent likes what she sees and wants to see more, she'll ask.

Q. What if I have finished the whole manuscript?

A. See the answer above. Agents and editors are perpetually swamped, and their submission guidelines indicate how much material they want to see. They won't be impressed if they ask for two chapters and you send a full manuscript, and they will read a short document faster than a long one. So even if you have more, don't send it unless asked.

Q. If I'm submitting more than one chapter, do the chapters need to be in sequence?

A. Unless agents' and editors' guidelines indicate otherwise, your chapters don't have to be from the beginning of the book or in sequence, but make sure editors understand the context of the chapters you submit.

Q. What if my book has no chapters?

A. If your book isn't structured by chapter, an editor will still expect to see at least 10 percent of the manuscript (or more if you're writing narrative nonfiction).

Q. What if I'm writing an illustrated book and providing my own illustrations?

A. Include sample illustrations and captions as well as sample writing. Publishers need a compelling reason to put forth the effort and expense of producing an illustrated book. Include attractive illustrations that are representative of the variety that appears in your book.

Q. What if I want my book designed in a particular way?

A. If you have a vision of how you want your book to look and you are able to design sample pages or can obtain the services of an experienced book designer, include two facing spreads—four sample pages—as examples of the design you want for the book.

These are only worth including if they are of professional quality. Make your sample pages the same size as the rest of your proposal. They will be easier to prepare, reproduce, submit, and read. Note: Your publisher will have the final say on how your book is designed. If you present a design or suggest a format for your book, it must be with the understanding that if the salespeople say it won't fly, you will have to compromise or seek another publisher.

Q. What if my work is self-published?

A. Don't include sample chapters in your proposal; send the whole book. (For more detailed instructions and exceptions, see [chapter twenty-two](#).)

HOT TIP

CUSTOMIZE THE SAMPLE WRITING

PROSE-DRIVEN SAMPLE WRITING

- As noted, you can embed sample writing from several chapters *within* the detailed outline, replacing the need for a separate section of sample chapters. Here's one possible structure.
 - Five pages each of chapters one and two are excerpted, reading as if pulled from the book itself.
 - Chapters three and four are each described with two-paragraph summaries.
 - Subsequent chapters alternate randomly between these styles.
 - Chapters include contextual notes like: "Chapter closes with a description of Michelle's surprisingly agreeable reaction to Matt's indecent proposal."
- In research-intensive books where it's impossible to know everything at the proposal stage, let editors know you're aware of needed info by inserting contextual notes like "[Chapter continues]" or "[Material to come]."
- If you've opened your proposal with sample writing as pizzazz, don't repeat that material later in the proposal. Include enough additional writing that editors don't feel the proposal is too thin.
- Some narrative works are presented in a letter of passion (see [chapter twenty-eight](#)).
- Voice is crucial (see [chapter thirty-three](#)).

PROMOTION-DRIVEN SAMPLE WRITING

- Your writing must appeal to your book's audience. Instructional sample writing must be clear. Inspirational stories must inspire.
- Your ideas must be fresh. Here's a little self-test: Have you given the editor or agent something to talk about and remember?
- Keep your writing hand invisible; let your ideas shine through. Commercial writing should invoke descriptors like *breezy* and *lean*, not *lyrical* or *gorgeous*.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pizzazz*	<p style="text-align: center;">SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five to ten pages • Sometimes called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Support Material ◦ Published Articles ◦ Related Material ◦ Attachments
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Overview	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Specs	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Bio	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Author Platform	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personal Promotion*	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audience	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comps	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Book Table of Contents	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Detailed Outline	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sample Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplemental Material*	
*Optional Sections		
<p>Supplemental Material: Articles, reviews of previous books, platform-related lists, or any other meaningful support that would disrupt the flow of the main body of your proposal.</p>		

If it's important but long or boring, chop it out of the proposal and tack it on at the end.

Your proposal must be an engaging, seamless read. Don't let long lists, links, or articles slow down the reading experience. Consider moving the following material to the end of your proposal.

- **ARTICLES YOU'VE WRITTEN, ONLINE AND OFF:** These are sometimes called “tearsheets” (originally torn, as they were, out of publications). Include only pertinent articles from impressive publications. If full articles are available online, reprint enough of the story to captivate, and then link to the full article.
- **ARTICLES YOU'VE APPEARED IN, ONLINE AND OFF:** Have you been quoted as an authority on your subject in a prominent periodical or trade journal? Reprint a representative portion under the article's headline and byline, the publication name and date, and a link to the full article online.

- **ARTICLES THAT SUPPORT YOUR CONTENTIONS, ONLINE AND OFF:** Judiciously include excerpts from articles that document the credibility or popularity of your topic. If you've supported your idea well in the body of your proposal with quotes, references, and statistics, such articles may be overkill.
- **A CV OR RÉSUMÉ:** Only include this if your academic qualifications are important to establish your credibility. CVs frequently appear in proposals for academic books but are rarely included in those for general trade publications.
- **LISTS OF PUBLICATIONS AND PROMOTIONAL VENUES:** In addition, anything that is too long for your platform section belongs here.
- **CHARTS:** These graphic elements can document platform statistics, especially growth.
- **REVIEWS AND SALES LISTS OF YOUR PREVIOUS BOOKS:** This includes self-published book sales.
- **MEDIA APPEARANCES AND MEDIA CONTACTS:** Include the extended list here if it's too long for the main proposal.
- **YOUR "BIG-MOUTH LIST"**
- **PHOTOS AND LINKS TO VIDEOS**
- **ART- AND DESIGN-RELATED MATERIALS:** These include samples and layouts.
- **YOUR SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK, IN BOOK—NOT MANUSCRIPT—FORM**

CUSTOMIZE THE SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

PROSE-DRIVEN SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

- Supplemental material about your subject, especially historical figures (such as samples from diaries), is appropriate.
- Provide a CV if relevant.
- Excerpt and collect reviews of your previous books, with links to full reviews.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

- Use attractive graphics and charts whenever possible to document statistics on your subject matter.
- If your supplemental material is link heavy, reconsider your presentation. Links are essential, of course, but do your best to keep your editor's head in your proposal rather than online.

Part Four

THE SPECIALIZED PROPOSAL

A Book Series or a Two-Book Deal

Self-Published Books

Graphic Novels

Cookbooks

Business Books

Novels

Memoirs

The Narrative Letter of Passion

How-To

Biography

Interview Books

Exposés

Academic Books

Anthologies

Ghostwritten and Co-Authored Books

PROPOSING MORE THAN ONE BOOK

Agents and editors don't want literary one-night stands. They want to discover writers, not just books. Writers who turn out books predictably, each book better and more profitable than the last, are the foundation of successful agents and publishers. If your books ascend to publishing nirvana and become bestsellers, you will be one of your publisher's most prized authors—a "repeater."

Although unusual for a first-time author, you can generate a multibook deal with your proposal or at least plant the seed in the publisher's mind that you're someone to think about for the long haul.

But there's a caveat: Publishers and agents prefer to focus on one book at a time, so propose more than one title only after careful consideration. If your book has logical spin-offs, the publisher will think of it, too. Publishers usually prefer to see how one book does before committing to more.

THE BOOK SERIES

Think of authors like Suze Orman, Robert Kiyosaki, Deepak Chopra, Marie Kondo, and Gretchen Rubin, not to mention the scores of adult-coloring-book creators. Books can become springboards for other books that share the same subject or structure. If you're keen to develop your concept into a series, at the end of your overview, after the book specs section, add a "Related Books" subhead. Under this subtitle, write: "[BOOK TITLE] is envisioned as the first in a series of X books, including A, B, and C." Leave it at that. Don't overwhelm publishers with the scope of your idea. List up to three books, beginning with the most commercial idea.

HOT TIP

NICHE CRAFT

Many nonfiction books can be followed up with related titles; Mike calls this "niche craft." Jay Conrad Levinson was a master. In *Guerrilla Marketing Attack*, Levinson wrote a chapter containing one-hundred marketing weapons, with a two-line description of each. He expanded that chapter into his book *Guerrilla Marketing Weapons*. Jay let Mike use the weapons format as the basis for his *Guerrilla Marketing for Writers*. *Guerrilla Marketing* spawned more than forty spin-off books.

Think creatively—you may be able to expand a chapter of your book into another book.

TWO-BOOK DEALS

Two-book deals do happen from time to time. After the supplemental material, you can include a single-spaced, two-page proposal for your next book.

- Make the first page a “Proposal on a Page.” After a one-paragraph overview, briefly present each relevant, nonredundant sales and marketing element, either in paragraph form or as a bulleted list. An author bio, for example, would be redundant; your qualifications and passion for this new idea will be the same as for the primary book proposed. However, this new idea would likely appeal to a somewhat different audience and face different comps; it might lend itself to altered promotional efforts appropriate to the new topic. Don’t forget to list book specs such as structure, completion time, and word count.
- On the second page, list your chapter titles with a one-line description of each.
- List the name of this section on your proposal contents page. An appropriate section title would be “Next Book: [Title of the New Book].”

You may even find a publisher who wants to publish your second book first. Two-book deals are more common for authors who have track records, but first timers get them, too.

SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS

Your proposal must prove that your self-published book has a much larger book-buying audience than you've been able to reach on your own.

Hello, novelists—we're finally talking to you! And if you're a self-published nonfiction writer, plan to stick around, too. All self-published authors who seek traditional publication must pitch their books with proposals.

Self-published books find traditional publishers all the time. This has been true for as long as we've been in publishing (and we both fondly remember offices where the only screens were in the windows, so that should tell you something). A stigma against self-published books once existed, but it was primarily against fiction and endured for good reason. Before publishers consolidated and opportunities decreased—before digital publishing became common-place—most worthy novels found publishers and most self-published novels were of inferior quality.

Nonfiction has never been stigmatized, contrary to what you might read online. Because publishers are conservative about exploring unproven topics, they are open to self-published nonfiction outliers and business books that substantiate new markets. We have both experienced great success in selling self-published nonfiction to traditional houses. Mike read a story about Jay Conrad Levinson's self-published book *Earning Money Without a Job: The Economics of Freedom* in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and sold the book to Holt. Then, for Jay's next book, Mike suggested the title *Guerrilla Marketing*; we've already talked about that book's incredible success and multiple spin-offs. Jody's first editorial acquisition was a self-published book on The Three Stooges (!) that she read about in *The Wall Street Journal*. As an editor, she published many other self-published (and small press) books, like the multimillion-copy seller *Chase's Calendar of Events*, now known as "the world's datebook," and the best-seller *Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow* by Marsha Sinetar. Her agency roster includes many originally self-published writers for whom she's generated more than a million dollars in advances. As noted, *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid or Crazy?!* (Simon & Schuster) now has more than 400,000 copies in print.

Today thousands of terrific novelists opt to self-publish for many reasons, and publishers are no longer predisposed against self-published fiction. But publishers *do* have heavy-duty expectations.

HOT TIP

CONSIDER THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS

You make a lot more money per book self-publishing than you do with a traditional publisher. This is far from your only financial consideration, but if you look at per-book income alone, is writing a proposal worth your effort? How many books would a publisher have to sell to earn the same money you make now?

Research what you earn per book. Compare that figure to the following numbers.

Your book, if published at a major or midsize house, would—very generally—pay, per book, the following royalties.

- **E-BOOK:** 25 percent of the net amount received by the publisher after Amazon commissions, which—and this is constantly changing—is 70 percent of the price of the e-book. (Agents are not happy about this, and they push publishers very hard for more than 25 percent. Sometimes publishers will budge, but they need a big incentive to do so. The Obamas probably got 35 percent in their recent deal with Penguin Random House ...)
- **TRADE PAPERBACK:** 7.5 percent of the book's cover price

SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS PUBLISHERS LOVE

“It’s about what we know we can do with it. I’ve bought a couple of self-published books recently where the numbers were not huge, but I feel like we can take the book to the next level. I’m looking for things that will fit in with what we’re doing.”

—**MARIAN LIZZI, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, TARCHERPERIGEE/PENGUIN
RANDOM HOUSE**

So you think you want a publisher. Will a publisher want you? Is it worth your time to craft a proposal, find an agent, and endure the submission process? Here’s how to tell:

- **HAS YOUR BOOK SOLD THOUSANDS OF COPIES?** If yes, publishers may be interested. But however many books you’ve sold on your own, you must prove that there

are exponentially *more* to be sold. Show this by:

- **THE RATE OF SALES:** If your book sells more copies each week than the week before, this upward trend demonstrates that the audience for your book is growing.
 - **A LIMITED MARKET:** If you have only sold your book in one market—say, you’ve only sold print editions in your region of the country, or you’ve only published your book as an e-book—and your sales are still impressive, publishers will see a valuable hole they can fill.
 - **CONSISTENT SALES:** If your book has been on the market for a long time and predictably sells thousands of copies every year, publishers will be interested in exploring possibilities for growth.
 - **EXPLOSIVE SALES:** If your book has been on the market for a very short time and wowed the world with its sales, put a proposal together fast!
- **HAS YOUR BOOK SOLD POORLY FOR A GOOD REASON?** Self-published books once had to meet the sales criteria described above to interest publishers. Since self-publishing is now so common, publishers are open to books they believe are marketable but undersold due to poor distribution, poor promotion, or the wrong title.

HOT TIP

IF NOTHING IS WRONG, EVERYTHING IS WRONG

If you’ve done an excellent job promoting your book and there’s nothing obviously wrong with it—the title is appealing, the cover is strong, the content matches the needs of the audience, and the price is right—and the book isn’t selling well, the odds are *against* your finding a traditional publisher. Your book has proven that it has reached its maximum sales potential.

SEEKING A PARTNER

Successful self-publishers sometimes partner with traditional publishers, keeping, for example, the rights to continue publishing their e-books while licensing print rights. Others want an agent to sell foreign rights or film rights to their books.

In such instances, after an agent has responded to your query with an offer to consider your book, send a short proposal emphasizing sales opportunities for the rights you offer. Agents

and publishers usually are most interested in partnering when either (a) sales are so huge they can't lose or (b) they believe you may hire them to exploit all publishing rights for your next book.

HOT TIP

THE FORMULA FOR SELF-PUBLISHED PROPOSAL SUCCESS

Current success + identifiable limitations of the self-published edition = large potential sales for traditional publishers.

A FAVORITE RESOURCE

We've recommended Publishers Marketplace (www.publishersmarketplace.com) often in this book. It's a great help in pitching your self-published book, too.

Search deals using the keyword *self-published* to find up-to-the-minute reports of self-published books sold to publishers. Study the descriptions to learn which factors in the self-publication history are highlighted, and extrapolate from those to craft your pitch. Add the names of the agents and publishers involved to your brainstorm bucket.

THE SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK PROPOSAL

The self-published book proposal differs from the standard proposal in the following ways:

- **PIZZAZZ:** Open your proposal with a fabulous review or impressive sales figures. For a self-published book, even a sales chart can be pizzazz-y (see the sample bulleted list from the proposal for the self-published *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid Or Crazy?! in chapter nine*).
- **OVERVIEW:** This section should be short and focused on sales history. Answer these questions:
 1. How many copies has your book sold?
 2. In what formats has it been published?
 3. When was it published?
 4. What's the rate of sale?
 5. What is the current price?

Explain why your book hasn't reached its potential if these reasons are definable—but don't complain. List these deficits as positive proofs that a larger market can be exploited when the problem is corrected. For example, write, "I published this book as an e-book experiment only; it is not available in print. My e-book sales of ten-thousand copies at \$9.99 in the past six months is strong evidence of real interest in me and my subject matter. As reported by *Forbes* in July 2017 (see supplemental materials), consumers purchase upmarket business books like mine in print at a rate of two to one vs. e-books."

- **BOOK SPECS:** List any changes you hope to make to the book. Describe your voice and structure, and how those writing choices increase reader appeal, just as you would if you were proposing an unpublished book.

HOT TIP

Expect commercial publishers to recommend significant changes to your self-published book, including a new structure, a new cover, and even a new title. If you're not flexible in this regard, don't seek a traditional deal.

- **AUTHOR PLATFORM:** Describe each part of your platform in the context of how you have used it to promote your book. If your platform is huge and your self-published sales are small, this is a *negative factor* for publishers. It shows that people love you but not your book. Unless there's something clearly wrong with the book, this is a very hard obstacle to overcome.
- **AUDIENCE:** Define two audiences, the one you've reached and the one you haven't been able to reach and why. Large, reachable, yet untapped markets are golden to agents evaluating self-published books.
- **PERSONAL PROMOTION:** As the publisher of your book, you may have many markets in place, such as special-interest stores, that already purchase your book. List them with details.
- **COMPS:** Compare your title to traditionally-published books but not to other self-published books.
- **DETAILED OUTLINE:** There's no need to include this section; the publisher will have your book in hand.
- **SAMPLE WRITING:** Ditto. Send the book.
- **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:** Self-published proposals are usually list- and chart-heavy. Brag in the front of your proposal; include your proof in the back.

SUBMISSION

Most proposals are submitted digitally, but printed self-published books are sent through postal mail. Buy a double-sided folder, and place your book on one side, with the supplemental material and the rest of the proposal and cover letter on the other side.

If your book is digital only, ask the interested agent or publisher how he would like to receive your book. Whatever you do, don't make the agent pay for a copy!

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

”In graphic novels, the work—not the platform—takes the spotlight.”

—GORDON WARNOCK, PARTNER, FUSE LITERARY AGENCY

Graphic novels are comics in book form—and so much more. They can be as engaging, hard hitting, and immersive as any novel, memoir, or nonfiction book presented as text only. In fact, the commonly used term, “graphic novel” is itself a bit of a misnomer, as a graphic novel can be fiction, nonfiction, or anything in between.¹

Many graphic novels are self-contained illustrated fantasy and science-fiction stories, logical extensions of the comic books that spawned the genre. These are, in large part, published by specialty publishers who have a keen understanding of their audience as well as the promotion and distribution channels in place to reach it.

But, increasingly, general-interest publishers have embraced this innovative format for all sorts of books, especially memoir. Art Spiegelman paved the way in the 1980s, changing the thinking about graphic novels forever with his affecting memoir *Maus* and winning the Pulitzer Prize in the process. A few decades later, Alison Bechdel provided further proof of the form’s mainstream appeal with her literary, emotionally rich graphic memoir *Fun Home*. Today, *Smile* author Raina Telgemeier is a constant presence on *The New York Times* best-seller lists with her graphic novels for middle-grade children. Traditional nonfiction writers, too, have found powerful expression in such graphic novels as Philippe Squarzoni’s *Climate Changed* and Josh Neufeld’s *A.D. New Orleans After the Deluge*. The Eisner Award-winning trilogy *March* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell was a number one *Times* bestseller.

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL PROPOSAL

Graphic novels are primarily sold through proposals. But proposals for graphic novels differ from the norm in many ways, and publisher requirements vary greatly.

Proposals for Specialty Publishers

A number of reputable specialty publishers of graphic novels, like Drawn & Quarterly in Canada and Dark Horse in the United States, accept submissions directly from writers—you don't need an agent.

Unlike general-interest publishers, many won't review stories or scripts without illustrations. Image Comics asks that you don't include testimonials!

Because specialty publishers' requirements vary so much, we can't provide general guidelines. You must adhere to the strict rules posted on their websites. After your research leads you to a publisher you believe might suit your work, go to a convention they attend, buy their products, and chat them up in person.

Proposals for Agents and General-Interest Publishers

Graphic novel proposals tend to be shorter than standard proposals, but in many ways they're closer to prose-driven proposals than promotion-driven proposals. Graphic novel agents and editors at the bigger houses usually care more about excellence in content than number of Twitter followers.

- **PIZZAZZ:** If your concept has a strong hook, consider a one-sentence descriptor establishing your concept's mainstream appeal.
- **OVERVIEW:** This should be brief, just a few paragraphs. Graphic novelists are expected to be extraordinarily creative people who love pushing the boundaries of visual and literary media. While your overview must objectively describe your concept and its audience, publishers look for subtext that promises inventive thinking.
- **BOOK SPECS:** Speak directly to publishers and agents about what you will provide and what you want the publisher to provide. Use language that shows familiarity with the genre, such as “storyboards,” “captions,” and so forth. Include:
 - number of pages
 - color or black and white
 - whether you plan to provide illustrations and a colorist
 - whether your book is part of a series
- **AUTHOR BIO, AUTHOR PLATFORM:** Unless you have a strong platform, merge these sections. If you are an author/illustrator (or larger) team, include bios for each

person and explain who will be the main contact person for the publisher.

- **AUDIENCE:** Define two audiences, the one comprising people who admire you (and your writing and/or illustrations) and the specific target market for the topics covered in your work.
- **COMPS:** These are particularly helpful in providing visual models for your concept (and indirectly showing publishers your familiarity with the market).
- **BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS, DETAILED OUTLINE:** Graphic novel proposals often include a one- to three-page synopsis of the story arc rather than a detailed outline.
- **SAMPLE WRITING/SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:**
 - “In most cases you should have the script completed, at least for the first book in a series, whether or not you’re including art,” says agent Gordon Warnock.
 - If you’re not providing the art, include samples of how you describe the art needed. This shows the publisher you know how to work with illustrators.
 - If you have an illustrator, provide between twelve to twenty-five pages of completed—included, colored, lettered—sequential art.
 - This means big files, so ask the agent or publisher who has requested the material how she would like the files, and offer a few options (PDF? JPG? Dropbox? Hightail?). If the reviewer wants e-mailed files, send the script and supplemental material in a Word Doc and the art sample as a separate PDF.

1. People in the publishing industry further break down the category into “graphic memoirs” and “graphic biographies” and so forth.

24

COOKBOOKS

Be original, creative, and honest.

Thanks to the explosive influences of food blogs, the Food Network, and photo-taking smartphones, cookbook publishing ain't what it used to be. The changes are challenging—there's more competition than ever—but oh, so exciting! If you're contemplating proposing a cookbook of your own, read on.

FROM BLOG TO BOOK

Food bloggers do find book deals—a *tiny percentage* of the thousands of food bloggers, that is. It's true that blogs provide direct-to-audience opportunities for foodies to express their visions and establish a following, but breaking through the noise isn't easy. Intense competition compels bloggers to find ever-more-elusive fresh spins and desirable topics to whet the appetites of their audience.

If you're keen to turn your well-trafficked food blog into a book, keep in mind:

- **THE BOOK IS NOT THE BLOG.** Publishers aren't interested in reprinting blog content verbatim. Your blog is the appetizer; your book is the main course. Be clear in your proposal that your book will include a visionary, marketable twist on your blog material, with plenty of recipes, text, and photos that haven't been published.
- **“BORROWING” RECIPES IS RAMPANT IN THE BLOGOSPHERE, BUT THE BAR IS HIGHER FOR BOOKS.** Be honest with publishers. If parts of your sample recipes have been swiped from other bloggers, acknowledge it in the recipe's headnote. If you don't say so and the publisher discovers it later, say bye-bye to your book deal.
- **MOST CURRENT COOKBOOKS—NOT ALL—INCLUDE MAGNIFICENT FULL-COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS.** Many bloggers work with photographers or take their own high-quality photos for their blogs. Publishers are open to the possibility of the author providing her own photos for the book; doing so saves the publisher money and gives the author more creative control.

FROM SELF-PUBLISHED TO TRADITIONAL

Successful self-published cookbooks—especially restaurant cookbooks—can find homes with traditional publishers. A chef publishes a cookbook to sell at the restaurant, the restaurant and the cookbook take off, and the chef gets a book deal. Book bloggers sometimes self-publish, and as their fame increases, so does their publishing potential. It's a feasible path, but it all comes down to sales. (See [chapter twenty-two](#).)

CREATE A READING EXPERIENCE

Today's cookbooks are expected to do much more than provide recipes: They must also be joyful reading experiences from the first page to the last. We love this ironically positive outgrowth of the Internet-forced democratization of information. Though free online recipes were once expected to kill the cookbook, they have given birth to a new and improved literary form.

The combo platter of cookbook and memoir has since become a beloved category. Think of Orangette blogger Molly Wizenberg's *A Homemade Life: Stories and Recipes from My Kitchen Table*; Ruth Reichl's classic *Tender at the Bone*; and *New York Times* best-seller *Blood, Bones & Butter* by Gabrielle Hamilton. As Julie Bennett, editorial director of Ten Speed Press, observed in an interview with Dianne Jacob on Dianne's *Will Write for Food* blog, even nonmemoir cookbooks now often have longer narrative recipe headnotes or personal stories.

HOT TIP

To grab a publisher, a cookbook proposal must promise either (1) a large, eager audience or (2) a fabulous, new, in-demand concept.

Authors who fall within the first category get the big bucks from the big houses. Authors who belong to the second category get big career starts, generally from smaller houses.

THE COOKBOOK PROPOSAL

The cookbook proposal differs from standard proposals in the following ways.

- **PIZZAZZ:** Use a rocking testimonial from a famous chef, an excerpt from an amazing restaurant or food-truck review, knockout stats from a food blog, or a riveting excerpt from the memoir-cookbook hybrid you're proposing. "When I get a proposal for a cookbook with blurbs up front from big names in the food world, I know I have to pay attention, even if I haven't heard of the writer," says writer and editor Harriet Bell of Bell, Book & Handle (bellbookandhandle.com) and creator of Broadway Books' award-winning cookbook program.
- **OVERVIEW:** This section should be focused on the food and your following.
- **BOOK SPECS:** List the number of recipes you plan to include (research your models to find the appropriate number). A memoir with recipes has fewer recipes than a single-subject cookbook, which has fewer recipes than a typical restaurant cookbook, which has fewer recipes than most cuisine-based cookbooks. Describe voice and instruction style. Does your cookbook include personal stories in each recipe headnote, for example? Define the level of expertise required to create the recipes.

Remember: If you're proposing a package with photos and you don't say that you need a separate photo budget, you'll be expected to pay all costs, including permissions. If you're sending your proposal to an agent, say, "I'd appreciate your help in determining how to present this to a publisher." If you are submitting directly to a small publisher, don't include the budget in your proposal. Gather information first from the interested publisher; it may have a different number or style of photos in mind.

- **AUTHOR PLATFORM:** This section is usually very important in cookbooks, although sometimes the unusual single subject can sell on concept alone at a smaller house. Testimonials from other successful cookbook authors are helpful in any case.
- **AUDIENCE:** Define two audiences, the one for you (and your cooking style) and the one for your subject matter. You may have invented an amazing new bacon banana; it may even be delicious. But if bacon bananas aren't a documentable trend, publishers will pass on your proposal.

- **PERSONAL PROMOTION:** As an expert cook, you may have access to special markets unknown to the publisher, or you may own restaurants and be willing to buy back books to resell. Your blog may offer unique and exciting promotional opportunities. Include numbers and concrete plans.
- **COMPS:** Your comps list is crucial. The cookbook market is very crowded; yours must stand out from others in a *salable* way.
- **BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS AND DETAILED OUTLINE:** The structure of your cookbook must reflect your voice and vision. You may start with the standard structure—[Part One](#): Introduction, [Part Two](#): Recipes, [Part Three](#): Resources—but that’s not going to get you a publisher today.

Cookbook structures that attract agents and publishers are original, have a strong point of view, and are frequently inventive. Find inspiration in existing books. Skim Anthony Bourdain’s *Appetites* to understand voice, design, and a wacky approach to content and structure.

Check out these cool part titles from *Dinner: A Love Story* by Jenny Rosenstrach, published by Ecco Press.

[Part 1](#) ♦ 1998–2001

Rituals, Relationships, Repertoires

(or, how we taught ourselves to cook) ...

[Part 3](#) ♦ 2006–PRESENT

Family Dinner

(or, the years the angels began to sing) ...

Here’s an arguably offensive yet strangely appealing example: The table of contents from *Thug Kitchen: The Official Cookbook* by Thug Kitchen, published by Rodale.

TRACK LIST

vii	WHAT THE F*CK IS THIS?
1	CARPE F*CKING DIEM Breakfast
31	SHORT ORDER SH*T Salads, Sammies, and Mini Meals
83	BIG-ASS CUP OF COZY Soups and Stews

- **SAMPLE WRITING:** Include writing from the introductory sections of the book and at least ten sample recipes that represent the different categories of recipes you'll include in the book. If you're not sure how to write a recipe, get Dianne Jacob's free e-book on the subject by signing up for her newsletter through the blog page on her website (diannej.com). Her website is a fabulous resource for cookbook writers. We love her interviews with top industry professionals; she talks with the real pros and asks all the right questions.

Your sample writing must prove that your recipes are well tested, trustworthy, and smart. Even your recipe titles must be evocative and consistent with your topic, your tone, and your reader's expectations.

- **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:** If you're pitching a package that includes photos, publishers will need to see those beautiful full-color photo examples. If you're a book blogger, include charts that document your popularity and, most important, your engagement with readers.

25

BUSINESS BOOKS

The focus of the business book proposal is the business of the book, not its literary merit.

Publishers seek business books written by experts who are immersed in and known for a distinct approach to a facet of conducting business. Purely theoretical business books are rarely acquired. Proposals that sell put forward a fresh concept and provide proof that the concept works in the real world.

Most business books don't sell many copies. That may not matter to you as a business book writer because publication delivers benefits far beyond the royalties your book might earn. Simply getting published elevates your credibility and fame, brings in new consulting jobs and speaking engagements, and catapults your career forward.

Business books that don't find a wide bookstore readership can earn money in other ways: They can be sold as add-ons to paid speeches or loss leaders for other related products.

HOT TIP

BUSINESS BOOK PUBLISHERS ABOUND

The largest publishers all have business book divisions. Editors at those imprints seek high-profile authors with established platforms. Authors with great credentials, great concepts, and less fame can find terrific publishing opportunities with smaller or more specialized business book presses; there are many viable options.

THE BUSINESS BOOK PROPOSAL

The business book proposal is very similar to the standard promotion-driven proposal, with a few modifications, which are outlined below.

- **OVERVIEW:** Open with a one- or two-sentence selling handle. Follow this with a bulleted list or an at-a-glance executive summary that breaks down your book's topic, audience, competition, attributes, writing credentials, platform, and personal promotion.
- **AUTHOR PLATFORM:** Publishers expect you to have a presence both online and off, including social media. If you're not tuned in, publishers will doubt your authority, as success in business necessitates an awareness of, and involvement in, current culture. You also must provide an impressive list of personal contacts and testimonial providers. Business writers—whether writing for a niche or a general market—must convince publishers that their acumen is known to and respected by others in their field.
- **PERSONAL PROMOTION:** Although a book buyback offer is optional in some categories, it's essential in business book proposals.

26

NOVELS

Most novels aren't submitted with proposals. Manuscripts must be fully written before submission, with the possible exceptions of books written into an established series (primarily young adult books) or rarely, a new book by a best-selling author.

But the world is changing. Because the demand for authors who *also* become promotion partners is so high, some agents and even some publishers—though none of the Big Five, yet—ask novelists to accompany their completed novels with a mini-proposal. Here are some brief guidelines.

THE SYNOPSIS IS NOT THE PROPOSAL

Agents frequently ask novelists for a synopsis of key plot points. But bear in mind that this synopsis is *not* a proposal; it's an expected part of the novel submission.

Proposals that accompany novels are much shorter and less formally structured than the standard proposal. If your agent or publisher asks for a proposal with your novel, include the following proposal elements in the form of a business letter or memo:

- Author Bio
- Platform
- Personal Promotion
- Supplemental Material

27

MEMOIRS

“Memoir is not an act of history but an act of memory, which is innately corrupt.”

—MARY KARR, *THE ART OF MEMOIR*

It’s been said that memoirs are the novels of the twenty-first century. The success of groundbreakers like *Angela’s Ashes* by Frank McCourt, *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, and *The Liars’ Club* by Mary Karr helped shift memoir from a dubious, misunderstood format into one of the most popular nonfiction categories today, eclipsing the term *autobiography* and—sometimes controversially—blurring the lines between fiction and nonfiction.

Elements of memoir can now be found within other kinds of nonfiction, from journalistic narratives like *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot, in which the author inserts her own experiences as an investigator into the story, to the brilliantly intertwined personal- and plant-growth stories of *Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren and to the cookbook-memoir combo *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* by Lucy Knisley.

While we’ve placed memoir firmly in the “prose-driven” category throughout this book, commercial or promotion-driven titles do sometimes burst onto the best-seller lists. Writers with strong, funny voices like Jenny Lawson (“The Blogness”) have transitioned from blog to book on the strength of viral popularity—and wicked talent. Celebrity memoirists obviously capitalize on their platforms to sell their books to publishers (but fame doesn’t always translate into reader appeal).

Whether humorous, confessional, graphic, or transformative, memoir is, above all else, a literary endeavor. Successful memoirists don’t simply recount their birth-to-now life stories. They self-consciously choose a dramatic slice of their lives, reframe it through the lens of their own interpretation, and layer it with meaning and thematic purpose.

Some agents and publishers prefer to read the whole memoir before offering to represent or publish. This makes sense. Publishers have been burned more than once after acquiring a memoir based on a proposal that just didn’t live up to the promise of its sample writing.

However, a number of editors do acquire memoirs from proposals. Memoirs sold on proposal can be shaped collaboratively between publisher and author; for many, this is a joyful process.

FOURTEEN TIPS ON WRITING A MEMOIR

Catherine Friend, author of *Hit by a Farm: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Barn*, shared fourteen tips about writing a memoir at the San Francisco Writers Conference. Although she developed her suggestions for a class on memoir writing, Catherine's sound advice applies to the proposal as well as to the full book. Consider each tip carefully as you develop your book's structure and choose its content and of course as you craft your sample writing. Many of her recommendations, if unheeded, will give editors a reason to say no to your proposal:

1. **A MEMOIR IS A SLICE OF LIFE, NOT THE WHOLE THING.** Don't share funny stories from your childhood or college days unless those stories directly relate to the slice you're writing about. Keep that slice as narrow as possible.
2. **MAKE SURE YOU TELL YOUR STORY,** not your parents' or your brother's or your neighbor's. If these people have stories that fascinate you and you're involved in the story, focus on how the events affected you. Tell the story using your life as the lens or filter.
3. **KNOW YOUR MOTIVATION.** Why are you telling your story? To teach? Warn? Entertain? As therapy? If revenge is on the list, you might want to reconsider until you've cooled off.
4. **SPEAKING OF WHICH, LET YOUR EMOTIONS AGE, LIKE WINE.** If you're writing about something emotionally difficult, give yourself time to move beyond those emotions. If a memoir's narrator is incredibly angry or passionate on the page, then there's no room for me, as the reader, to experience those emotions. It sounds backwards, but the less emotional you are on the page, the deeper the emotions your readers will experience.
5. **DON'T START AT THE BEGINNING.** That's boring. Instead look for that defining moment, the one that told you your life was about to change. For me, that was the day I knelt behind a ram and squeezed his testicles. And don't get hung up on finding the perfect

beginning since that will likely be the last part of the book you write anyway. Just start somewhere.

6. **BE WILLING TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT WENT WRONG.** Sorry, but no one cares about the things that have gone right in your life. It's the mistakes and disasters that are interesting. I wrote not about my education or job successes but about planting two-hundred grapevines upside down. When things go wrong, it creates tension.
7. **YOU ARE THE MAIN CHARACTER, SO DON'T BE PERFECT.** Embrace your quirks, and accept your flaws. This honesty will help you connect with readers. The fact that I'm grossed out by manure and don't like to work hard tells readers I have no business farming. If you let readers know you aren't perfect, this creates tension. A memoir is just like a novel when it comes to tension—the more, the better.
8. **HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF?** If you think you're adorable and awesome, I don't want to read about you. If you despise yourself, I also don't want to read about you. Instead of self-love or self-loathing, aim for self-curiosity or self-amusement. "Gosh, I wonder why I did that?" This can turn disasters like the upside-down grapevines into a compelling story.
9. **LOOK FOR THREADS RUNNING THROUGH YOUR STORY.** Find two or three themes, and then make sure all your material connects to one of these threads. If you do this, you'll write a tight, cohesive memoir. Also, whenever two threads cross in a story, you'll create—once again—tension. Every time that farming interfered with my writing, talk about tension.
10. **PUT YOUR STORY IN CONTEXT.** What's happening in the world around you? Step outside yourself, and consider family, community, state, nation. Yes, you're writing a memoir, but that doesn't mean it's all about you. The story of your car accident on August 12, 2001, may not include national events, but if you're writing about your car accident on September 12, 2001, you'd better step back and look at how this fits into bigger events.
11. **TRUTH VS. FACT.** Because memoir is creative nonfiction, it's meant to be shaped into a story. You don't always need to stick with an exact time line, but you do need to stay truthful. If you find yourself saying, "But that's the way it happened," step back and see if you can reshape the truth into a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Do this not by making things up but by looking at the event as a storyteller.
12. **SPEAKING OF WHICH, BREAK YOUR MATERIAL DOWN INTO STORIES.** Don't treat your slice of life as one big story. It's really many little ones, and approaching

your memoir this way will make it more enjoyable for others to read. Just think about how you tell the story to a friend over pizza—you don't share every detail, you slow down at the good parts, and you end with the piece of the story that amazed you.

13. **MEMOIR IS BASED ON MEMORY, AND MEMORY IS UNRELIABLE.** So if you look to family or friends to validate your memories, don't be surprised if their memories are different than yours. This is your memoir, so you get to tell your version.
14. **RELAX AND HAVE FUN.** Don't take yourself or your story too seriously. Play around. Convert one story into a grocery list, another to a poem. Read lots of memoirs. Think outside the box. It may take a while, but you *will* find the best way to tell your story.

THE MEMOIR PROPOSAL

Customize your memoir proposal using the tips for prose-driven nonfiction at the end of each chapter in [Part Three](#). Here are a few reminders and examples.

- **PIZZAZZ:** Grab publishers up front with can't-put-it-down writing from your book.
- **OVERVIEW:** Lead with passion, story, and voice. However, if aspects of your story will interest identifiable markets, allude to them here and expand in the audience section.
- **BOOK SPECS:** Speak directly to publishers about the voice of your memoir. Your memoir voice may not match your personal voice; instead it must match that portion of your internal life that you are revealing and contribute to the feelings you want to evoke. If you were furious when you underwent unnecessary surgery, your voice may be staccato and angry at times. If you were addicted, your memories may be vague and your voice detached. Let publishers know what you have chosen to include and omit—and why. Explain briefly your philosophy about the ratio of research to memory in your memoir. Publishers don't want another James Frey, who fabricated distressing events in his Oprah-recommended best-selling memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, embarrassing his publisher and increasing the level of mistrust in memoir—and in publishers—everywhere. Plus, it got him Oprah's evil eye; nobody wants that.
- **AUTHOR PLATFORM:** Memoirists don't necessarily have to blog or tweet. But you are expected to have a strong network from your writing or journalistic background. If it's small, list your platform elements as a subhead under your author bio. You don't need to use the word *platform* if it seems like a stretch; find a heading that defines the group of

outlets through which you're known. If your memoir is more driven by commercial than literary appeal—if it's humorous or based on a blog—platform becomes more important. While your blog doesn't have to be viral, use your stats to prove that those who do follow you are passionate and engaged.

- **AUDIENCE:** Define two audiences, the one comprising people who admire you (and your writing) and the one for topics covered in your memoir besides you. *Lab Girl* readers, for example, include people interested in memoir, yes, but also people interested in women's rights and earth sciences.
- **COMPS:** This section can be tough for memoirists to compile. Comparing your story to the latest and greatest best-selling memoirs can backfire. Combat this problem by finding legitimate stylistic comparisons, and write about them humbly. Here's a great use of this technique from an extended query for a historical novel by Jody's client Julia York: "I think my personal writing style is the most similar (with absolutely no claim to her brilliance or genius) to early Ursula Le Guin, especially her books from the seventies. ... We both love to play with language."
- **BOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS AND DETAILED OUTLINE:** Memoirs often are creatively structured, with inventive chapter titles. Organize yours to echo your voice and vision, and create a fully immersive experience for your readers. Here are excerpts from a couple of particularly inventive tables of contents that may inspire you.

Wild

by Cheryl Strayed (Knopf/Penguin Random House)

Table of Contents

Author's Note

Map

Prologue

PART ONE: THE TEN THOUSAND THINGS

1. The Ten Thousand Things

2. Splitting

3. Hunching in a Remotely Upright Position

[Contents continue.]

Lab Girl

by Hope Jahren (Knopf/Penguin Random House)

Table of Contents

Prologue

Part One: Roots and Leaves

Part Two: Wood and Knots

Part Three: Flowers and Fruit

Epilogue

- **SAMPLE WRITING:** Editors and agents expect a large chunk of compelling sample writing—20 percent or more of the total word count—in memoir proposals. Provide that writing in at least two full sample chapters, or within the narrative outline (described in [chapter seventeen](#)) or in the narrative letter of passion (described in [chapter twenty-eight](#)).

THE NARRATIVE LETTER OF PASSION

“The proposal written in letter form can draw me into the narrative in a more direct way than a standard proposal. It can show me an author who is really swimming in the mix and writing a book that needs to happen.”

—VANESSA MOBLEY, EXECUTIVE EDITOR, LITTLE, BROWN/HACHETTE

Narrative nonfiction can be proposed in what we call a *narrative letter of passion*. All of the standard elements of the proposal are present (and even, sometimes, pizzazz), but the book is pitched in a letter, usually from the writer to the agent.

These letters can be as short as twenty pages or as long as sixty—and require as much work as a standard proposal. They include sample writing from the book, usually in the form of lengthy, writerly chapter descriptions instead of full sample chapters.

“The narrative letter directly demonstrates the writer’s voice and passion and obviates the need for editors to drag their way through really boring text,” says agent Madeleine Morel of 2M Communications Ltd.

Letter-form proposals are often used by authors proposing their second or third books to a publisher, where less formality is needed to prove the writer’s professionalism or ability to turn a phrase.

The rise in popularity of the letter of passion may be a direct result of the constraints of reading proposals digitally. Jody is a firm believer that digitally read proposals get boring faster than printed proposals because they’re harder to flip through. The voice-driven letter of passion feels more booklike, plunging us into its world in a way that formulaic proposals cannot.

PROPOSAL EXAMPLES

What Would Betty Do: The Spiritual Opportunist’s Survival Guide to this World and the Next

by Mrs. Betty Bowers (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster)

Nobody said the letter of passion couldn't be funny. This spoof pitch was written by Andrew Bradley, who also writes the enormously popular Facebook page for the fictional Mrs. Betty Bowers. Find Betty here: www.Facebook.com/Mrs-Betty-Bowers-Americas-Best-Christian-312383761871.

From the Christian Louis Quinze Desk of Betty Bowers

Re: Betty Bowers Book: *What Would Betty Do: The Spiritual Opportunist's Survival Guide to this World and the Next*

Dear Member of the Liberal Media:

Being asked by the secular publishing world to reveal my secrets of how I became America's best, most glamorous Christian is not something I regard with untempered enthusiasm. Yes, there is the satisfaction of reminding people that, come Judgment Day, I will be whisked through the "Ten Sins or Less" Express Line while they are subjected to the ineptitude of surly seraphim and processing delays unfamiliar to those who have not tried to secure concert seats through Ticketmaster's 1-800 number. While helping others is almost as important as a crisp hemline, I am left to ask the question that proves decisive for all who embark on a journey of profound spiritual meaning: What's in it for me? Do I really wish to open the door to Heaven for people I would choose not to even have in my Christian home? After all, it is hard enough to avoid the truly dreadful here on Earth when they only have a finite amount of time to find you.

Nevertheless, I am being called away from my itinerate schedule of light luncheons and hearty rebukes to offer a perfectly manicured hand to those who don't pass in social circles elevated enough to otherwise benefit from my company. As I often tell the marginally saved, the path to Heaven is as narrow as my perfect size-four waist. Few will make it. And isn't this as it should be? I mean, if you crave indiscriminate membership, you can always become a Demoncrat [sic]. While it is risible to assume that other, lesser people could ever replicate with any verisimilitude my finely calibrated knack for spotting a heretofore unnamed sin, to say nothing of the panache with which I carry off an edgy hat, this book would at least provide a voyeuristic peek into my world of social and spiritual preeminence ...

[Letter continues.]

In the Cradle of Storms

by Mark Obmascik (Atria/Simon & Schuster)

Mark had already published two books with Simon & Schuster, so he proposed his next exciting book through a letter of passion sent to his editor. The book is slated for 2018 publication.

Dear [Editor]:

Laura Davis was confused. In the living room of her home stood a fidgety old man, but she still had no idea what the visitor wanted. He talked about his grown children. He talked about his Arizona retirement. And he talked on and on about his orchids and all their beauty and their fragility and their rewards. Davis had little patience for exotic flowers or idle chitchat. She was a single mom trying to support her five-year-old twins and live-in elderly mother on her meager nurse's salary. She tried to be polite, but really, wasn't it time for this guy to go?

Finally it was. As Davis walked the man outside to his car, he paused, then wheeled around. “By the way,” he told her, “I’m the one who killed your father.”

With those ten words, the lives of Laura Davis and her visitor, Dick Laird, changed forever. Davis spent the next years working mightily to uncover her family’s past. Laird tried his hardest to overcome it.

In my next book, *In the Cradle of Storms*, I will show how a single World War II death rocked the basic beliefs of both friends and enemies on two continents. When U.S. Army Sgt. Dick Laird shot and killed Japanese doctor. Paul Tatsuguchi on the god-forsaken Alaskan Island of Attu—a desolate place that was never worth fighting for—he felt utterly certain he was doing his patriotic duty. When, minutes later, Laird found a diary and a Bible in the dead man’s pocket, he began a journey to redemption that only found its resolution forty years later. I am eager to explore deeply the intersecting journeys of the Laird and Tatsuguchi families; their inspirational tale of courage, forgiveness, and reconciliation provides a heart-wrenching look at the ways man can extract the best from the worst, through war and peace, while spanning the boundaries of nations and generations.

I’ll write this story with the help of both men’s personal diaries; the doctor’s diary, in particular, was passed among thousands of American soldiers during wartime, and it became a startling symbol that the Japanese enemy was not always the savage that U.S. war propagandists had made him out to be. I first learned of the World War II diary of Dr. Paul Tatsuguchi while researching the history of Attu for my first book, *The Big Year*. In the years since, I’ve spent much time tracking down surviving members of the Tatsuguchi and Laird families, as well as classmates, friends, neighbors, and academic researchers who knew something of the story. Just this summer, I finally found the Harvard-trained Army psychiatrist with more than ...

[Letter continues.]

STRATEGIES FOR SIX MORE KINDS OF BOOKS

Everybody likes cookies; nobody likes a cookie-cutter proposal.

Different categories of books present different proposal-writing challenges. In this chapter, we detail techniques for customizing the following types of proposals.

- How-to books
- Biographies
- Interview books
- Exposés
- Academic books
- Anthologies

HOW-TO BOOKS

How-to books are staples in the book business. Publishers and book buyers welcome ideas that enable readers to lead better, richer lives. Successful how-to books offer a strong concept or a new slant on an old idea and are told in an engaging, expert voice, timed right and backed up with a solid platform. You can entice proposal readers in a number of different ways.

- **A DOWN-TO-EARTH, ME-TO-YOU TONE:** In Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, the author has an endearing voice that keeps readers turning the pages.
- **JOKES, QUOTES, CARTOONS, OR ANECDOTES:** If such elements suit your topic, include a few in your proposal.
- **EXAMPLES OF SELF-TESTS, EXERCISES, AND PROMPTS:** These will keep readers involved.
- **A STEP-BY-STEP PROGRAM:** This is reflected in your choice of structure and chapter titles.

- **BOOK SPECS:** They should describe how illustrations and sidebars will break up the text.
- **LINKS IN YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:** These can be video demonstrations and other online support for you and your concept.

BIOGRAPHIES

It can be a challenge to hold editors' attention in a biography proposal. Biographies are typically structured chronologically, and a "she did this, then she did that" approach can get dull.

In his six-figure proposal for *Patrick O'Brian: A Life Revealed*, Dean King circumvented this problem by opening his proposal with double pizzazz. The first thing editors saw was an arresting photo of the subject. On the next page began the book's eight-page prologue, which ends with a jaw-dropping revelation no editor could resist: King discovered beloved author O'Brian had lived half of his life under a different name and had hidden his real identity from the world.

King did not include a detailed chronological outline, which could have dissipated interest. Instead, he made all the right moves to keep editors hooked:

1. He continued the story of O'Brian's life in the overview.
2. He ended the overview with a list of additional arresting details.
3. He provided a full, first-person author's note, in which he shares his passion for the subject as well as his adventures as an amateur private detective trying to uncover his hero's hidden past. This further personalized the proposal.
4. He included one complete sample chapter.

INTERVIEW BOOKS

Writers are often attracted by the notion of doing a collection of interviews. They think, *Hey, I'll find twenty people who need publicity, do ten ten-page interviews with each one, and have a book.* Unfortunately, editors aren't wild about collections of anything, including interviews.

Editors seek books, not collections. They expect you to develop an idea and structure it using interview material to prove your points. Consider making your idea more like a book by building it around a central concept. For example, *Patrick O'Brian* biographer Dean King, along with Jonathan Pearlroth and Jessica King channeled their horrendous experiences dealing with cancer in their young lives into inspiration. They interviewed more than eighty other cancer survivors and families to learn and share what others did to battle the disease. *Cancer Combat: Cancer Survivors Share Their Guerrilla Tactics to Help You Win the Fight of Your Life*, published by Random House, earned a six-figure advance and is now considered a classic.

HOT TIP

If you record interviews, you can put them on your website and include links to them.

Interview Book Tips

Be mindful of these productive practices as you develop your proposal for your interview book:

- Mix up the questions; asking everyone the same questions may yield repetitive answers.
- Collect as many interviews in advance as possible to be sure you'll end up with a book's worth of material.
- Find examples from all major book markets and all regions of the country. Aim for as much diversity in location, background, type of product and service, experience, attitude, and lifestyle as you can in those you interview.
- Explore your topic by writing related articles first, to make sure there's enough substance for a book. Include, as supplemental material, tearsheets from the articles, with facts about the number of people reached.

EXPOSÉS

A controversial book can sell if it:

- addresses a topic about which readers are intensely curious

- is authoritative and credible
- has shocking revelations
- is published at the right time
- is written by an author with a very strong platform

Classics like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, as well as books about political figures ad nauseam, have proven that exposés can sell.

But people don't like being depressed, and they sure don't want to pay for the privilege. That's why exposés don't sell well unless written by a promotable author about a hot subject with built-in, broad interest.

If you feel compelled to write an exposé but don't have the platform, consider being prescriptive as well as descriptive. People want to buy *solutions*, not problems. So if you can, develop a program for making the situation better. This may improve your title and your sales and lead to more talks and publicity.

ACADEMIC BOOKS

By *academic books*, we mean books published by university presses. University presses are known for publishing esoteric and scholarly books, but they also publish a wide range of general-interest and niche books, from regional guides to history, memoir, Judaica, music, and even how-to and fiction.

Because publishing options with major publishers have shrunk, agents now submit regularly to university presses, but you usually can submit your proposal without an agent. Check the publisher's guidelines to be sure.

University presses ask for the same elements as other publishers—but with enough divergence that you must study the submission requirements posted on their websites. Many ask you to name potential reviewers (with contact information); some ask you to reveal where else you've submitted. As posted on their current websites, Washington State University Press “assumes” you're only submitting to them and asks you to explain why not if you're not! University Press of Kansas doesn't want to see a sample chapter—they ask only for 500 to 2,500 “well-chosen, polished words.” University presses, even when very interested in your work, usually only offer “contingent” contracts for the book you propose. Publication is not a

sure thing until they've received your full manuscript *and* sent it to independent reviewers *and* gotten positive feedback. Expect a lengthy decision process.

Study the online catalogs of any university press you're considering. University presses have specialties, so make sure they publish books in your category.

ANTHOLOGIES

The success of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series—which was, by the way, initially rejected by 144 publishers—proves the commercial potential of anthologies blessed with a great idea, a system for test marketing, a large readership, a branded title, and powerhouse promotion. But most anthologies don't have all these strengths and are primarily used in classrooms; in other words, they're not mega-bestsellers. Even the word *anthology* is deadly to your proposal prospects. Try *treasury* or *celebration* instead in your title.

Make the case that your anthology will hold up over time. Start with a strong concept, and include worthy selections that hold up well against each other and flow naturally from one to the next. Split the book into parts and chapters, and write an introduction for each section—and perhaps each entry—to give the book cohesion. Include brief bios of your contributors before their entries, after their entries, or at the end of the sample text and the book.

Getting permissions takes time, effort, and expense. Decide whether you plan to pay for the permissions yourself or will ask in your proposal that the publisher pay those fees. If you seek funding from the publisher, include an accurate round-figure cost estimate for permissions. Regardless of who pays, in most cases it will be your job to track down who owns the rights to the work you wish to include and to negotiate payment with the rights holder.¹

1. Okay, sometimes the publisher will work with you to find permissions, but in Jody's experience that has not worked out so well. Getting permission, for example, for one essay in one book is not the editor's highest priority, yet the writer can't move forward until he knows permission has been cleared. It may seem like a good idea in principle to lay this job on the publisher, but in practice, it can create bad feelings and an editorial juggernaut. Keep control over your project by obtaining the permissions yourself (at the publisher's expense, of course).

PROPOSALS FOR GHOSTWRITTEN AND CO-AUTHORED BOOKS

Celebrities, business leaders, doctors, chefs, and other professionals frequently want to share important messages with the world, but they have neither the time nor the writing experience to craft a proposal. Instead they use ghostwriters.

You might wonder whether this practice is ethical. It is, if (1) you tell the agent the proposal is ghostwritten and (2) you commit to hiring your proposal's ghost, or another competent ghostwriter, for the book, too. List your ghostwriter's involvement in the proposal's book specs section. From the publisher's perspective, having a trusted professional writer involved is usually a blessing. Readers don't care as long as the views expressed in the book are truly those of the person whose name is on the cover. But things get dicey if:

- You wish to hire a ghostwriter for the proposal but not for the book. That's fraudulent, for reasons we hope are obvious. Even if it weren't unethical, if you use this practice, you set yourself up for a big fall. If your book doesn't match the quality of the proposal, your publisher may reject it and demand that you return the advance. Contractually, you'd be obligated to do so.
- You're writing a voice-driven book, such as memoir or journalistic narrative nonfiction, and you don't disclose the use of a ghost. Readers expect these books to be written by the person whose name is on the cover and who is promoting the book. Readers *will* feel betrayed when they discover you've hidden your employment of a ghostwriter.

For both situations, the simple solution is to credit the ghost.

CREDITING JOINTLY WRITTEN BOOKS

Writers are frequently confused about where and how to credit co-authors in books and proposals; fortunately, the decision is usually straightforward. Clarify your roles in writing

before you write your proposal. Any co-author who will be listed on the title page of your book should be described in a callout at the end of the author bio.

The credit itself is either an *and* or a *with*. Here's how to decide:

Joe Smith AND Jennie Jones

The use of *and* in this credit means Joe and Jennie wrote the book together. Either or both authors are expected to be the face of the book. List the names alphabetically if you are equal contributors or in an order you otherwise agree is appropriate.

Joe Smith WITH Jenny Jones

The word *with* is used when Joe Smith is the expert and the face of the book and Jenny Jones is the writer. Less commonly, *with* is used when the authors' contributions are disproportionate or when the authors, for any reason, believe a *with* credit is appropriate.

PROPOSAL COACHES

Mike and Jody offer book proposal consulting and coaching services, as do many other professionals. You don't have to disclose the involvement of a coach or even a professional editor, as long as the work in the proposal is still primarily yours and you can easily replicate any suggested revisions in the final book. If the editorial work contributed by an outside source is extensive, you don't have to mention this in the proposal, but you *do* have to hire the same person or someone of equivalent experience to edit your book before delivery. It's both ethical and in your best interest.

Part Five

PULL IT TOGETHER AND PERFECT IT

10 Prompts for Great Titles

Three Proposal Structures (Lists)

Step-by-Step: Build Your Full Proposal

Edit for Voice

Format for Print and e-Readers

Get Productive Feedback

Top Ten Proposal Killers

31

TITLES

“A good title is the title of a successful book.”

—RAYMOND CHANDLER

One New York editor said to Mike, “If the title is good enough, it doesn’t matter what’s in the book.” *Everything Men Know About Women* proves her right. The book sold more than 750,000 copies. Its 120 pages are ... blank!

The perfect title for your proposal will define your subject and grab editors’ positive attention. It’s a label they can confidently share with colleagues in editorial board meetings and use to convince the powers-that-be to release money to acquire your book.

HOT TIP

Don’t offer agents or editors a string of titles to choose from; pick the one you like best. You can share the others later.

PROMOTION-DRIVEN BOOK TITLES

In *How to Drive Your Competition Crazy*, Guy Kawasaki tells the story of how nobody at a private boys' school signed up for a course called "Home Economics for Boys." The class filled up immediately when the school changed the name of the course to "Bachelor Living."

The title and subtitle of your promotion-driven book must work together to entice readers to make a purchase. Titles are short, simple, visual, metaphorical, and resonant, creating an emotional response. Titles grab the gut. Titles sell. Subtitles are straightforward, designed to clearly express what your book will do for readers. They might define a desirable activity or skill to be learned, a systematic approach to learning it, and, perhaps, a time within which the reader will acquire the skill.

HOT TIP

TARGET WORD COUNTS

These are not rules; they are guidelines. You'll find plenty of exceptions, even in this chapter.

For your title, aim for six words or less. Just one word can be remarkably effective, such as *Dry* by Augusten Burroughs (Picador) and *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown).

For your subtitle, book designer Karris Ross advises a limit of about ten words; longer can be off-putting.

The following title/subtitle combinations effectively tell and sell. Emulate them to develop a great title for a prescriptive or platform-driven book (see "[Ten Prompts for Great Titles](#)" at the end of this chapter for more title-writing tips).

- *The 90-Second Fitness Solution: The Most Time-Efficient Workout Ever for a Healthier, Stronger, Younger You* by Pete Cerqua with Alisa Bowman (Atria/Simon & Schuster)
- *Black Belt Negotiating: Become a Master Negotiator Using Powerful Lessons From the Martial Arts* by Michael Soon Lee with Sensei Grant Tabuchi (Amacom Books)
- *Smart Women; Foolish Choices: Finding the Right Men/Avoiding the Wrong Ones* by Connell Cowan and Melvin Kinder (Signet)
- *The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun* by Gretchen

Rubin (HarperCollins)

- *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* by Brené Brown (Hazelden Publishing)
- *You Can Draw in 30 Days: The Fun, Easy Way to Learn to Draw in One Month or Less* by Mark Kistler (Da Capo Press/Hachette)
- *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* by Angela Duckworth (Scribner/Simon & Schuster)

GENERIC VICTORIANS

Shortly after Mike and his partner, Elizabeth, started their agency, Mike discovered the beautifully painted Victorian homes that were sprouting like flowers around San Francisco.

He took photos of the houses and wrote a proposal that he eventually sold to Cyril Nelson at Dutton, who came up with the title *Painted Ladies: San Francisco's Resplendent Victorians*. One word, *resplendent*, the result of a late brainstorm from Cyril, elevates the title to emotion-grabbing genius.

That first book started a national trend that led to five more books. The trademarked words *painted ladies* have become synonymous with multicolored Victorian homes.

NARRATIVE NONFICTION AND MEMOIR TITLES

“There are many paths to success in publishing; some come easily, but most require blood, sweat, and tears. And a really great title helps a lot.”

—LAURIE ABKEMEIER, LITERARY AGENT, DEFIORE & COMPANY

Memoir titles can be metaphorical and even mysterious but must still grab the heart and head—and occasionally the funny bone. Some memoirs have wonderfully wacky titles. Memoirs are almost always subtitled “A Memoir” or “A Memoir of XXX.” Notice how each of the following successful memoir titles expresses a concept that is personal to the author yet at the same time evokes a sense of place, time, or experience that is universal and recognizable.

- *Girl Walks Out of a Bar: A Memoir* by Lisa F. Smith (SelectBooks)
- *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* by Jeannette Walls (Scribner/Simon & Schuster)
- *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* by J.D. Vance (HarperCollins)

- *Boys in the Trees: A Memoir* by Carly Simon (Flatiron Books/Macmillan Publishers)
- *Bettyville: A Memoir* by George Hodgman (Penguin Random House)
- *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir* by Jenny Lawson (Penguin Random House)

If we wrote a book about historical narrative nonfiction subtitles, here's what we would call it: *Narrative Nonfiction Subtitles: The Fascinating Behind-the-Scenes Tale of Those Never-Ending, Keyword-Laden Phrases that Editors and Authors and Agents Discuss Endlessly and in the End, Nobody Ever Reads*.

Titles of historical narrative nonfiction works are evocative but less personal than those of memoirs. Their subtitles are often a mouthful. That's because they must educate the reader about the book's subject matter—which often is a little-known event—and why the subject itself matters *and* why the approach is relevant. For your proposal, don't spend too much time wordsmithing the subtitle, which the publisher will undoubtedly change. Aim for clarity, and remember to describe not only your topic but also why it will be meaningful to readers today. Some popular titles in this category include:

- *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand (Penguin Random House)
- *The Seashell on the Mountaintop: A Story of Science, Sainthood and the Humble Genius Who Discovered a New History of the Earth* by Alan Cutler (Dutton/Penguin Random House, reissued by Author Planet Press)
- *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* by Daniel James Brown (Penguin Random House)
- *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* by Erik Larson (Penguin Random House)
- *Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void* by Mary Roach (W.W. Norton & Company)

The titles for biography and other information-driven literary nonfiction are more straightforward, often focused on the “tell” over the sell. Ron Chernow didn't need anything fancier than his title *Alexander Hamilton* to secure a spot on the *New York Times* best-seller list, a Pulitzer Prize, and the world-changing attention of Lin-Manuel Miranda.

PROFANITY SOAPBOX

Every subject area, from parenting to cooking, now boasts a few books with profane titles. It's so common that the shock value has diminished considerably and, in our opinions, left in its wake a society that's a little more accepting of rudeness and cheap laughs. Even though, okay, some are pretty funny.

HOT TIP

Buy domains for titles you're strongly considering. Domains are cheap, and you can release any that you don't end up using after a year. While you're at it, do keyword research to find the most commonly searched terms related to your book. Keyword-driven titles can feel contrived, but it doesn't hurt to use one or two popular search terms in your subtitle.

TEN PROMPTS FOR GREAT TITLES

For inspiration, ask yourself these questions.

1. **DOES MY TITLE COMPEL PEOPLE TO READ THE COPY THAT FOLLOWS?**
Example: *Guerrilla Marketing for Free: Dozens of No-Cost Tactics to Promote Your Business and Energize Your Profits* by Jay Conrad Levinson (Mariner Books)
2. **DOES MY TITLE CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF MY BOOK WITH A MEMORABLE IMAGE, SYMBOL, OR METAPHOR?** Examples: *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese (Random House), *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger (Da Capo/Hachette)
3. **DOES MY TITLE SELL A SOLUTION RATHER THAN A PROBLEM?** Example: *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* by Brené Brown (Avery)
4. **DOES MY TITLE CARVE OUT A UNIQUE SPOT IN THE MARKETPLACE?**
Example: *The Only Negotiating Guide You'll Ever Need: 101 Ways to Win Every Time in Any Situation* by Peter Stark and Jane Flaherty (Crown Business/Penguin Random House)
5. **DOES THE TITLE OF MY BOOK MATCH THE TITLE OF THE TALKS I WILL GIVE ABOUT THE BOOK?** The same title for both creates synergy.

6. **DOES MY TITLE USE OR CO-OPT PROPRIETARY NOMENCLATURE?**
Glennon Doyle Melton, author of bestsellers *Love Warrior* and *Carry On, Warrior*, is on her way to being forever associated with the word *warrior*.
7. **CAN I BRAND MY BOOK AND MY ATTITUDE WITH A CATCHY METAPHORICAL OR TANGENTIALLY RELATED PHRASE?** Two perennially best-selling examples: *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive: Outsell, Outmanage, Outmotivate, and Outnegotiate Your Competition* by Harvey Mackay (HarperBusiness/HarperCollins), *What Color Is Your Parachute?: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* by Richard N. Bolles (Ten Speed Press/Penguin Random House)
8. **CAN I USE A VARIATION OF MY TITLE FOR OTHER BOOKS?** Series like *The 5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman (Northfield Publishing Company) show that the right title helps create enduring brands.
9. **DOES MY TITLE CAPTURE HOW MY BOOK WILL BENEFIT MY READERS?**
Will it inform them, enlighten them, entertain them, persuade them, inspire them, or make them laugh? Example: *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up* by Marie Kondo (Ten Speed Press/Penguin Random House)
10. **DOES MY TITLE USE WORDPLAY TO HELP MAKE IT MEMORABLE?** Try out these techniques.
 - **RHYTHM:** *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules* by Chérie Carter-Scott (Penguin Random House)
 - **ALLITERATION:** *Amazing Art: Wonders of the Ancient World* by Christopher Berg (HarperCollins)
 - **VERBAL AND VISUAL PUNS:** *Sellmates: The Art of Living and Working Together* (one of Mike's favorite ideas that needs a writer)
 - **WORDPLAY:** *Tongue Fu! How to Deflect, Disarm, and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict* by Sam Horn (Griffin/St. Martin's Press)
 - **TWO CONTRASTING OR OPPOSING PHRASES:** *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray (HarperCollins)
 - **HUMOR:** *I'm Not as Old as I Used to Be: Reclaiming Your Life in the Second Half* by Frances Weaver (Mike can't convince Jack Canfield to do *Chicken Soup for the Shoemaker's Soul* or *Chicken Soup for the Filet of Soul*, but he keeps hoping.)

11. DOES MY TITLE USE WORDS THAT SELL?

- **WORDS THAT SELL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:** *sex(y), now, success, first, complete, how to, you, health, balance, transform, original, diet, weight loss, God, soul, spiritual, inspirational, overcome*
- **MONEY WORDS:** *free, money (-making/-saving), save, profit, risk-free, guarantee, income, tax-free*
- **SUPERLATIVES:** *biggest, largest, best, oldest, youngest, richest, most beautiful, most exciting, most complete, cheapest*
- **TIME WORDS:** *now; today; a number followed by seconds, minute(s), hour(s), day(s), week(s), month(s), year(s); speed, quick (-ly/-er/-est), fast (-er/-est), instant(ly), convenient*
- **WORDS THAT SUGGEST A SYSTEM OR PROGRAM:** *a number followed by secrets, steps, stepping-stones, keys, ways, commandments, building blocks*
- **CROSSOVER WORDS:** *at home and at work, in your personal and professional life, for parents and teachers*
- **COMBINED WORDS:** *two words that combine to create a new one, like *Negotiauctions: New Dealmaking Strategies for a Competitive Marketplace* by Guhan Subramanian (W.W. Norton & Company)*

32

STRUCTURE

Say it with us: strongest to weakest, strongest to weakest ...

Congratulations are in order—the bulk of your proposal is now drafted! The hard part is over. All that remains is refining, refining ... and refining.

It's time to determine the final structure of your proposal and to pull all those sections into one well-organized document.

“The structure of your proposal is key to getting editors to stay with your proposal long enough to win them over.”

—LISA TENER, BOOK DEVELOPMENT COACH

Here are three structural models. Build on these frameworks to find your ideal construction.

BASIC STRUCTURE

This generic structure illustrates an effective flow for all the sections described in this book, without any customization. If you're not sure how you might want to personalize your proposal, place your sections in this order for your first compiled draft and edit from there.

- Title Page
- Pizzazz*
- Proposal Contents
- Overview
 - Book Specs
- Author Bio
- Author Platform
- Personal Promotion*

- Audience
- Comps
- Book Table of Contents
- Detailed Outline
- Sample Writing
- Supplemental Material*

*Optional

PROSE-DRIVEN STRUCTURE

For memoir and other narrative nonfiction proposals, focus on the writing. Place sample material in the front, and position sales-related discussions (such as the audience and comps sections) at the end. The hypothetical writer of this proposal doesn't have a significant platform or a personal promotion plan, and he placed his sample writing within his detailed outline.

- Pizzazz
- Title Page
- Proposal Contents
- Overview
 - Book Specs
- Author Bio
- Book Table of Contents
- Divider Page
- Detailed Outline with Sample Writing
- Comps
- Audience
- Supplemental Material

PROMOTION-DRIVEN STRUCTURE

The writer of this hypothetical proposal has a strong platform and much to say about sales opportunities, so he calls editors' attention to key sales points at the beginning of his proposal. He includes two complete sample chapters.

- Pizzazz
- Title Page
- Proposal Contents
- Overview
 - Book Specs
 - List of Key Sales Points

- Author Bio
- Author Platform
- Personal Promotion
- Audience
- Comps
- Book Table of Contents
- Divider Page
- Detailed Outline
- Sample Chapters
- Supplemental Material

MOVING YOUR MATERIAL STEP BY STEP

Transfer your draft sections into one document in the following order.

1. In the word-processing program of your choice, create a document called **Draft Proposal**.
2. On the first page of the document, type the proposed title; this is your **title page** (see [chapter thirty-four](#)).
3. Decide now if you will open your proposal with **pizzazz**. First, review [chapter nine](#) along with any pizzazz notes in your brainstorming files. Then, if you wish to include it, choose and insert pizzazz after the title page. If you know you want pizzazz but haven't

finalized its content, type “insert pizzazz here” on the pizzazz page, along with ticklers reminding you of the pizzazz options you’re considering.

4. After the pizzazz section, type the heading “**Proposal Contents**” on the next page, but don’t write the contents yet.
5. Insert the **overview** after the proposal contents page.
6. Insert **book specs** at the end of the overview, under a subhead.
7. Insert your **author bio**.
8. Insert the **platform** section on its own or as a subhead under the author bio. Remember: Combine the platform and author bio sections if:
 - Your platform is *large* and inseparable from your professional identity.
 - Your platform is *small*, and you don’t partake in much social media.
9. Read through your **comps** and **audience** sections. If the audience is primarily defined as people who purchased similar books, combine these sections and place the combined section into your proposal next.

Or, if your **audience** section describes robust, definable, and easily reached markets, place this section after **platform** and before **comps**.
10. Insert **comps** after **audience** if you’ve kept these sections separate.
11. Assess your **personal promotion** section. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Have you written a stand-alone **personal promotion plan**? If so, place it in the proposal *either* after **platform** *or* after **comps** (you’ll review placement later).
 - Do parts of your **personal promotion** section overlap with or repeat elements of your **platform** section? If so, combine these sections. If not, place it *either* after **platform** *or* after **comps**.
12. Insert the book’s **table of contents** on the next page.
13. Add a **divider page** if you want to separate the writing-related sections from the marketing-related sections. Insert the **detailed outline**.
14. Insert the **sample writing**.
15. Insert the **supplemental material**.
16. Now, jot down the order of your proposal on the **proposal contents page** you created in Step 4.

17. Add page numbers to all proposal pages except the title page.
18. Don't worry about formatting the proposal yet. Print it out as is, and read through.
19. Do you see obvious redundancies or other errors that you can easily fix? Do any sections seem out of place? Do any slow down the reading experience? Shuffle the pages, and play with structure until you're satisfied.
20. Review the section names on your draft **proposal contents** page. Do you like them? Are they consistent with each other and with your voice? Retitle if necessary. For inspiration and ideas, take a look again at the alternative titles on the first page of every chapter in [Part Three](#).
21. On your printed document, pencil in subheads where needed for clarity, especially if you have combined sections.
22. Incorporate your final structure, section heads, and subheads into the digital proposal on your computer; revise the **proposal contents page** as needed.

Yes, more revisions are on the way ... but first, celebrate your work. You've created a rich and admirable document.

33

VOICE

Writing skill is admired. Voice is loved.

“For a written piece of any type to be effective, it has to speak with voice, personality, and attitude,” says agent Madeleine Morel of 2M Communications, Ltd. “Merely passing on information without emotion in a proposal—or a book, a script, or even a website—will not make a serious and lasting impression on the reader and is a job only half done. Whatever the topic, at its core your work is one person talking to another person. Otherwise it’s only an instruction manual.”

Does your proposal have a personality? It’s time to find your voice.

DEFINE YOUR VOICE

The ideal voice is informed by:

- your personality
- an awareness of the reader’s needs
- an understanding of the topic’s demands
- editorial refinements

How do you find your voice? First, name it. Use the parameters below to draft a list of descriptors. Then prune your list to five words. Consider those words later as you revise your proposal for voice.

Your Personality

How do you view the world? Write down a few descriptive words. Use these prompts to get you started: Are you irreverent? Silly? Bitter? (Hope not!) Philosophical? Serious? What attitude do you have in a conversation when you feel most “you”?

The Reader’s Needs

Voice in nonfiction is filtered. You write to be read by a specific audience. Write down a few words describing your readers. Are they new to your subject? Are they young and informed? Influenced by popular culture? Are they sports fans? History buffs? Academics? Master chefs? Busy moms? Are they provincial or worldly?

The Demands of the Topic

The best proposals are written with integrity, which we define as cohesion between structure, style, content, and subject matter. A casual, conversational voice may or may not be suited to serious literary subjects. Does your subject require authority? Credibility? Humor? Distance? Immediacy?

EDIT FOR VOICE

Once you've completed your descriptor list, pare it down to five words. Incorporate the voice you've described by noting and adjusting the following elements.

- **LEVEL OF LANGUAGE:**
 - Is your prose concrete or abstract?
 - Do you use big or little words?
 - Do you sound scholarly or conversational?
- **REFERENCES AND JARGON:** Where do you get your examples and references: Shakespeare, YouTube—or both? Will the busy middle-aged mom you've targeted understand your millennial jargon (“on fleek,” anyone)? Is your topic-specific terminology understandable to those outside your field? If you seek an international audience, are your references translatable? Will your reader understand your jokes?
- **IMMEDIACY AND IMMERSION:** Do you want your reader to connect with you immediately and closely? Using the first-person point of view rather than third person strongly influences the proposal-reading experience.
- **STYLE:** Is your preferred style of language poetic or journalistic? Is it consistent?
- **AGENDA:** Do you have an agenda? Is a strong political point of view important to you and your audience? Or do you need to edit out strident text to hold on to your middle-of-the-road reader?

- **CADENCE:** Read your proposal aloud. Voice is more than words; it’s also rhythm. Do you write long sentences? A mix? One-sentence paragraphs for emphasis?
- **CONSISTENCY:** Have you sustained your voice in your chapter titles and headings?

Read through the samples in this book as well as passages from your favorite books. Analyze them. The strongest writing evokes a passionate, individual writer—somebody you’d like to meet and whom, in fact, you feel you already know.

Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal

by Mary Roach (W.W. Norton & Company)

Mary Roach infuses every aspect of her books, from chapter titles to text, with her personality. We know (we think) what she would be like at a cocktail party: curious, smart, down-to-earth and funny. Her chapter titles are no exception.

Chapter Two: I’ll Have the Putrescine: Your Pet Is Not Like You

Chapter Four: The Longest Meal: Can Thorough Chewing Lower the National Debt?

Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void

by Mary Roach (W.W. Norton & Company)

Jim Lovell is best known as the commander of Apollo 13: the man with the problem. As anyone who’s seen the Tom Hanks movie knows, an oxygen tank exploded on the way to the moon, knocking out power in the command module and forcing Lovell and his two crewmates to hunker down in the lunar module for four days, with limited oxygen, water, and heat.

For forty years, people have been coming up to Lovell saying, “My God, what an ordeal!” I said that to him, too but not in reference to Apollo 13. I was talking about Gemini 7. Two men. Two weeks. No bathing. Same underwear. Inside a pressure suit, inside a capsule so cramped that Lovell could not straighten his legs.

Halfway to Heaven: My White-Knuckled—and Knuckleheaded—Quest for the Rocky Mountain High

by Mark Obmascik (Simon & Schuster)

This excerpt from Mark’s proposal—used verbatim in the first chapter of his book—illustrates voice in memoir. Notice the voice carries through from the chapter title and chapter-opening callouts to the text.

Chapter 1

Failure

GRAYS PEAK 14,278'

TORREYS PEAK 14,275'

There's one thing harder than climbing a Fourteener: waking up a preteener to climb a Fourteener. Because nothing scares me more than lightning, I insist on an alpine start—on the trailhead before dawn to get off the top of the peak by noon to beat Colorado's regular afternoon thunderstorms. Which all means I must somehow wrestle our twelve-year-old out of bed by 4 A.M.

After nudging, shaking, rocking, bouncing, and rolling, he's still not moving. I threaten the nuclear option—Kelly Clarkson, shrieking "Since U Been Gone," through his iPod headphones—but he knows it's an empty threat. No man can stomach an American Idol two hours before sunrise. So I try another tack and ask him simply, please. Magically, it works. Plus, I promise food.

Cravings: Recipes for all the Food You Want to Eat

by Chrissy Teigen (Random House)

These days, voice isn't an optional ingredient in cookbooks.

LEMONY ARUGULA SPAGHETTI CACIO E PEPE

Some say love conquers all, but I say cacio e pepe does. It's true, John and I fell for each other and got married in Lake Como, Italy, but it's also where I became a slave for this pasta dish, which is super peppery and cheesy and is basically the boss of me whenever I make it. At first I was a little worried: Since I first tasted it when I was all gooey-romancey in Italia, would it weather the trip home? *Did I have pasta goggles on?* Thankfully, I adore it as much now as I did then—even more, actually. Which is a good thing to be able to say about pasta recipes as well as husbands.

FORMAT FOR ALL DEVICES

Design your proposal impeccably. A messy or confusing proposal is a rejected proposal.

Appearance matters in book proposals. A poorly presented document signifies a lack of professionalism, which tells the publisher you are not a trustworthy colleague. Your proposal reflects the effort you will devote to writing and promoting your book.

Before sending out your proposal for feedback, format it appropriately.

HOT TIP

The best formatting is invisible. It simply feels professional and shifts all focus to your concept.

DESIGN STANDARDS

Nobody has carved rules into some tablet about how proposals should be formatted, but use the standards on the next page and you won't alienate any readers. Although Jody has sold humor books in the detested Comic Sans font and has been known to send out physical proposals with sparkly stickers, these are exceptions. Generally speaking: Don't get fancy.

Spacing

- **LINE SPACING:** Double-space everything except your contact information.
- **PARAGRAPH SPACING:** Do not add extra spaces between paragraphs.
- **ABOVE NEW SECTION HEADERS:** Varies with your aesthetic

Page Layout

- **INDENTS:** Flush left first lines under section heads; otherwise indent.
- **MARGINS:** Standard margins (1" on sides, top, and bottom)

- **JUSTIFICATION:** Align text to the left.
- **HEADERS AND FOOTERS:** None on the title page. Use headers or footers, not both. List page number and your last name, but the book title is optional.
- **PAGE NUMBERING:** Number consecutively (including pizzazz pages). Numbering starts on the title page, which technically is page one, but the numbering on that page is hidden.
- **FRAMEWORK PAGES:** See later in this chapter.

Font

- **BODY TEXT:** Times New Roman or equivalent, in 12-point type
- **SECTION HEADINGS:** Bold and centered, in 14-point type
- **A-LEVEL SUBHEADINGS:** Bold and flush left, in 12-point type
- **B-LEVEL SUBHEADINGS:** Italics, underlined, and flush left, in 12-point type

HOT TIP

Don't include anything that will prevent readers from reading your first word to the last, ideally without stopping. Place links thoughtfully. Avoid footnotes and asterisks unless they are a component of your voice, like a funny aside in your humor book.

FRAMEWORK PAGES

Framework pages are stand-alone pages that provide context for readers: the title page, the proposal contents page, and optional divider pages. Design them as follows and you won't go wrong.

Title Page

About 4" from the top of the page, type and center the following:

TITLE [roman, all caps, 18-point type]
Subtitle [italics, title case, 16-point type]
 [blank double-spaced line]
 By Yours Truly [roman, title case, 16-point type]

Add your degrees after your name, or if you're currently in academia, type your title on the next line like so: "Professor of Psychology, Stanford University." If you have a foreword, add a blank double-spaced line, and then type:

Foreword by Foreword Writer, Credentials [roman, title case, 16-point type]

Near the bottom of the page, list your contact information, single-spaced and flush left:

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Day and Evening Phone Numbers

Website

Blog

E-mail Address

Social Network Addresses

Proposal Contents Page

Many proposals contain two formal tables of contents: one that outlines the contents of the proposal and one listing the book's chapter titles. The proposal contents page—called either the "Proposal Table of Contents" or "Proposal Contents"—is placed at the beginning of the proposal just after the title page (or after the pizzazz if you include it).

Don't list the title page in your proposal contents. List each section flush left, and indent subsections. Include only crucial subsections to which you want editors to have one-click access. Although your proposal should have many context-providing headings—like "Social Media" and "Public Speaking" within your platform section—don't clutter your proposal contents page with them.

Create digital links connecting each item in the proposal contents to its corresponding section, and list page numbers on which each item begins. The example below is for a narrative nonfiction book.

Proposal Contents

Book Prologue	1
Overview	7
About the Book	10
Author Bio	12
Platform	14
Comps and Audience	16
Book Table of Contents	19
Detailed Outline	21
Sample Writing	26
Supplemental Material	56

Divider Pages

When all proposals were submitted on paper, writers placed a divider page between the sales sections and the editorial sections to make the writing simple to find. This page was completely blank except for one or two lines of copy. You can still use a digital divider page to separate the sales information from the heart of the proposal—your writing—and to call attention to the beautiful words that follow. A few samples:

Let the Wind Blow Through You

by Joseph Marshall III (Viking)

Contents, Introduction

and

Sample Stories

The Rock of Anzio

by Flint Whitlock (Basic Books)

Detailed Chapter Outline

and

Sample Chapter

She Flies Without Wings, A Memoir

by Mary Midkiff (Delacorte Press)

Chapter Outline and Sample Text

Skeletons on the Zahara

by Dean King (Little, Brown)

SAMPLE WRITING

DEVICE MATTERS: DIGITALLY READ PROPOSALS

When we read printouts of proposals, we flip back and forth between sections without realizing it. It's just not natural to flip through text on a device, no matter how many strategic links have been embedded. This has changed proposal structures, as we've noted throughout this book. Because proposals on devices are read in a more linear fashion, they should be front-loaded with key information. Prose-driven books open with compelling stories; promotion-driven works open with key sales points.

Here's the bottom line: It's tough to keep editors' heads in your world in a digital proposal. Correct formatting can help; here are some tips.

- As suggested earlier in this chapter, use the hyperlink function in your word-processing program to link contents to corresponding sections. Many such programs include an option to automatically generate linked tables of contents.
- Employ other links thoughtfully so as not to disrupt the flow. Some studies report that links in e-books can be more distracting than helpful; this applies to proposals, too. Link each item once, in its first appearance. Group links should be included where possible at the end of the associated section or in supplemental material rather than scattered throughout.
- Don't embed video into your proposal—link to it instead.
- Share heavily illustrated proposals through a file-sharing mechanism like Dropbox. Discuss the delivery system first via e-mail with the interested editor or agent.
- Watch out for Word 2016's collapsing content! When you employ heading styles in recent versions of Word, sometimes the Word demons take it on themselves to collapse all the writing under a given heading so it effectively disappears. Doublecheck that everything in your proposal is visible, and consider replacing those auto-headers with manually-created versions (highlight the text and choose a font). Automatically-generated headers are great for organizing a proposal (see [chapter six](#)), but maybe not-so-great for final.

Most proposals are submitted digitally in Word as e-mail attachments, but you may be surprised to learn that many New York editors still print out your proposal.

Those same editors will, however, share your proposal digitally with others in their companies. This means your proposal must read just as well—and be just as accessible and interesting—whether it is read on a device or on paper.

PRINTED PROPOSALS AND SELF-PUBLISHED PROPOSALS

If you're asked to send a printed version of your proposal, follow these submission standards:

- Use 8½" × 11" paper, printed on one side of the page.
- Don't use staples, paperclips, or any form of binding.
- Place the proposal in a double-pocket portfolio. Place your cover letter and sales sections on one side and writing samples, illustrations, and supporting documents on the other.

If submitting a self-published book proposal, use a double-pocket portfolio. Place the book inside one pocket with the supplemental material and the proposal and a cover letter on the other.

When you submit any material in a folder, put a label on the front of the folder, with your book title and name printed on it.

USE FEEDBACK AND PINGS TO REJECTION-PROOF YOUR PROPOSAL

“I love criticism just as long as it’s unqualified praise.”

—NOËL COWARD

You’ve drafted your proposal, pulled it together, and edited for voice. Now it’s time to make it rejection-proof. Start by getting out of your head and reconnecting with the world!

Marty Asher, editor-at-large for Knopf/Random House, believes in putting finished work under the bed for three months so you can look at it again with fresh eyes before submitting it. For a proposal, three weeks is probably plenty—but do step away for a bit. We all develop tunnel vision that impairs our ability to judge our work objectively.

So take a break from writing. Keep the process moving forward by enlisting trusted readers to provide objective advice on how to improve your work.

WHERE TO FIND READERS

Proposal readers can give you valuable feedback, a less biased viewpoint, or a few words of much-needed encouragement. Here’s where to find them.

1. **ASK FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** Let your friends and family encourage you. They will tell you they like the proposal because they like you.
2. **ASK FELLOW WRITERS.** Offer to read their work in return.
3. **JOIN A CRITIQUE GROUP.** Join or start a critique group, online or off. Try to find a group that includes a few published writers. You may need to try more than one group until you find one that gives you what you need and whose members will benefit from your advice.
4. **ASK YOUR AUDIENCE.** Potential buyers of your book know what they like. Would they buy your book if they found it in a bookstore?

5. **ASK OTHER OBJECTIVE READERS.** Even without knowing the subject, they can help with your writing.
6. **ASK EXPERTS IN YOUR FIELD.** Approach people in your field, including authors of competing titles. If you're presenting a controversial idea, ask people who oppose it to attempt to poke holes in your argument. You may not convert them, but you might earn their respect and avoid embarrassment later.
7. **HIRE A FREELANCE EDITOR.** If you can't find free help, hire it. Copyeditors look for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors; developmental or line editors (also called substantive editors) edit for flow, structure, logic, clarity, and appeal. Book doctors rewrite. The nomenclature can be confusing and sometimes even used differently by different people; make sure to ask any freelancer to clearly define the scope of what she does before you hire her.

Freelance editors charge either a flat fee or an hourly rate that ranges from fifteen dollars (for copyeditors) to more than two-hundred dollars (for top developmental editors). If you need a developmental editor, hire someone who has worked at a publishing company or has otherwise been directly involved with traditionally published books. Ask for references. Someone with an MFA may know language but won't know what publishers seek. And bear in mind that an editor is only one reader. The more readers you can enlist, the better.

When you find an editor you want to hire, ask for an assessment of the proposal and an estimate of what it will cost to edit it; factor in what it might cost to check your revision. Most editors will mark up a few pages of your work on spec to help you decide.

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR READERS

HOT TIP

Write the words "Spare the reader, not the writer!" in large letters on every copy of the proposal or manuscript you share.

When you send out your proposal for critiques, include a note listing the areas on which you'd like feedback. Ask readers to:

1. Mark the “ping.” Are you bored, confused, skeptical, or impatient?
2. Rate each section and the proposal overall on a scale of one to ten,
3. Call out repetitive and contradictory text,
4. Note editorial issues,
5. Provide personal feedback.

1. Mark the Ping

“There can be as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis.”

—MALCOLM GLADWELL, *BLINK*

True story: Jody has never forgotten—for reasons you’ll soon understand—an opinion piece on romance she read long ago in the *Chicago Tribune*. The guy who wrote the essay talked about how when you first meet someone, you feel but ignore those gut-level “pings” that tell you the girl may be wonderful but not quite “the one.” The pings always come back to haunt you, usually by the fifth date. After reading the piece, Jody wisely decided to pay attention to “pings” but only when assessing queries and proposals. (“Why *wisely*?” you might ask. Well, at the time it seemed better not to dwell on pings in romance, given that the fellow who wrote the column had just broken up with *her*.)

Moving on! Our guts ping us before our minds register problems, in writing as well as in love. You don’t want the editors and agents courting your proposal to feel a single ping.

Ask your readers to skim your proposal and to make a little check mark—or insert a digital bookmark—next to spots where they sense something isn’t working. Do they feel bored, confused, skeptical, or impatient? Tell your readers they don’t need to figure out what’s causing the ping. If they do have an idea, though, they can jot down a word or two in the margins or in a digital note.

HOT TIP

IMPATIENCE AND EXPECTATIONS

Impatience while reading is a tip-off that the writer has set up certain expectations and not fulfilled them or raised questions but never answered them. For example, you may have bragged about your YouTube followers in your overview but not provided numbers in your platform.

“The best proposals elicit the fewest questions. Why? Because you’ve anticipated and answered them all.”

—JANE VON MEHREN, *EDITORS ON EDITING*

2. Rate Each Section and the Proposal

Ask readers to rate individual sections and the complete proposal on a scale of one to ten for content, impact, and enjoyment. Scales provide a distance that might encourage readers to give feedback. You can also ask for ratings of specific things that trouble you, such as the effectiveness of an anecdote or chapter title.

3. Call Out Repetitive and Contradictory Text

Both repetition and contradiction can be invisible to the writer yet obvious to the objective reader. Both give editors reasons to reject.

4. Note Editorial Issues

Ask readers to mark errors they spy in grammar, word use, punctuation, or other editorial elements.

5. Provide Personal Feedback

If appropriate, ask readers to share any personal anecdotes or reactions inspired by your proposal. This is valuable information you can use in discussions about your proposal with agents and editors.

USING FEEDBACK

Because people’s reactions are subjective, receiving critiques from various sources will prepare you for the range of responses you’ll receive about your book. Trust your instincts. Critique your proposal as if you were one of your readers, and then sift through conflicting or confusing suggestions, following only the advice that makes sense to you. The following information will help you get the most out of your feedback.

- Your work needs *macroeditors* and *microeditors*. Your readers will usually be more adept at one skill than another:
 - Macroeditors are right-brained individuals who notice issues with concept, titles and subtitles, structure, and overall impact with ease.
 - Microeditors are left-brained people who can spot errors in words, punctuation marks, and sentences.
- Approach revision as a series of steps, not a onetime editing fest. Get feedback after each round of revision.
- People love to see their names in print, so assure readers you will mention them on the acknowledgments page and give them an autographed copy of your book after its release.
- If you're sending a hard copy of the proposal, accompany it with a good-quality red-ink pen.
- When you negotiate the sale of your book, ask your publisher if they will give you promotional copies at no cost for people who have given you feedback on your proposal and manuscript.
- See if you can get one or more of your readers to at least skim this book before reading your proposal so they can judge if you have provided editors what they need.

TOP TEN PROPOSAL KILLERS

Do unto publishers as you would like them to do unto you. Act as professionally in all aspects of your proposal presentation as you hope publishers and agents will act in the publication of your book.

It's been a long journey. You've planned, drafted, customized, revised, and formatted. You've obtained and incorporated feedback. Take a last look before you hit "send," and don't let any of the following easy-to-fix proposal killers get in the way of your publishing career.

Committing one or several of these blunders will make you look like an amateur, a word we hear too often in New York. Publishers want to work with professionals—and so do you!

THE DEAL BREAKERS

1. **WORD WOES AND BROKEN LINKS:** Is your version of Word outdated? Make sure your document is easily opened—with just one click—on all devices, and that switching between devices doesn't screw up the document's formatting. These issues happen more often than you'd think: We request manuscripts only to find ourselves in conversation with the writer about why the document doesn't open. No agent or publisher has time to become a computer coach.

Likewise, make sure all your links within the document and to external websites function, and take readers where you want them to go. And, finally, confirm that Word's auto-heading function hasn't hidden any text (see [chapter thirty-four](#)).

2. **TOO MUCH INFORMATION:** When in doubt, leave it out. Eighty-page proposals aren't admired—they're rejected. Redundant information sends the message that you've run out of things to say (and, yes, we know we've said this before).
3. **TOO LITTLE CONTEXT:** Did you notice how we acknowledged our redundancy in the previous point? Editors will forgive most sins if you state that you're aware you're committing them and provide an explanation or a wink.

4. **BURYING THE LEAD:** If you've read the rest of this book, you can write this sentence for us: "Open with your _____,¹ in the proposal as a whole and within every section." If you intrigue them immediately, they'll cut you some slack on the weaknesses they spy later in the work.
5. **FORGETTING THE OBJECTION:** The most successful proposals anticipate and address the reasons a publisher might say no. Writing in a crowded field? Say, "This field is crazy crowded; it's hard to imagine something could break through the noise, but my book does, because [legitimate reason someone would buy your book here]. Or say, "My platform is not as large as many, but my followers are passionate about my work and increase by 10 percent each week."
6. **MISSING THE MARKET:** A convincing proposal shows an awareness of the book's market in every section. Your author credentials are only important if they are impressive to readers in your genre. A book is competitive only if your reader would buy it instead of yours. Your website is impressive only if readers of your subject matter frequent it.

When uncertain about all things audience related, take a walk through your local bookstore. What makes *you* pick up one book over another? What drives *your* purchasing decision?

7. **MISMATCH:** This problem can be cosmetic or more fundamental. If your credentials don't match your concept—if, for example, you're pitching the definitive book on horror movies but hold a degree in music—the mismatch is cosmetic, but you must find another way to establish your authority. If you're writing a literary memoir but lack the writing chops to elevate the story into universality, this mismatch is more problematic.
8. **POTATOES ARE TOO SMALL:** Small-potatoes support in your proposal convinces publishers you're not ready for prime time. Chop out:
 - Blurbs and forewords from people or media that aren't famous or impressively credentialed.
 - Low-selling small-press and self-published books.
 - Articles you've published on your own, for free, on websites nobody visits or in papers nobody reads.

9. **PLANS ARE TOO BIG:** Step on publishers' toes, and they'll kick you out the door. Chop out:

- **EMPTY PROMISES:** “I’ll build a website”; “I’ll create a TV series”; “I’ll do a TED Talk.” If it hasn’t happened yet, it doesn’t belong in your proposal.
- **WRONGHEADED PLATFORM:** “I’ve created a website for my book; go to www.myunpublishedbook.com to see a sample chapter and book cover.” Just ... no. Build a *private* site to display illustrations for your graphic novel or videos of your speeches, but bragging about a *public* site before you have a publisher shrieks “amateur.” It reveals a deep misunderstanding of both publishing and modern branding. A bookselling website without a published book announces to the world that you’re writing a book nobody can yet find in a bookstore; it highlights publicly what should be a semiprivate transaction between you and those you will work with in the publishing industry.
- **SILLY SUGGESTIONS:** “I’ll arrange my own bookstore tour”; “My book is a great vehicle for the next Ryan Reynolds movie.”
- **AMATEURISH STATEMENTS:** “I know publishers’ promo budgets are small, so I’ll pay for whatever needs to be done” sounds uninformed. “I’ll buy back as many books as I need to cover all publishing costs” means you seek a vanity publisher. “I wish to interview all interested publishers/agents before I make a decision” sounds pompous. When in doubt, go back to the golden rule at the beginning of this chapter.

10. **DISHONESTY; HEDGES:** Proposals aren’t politicians. Tell it like it is.

BONUS PROPOSAL KILLER: Saying, “I’ve worked with a professional editor. My book will be professionally edited.” This is a personal beef that Jody shares with many agents and editors. Working with a professional editor is neither a selling point nor a unique sign of professionalism. Publishing execs expect your book to be well edited, by you or someone else. We care about the end result, not how you got there. Offering to hire an outside person is overreach; publishers like the editors they’ve already hired.

There are two exceptions:

- If your freelance editor is more writer than editor, you must disclose her participation (see [chapter thirty](#)).
- If your editor is well-known in the publishing industry and will continue to be an integral part of your editorial process or will provide a blurb, you can discuss her involvement as part of the book specs section—not the author bio. Say, “I worked with [editor name] to

edit this proposal; my agreement with her states that if the publisher or agent wishes, I will hire her to work with me on the manuscript as a whole. She has also provided the following blurb.”

EDIT THYSELF

When you've considered all these proposal killers and are ready for your final revision, these exercises will help you catch any lingering mistakes:

- Read your proposal aloud.
- Run your index finger under each word as you read it aloud.
- Proofread your proposal from back to front.
- Read your proposal printed out and on several different devices.

1. "Strongest suit," of course!

Part Six

FIND A HAPPY HOME FOR YOUR BOOK

Mega, Medium, Small, and Hybrid Publishers

Where to Find an Agent

Query Letter Do's and Don'ts

Sell Your Book Without an Agent (10 Steps)

From Proposal to Self-Publishing Plan

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING OPTIONS

“Authors are the talent, and authors are the people who drive the process through their work.”

—GEOFF SHANDLER, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, CUSTOM
HOUSE/HARPERCOLLINS

Adair Lara wrote a lovely little book for Chronicle called *You Know You’re a Writer When ...*. She says that you know you’re a writer when:

- You’ll never forgive your parents for your happy childhood.
- You wonder which is a funnier word for a mineral, *feldspar*, or *potash*.
- There are three empty cereal bowls next to your computer—one for each of the day’s meals.

And, of course, you know you’re a writer when you’re staring at an honest-togoodness publishing contract with your name on it.

This section takes you through the traditional process of publication, from submitting your proposal to landing a book deal. There are more publishers—and more types of publishers—to whom you can submit your proposal than ever before. Yes, the big conglomerates keep eating up other publishers, but small, niche, and hybrid houses continue to spring up to fill the gap.

PUBLISHERS THAT REQUIRE AGENTS

Many publishers do not accept unsolicited proposals; in other words, you need a literary agent to submit your work to them on your behalf.

The Big Five

The New Yorker ran a cartoon by David Sipress that shows an executive standing in front of a room full of employees saying, “We’re still the same great company we’ve always been, only

we've ceased to exist.”

Most American industries are controlled by fewer than ten corporations; publishing is no exception. Most nonfiction bestsellers began their lives as proposals submitted by agents to one of the Big Five New York publishers, all of which are owned by multinational multimedia conglomerates.

The Big Five resulted from mergers and acquisitions of many smaller companies. Each deal prompted a now-predictable series of events: The merged houses continue to do business as usual for six months to a year, and then they turn the acquired or merged company into what's called an “imprint” within the larger company. Imprints usually have clear(-ish) identities based on the taste of the individual who runs it—for example, “Pamela Dorman Books” of Viking Penguin/Penguin Random House, or “Emily Bestler Books” of Atria/Simon & Schuster—or the types of books the imprint published when it was an independent company. Imprints often keep the name of the original publisher, like “Viking” or “Doubleday.” Eventually—usually about a year after the requisite press release that says “things won't change”—duplicative imprints disappear and jobs get lost. The Big Five publishers each publish under scores of imprints, representing the detritus of so many once-flourishing smaller presses. Fortunately you don't have to keep it all straight; the Big Five only work with agents, and your agent will explain who is who:¹

1. Hachette Book Group, USA: A subsidiary of the French media-conglomerate Lagardère
2. HarperCollins Publishers: An American division of Rupert Murdoch's global media company News Corp.
3. Macmillan Publishers: A subsidiary of Germany's Holtzbrinck Publishing Group
4. Penguin Random House, jointly owned by Bertelsmann and Pearson
5. Simon & Schuster, a division of CBS

Midsized Publishers

Midsized publishers are smaller in size than the Big Five publishers, but they're still pretty big, and, like the Big Five, they don't accept unagented submissions. The publication process at midsized companies is exactly the same as that at the larger houses, and many midsized publishers are just as prestigious, in some cases more so. They're becoming rare, as they are often targets of aggressive acquisition by the bigger houses. Examples include W.W. Norton & Company and Sourcebooks.

THE ACQUISITION PROCESS AT MAJOR PUBLISHING COMPANIES

At midsize and Big Five publishers, agents send your proposal to handpicked editors. If the editor is interested, he must jump through many hoops before he gets the okay to make an offer on your book. It can get complicated—for them, not for you—as the editors may need to make sure they're not bidding against someone else at the same company. Here are a few insider views:

“The acquisition process varies with the internal culture of each house. Some publishers have a process that involves numerous people reading; some don’t.

“I read the proposal—I know quickly whether I’m interested—and share it with my publicity director—and we decide together whether we wish to move forward and make an offer. If we do, we think seriously about how we can sell it and how many copies we can sell. Then we put together a P&L [a profit-and-loss statement]. Sometimes we’ll talk with the author. Imprints at big houses often need to check with other imprints to determine who can bid.”

—GEOFF SHANDLER, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, CUSTOM HOUSE/HARPERCOLLINS

“In my last job, we had to fill out forms based on the proposal that included a summary of the book and comp titles. We sent the proposal and the form to all editorial colleagues who came to the ed board.

“In my current job, it’s a fairly limited distribution. I read the proposal quickly, and if I’m excited about it, I have to get my editorial director and publisher to read it. If there’s a significant publicity hook, I’ll ask the publicity department to read it; if there’s subrights potential, I’ll get input from that department as well. I use this feedback to create my P&L.

“The proposal is discussed at our editorial board meeting but isn’t disseminated to the whole board in advance.”

—SENIOR EDITOR AND VICE PRESIDENT, BIG FIVE PUBLISHER

“If I love a proposal, I’ll e-mail it to the large group of editorial-meeting members—who are scattered around the country—right away, which includes editorial staff, publicity, marketing, and the publisher.

“If I’m less certain, I’ll do a more limited circulation. Sometimes, if it’s not right for me, another editor may take it over. Our company is very generous about finding the right editor for each project.”

—RENEE SEDLIAR, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, DA CAPO PRESS/HACHETTE
BOOKS

PUBLISHERS THAT ACCEPT UNAGENTED SUBMISSIONS

Agents focus on the Big Five and midsize publishers, who typically pay the largest advances. But you can submit your proposal directly to small, niche, regional, and university presses. The smaller the house, the more books they buy directly from writers. While a big house may have more clout, it can be better for your career in the long term to be published with attentiveness by a small house and succeed than to be published by a big house and get lost in the shuffle.

Small press is the term for a publishing company that is owned independently. Small presses typically pay small or no advances and can be reputable or disreputable. Publishing has now become an easy business to enter. It doesn’t cost much to say you’re a publisher and start popping e-books up on Amazon, and there are no regulations or rules. In [chapter forty](#) you’ll learn how to find and submit to small presses. For now, here are descriptions and a few words of caution. Trustworthy small presses include:

- **UNIVERSITY PRESSES** associated with established institutions
- **PUBLISHING ARMS** of well-established, nonacademic institutions, companies, and conference providers
- **PUBLISHERS OF PRINT BOOKS, SUCH AS REGIONAL PRESSES** that have been in business longer than five years and work with sales forces that get their books

into bookstores. Examples include Sasquatch Books, Shambhala Publications, BenBella Books, Quirk Books, Coffee House Press, and Graywolf Press.

Small presses that fall outside these categories require your careful assessment. Jody is a big fan of Victoria Strauss's Writer Beware blog (www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware), which works to protect authors by providing lists of predatory businesses and people, and advice about how to assess small presses, agents, and service providers. Check potential publishers against her "thumbs down" list. You'll also want to closely scrutinize publishers that fall within these categories.

- **E-BOOK-ONLY PUBLISHERS:** Some digital-only publishers are terrific; others are fly-by-night and unstable.
- **HYBRIDS:** These small publishers involve authors in the business of publishing to a larger degree than traditional houses. They may, for example, pay royalties on e-books only after they've deducted some production costs. The best hybrid publishers are those that publish selectively, *never* expect out-of-pocket payments from authors, and make up for the author's participation in costs by paying larger royalties or sharing the profits. The worst hybrid publishers are vanity presses in disguise. They claim they are as selective as traditional publishers, but they make the author pay for everything, from editing to press releases. We say if you have to pay, run away. Make sure any small press's print books are frequently reviewed by major *fee-free* reviewers and are known to and welcomed by booksellers.

HOT TIP

When searching online for terms like *publishing* or *small press*, if you see an ad for a publisher ("Want to get published?"), stay away from it. Legitimate presses of all sizes are inundated with submissions and don't need to get writers' attention through pop-up advertisements.

1. Want to know for yourself? Find an up-to-date file tree of all major publishers and imprints on Michael Cader's www.publishersmarketplace.com.

THE LITERARY AGENT

“A literary agent always wants to fall in love. There is nothing in ‘Bookland’ that is more enticing than a debut author: No bad sales figures! Endless potential! The drama of discovery! In other words, we want you to be our Cinderella, we want the slipper to fit, and when it does, we will commit with all our heart.”

—LIZA DAWSON, AGENT, LIZA DAWSON ASSOCIATES

A writer sent his manuscript to an agent, and when he didn’t hear back, he wrote her this letter: “Please respond immediately, as I have other irons in the fire.” Shortly after that, he received a note saying, “We have considered your manuscript and advise you to put it with the other irons.”

This chapter will help you avoid getting burned. We’ll take a look at the fundamental services that agents perform for their clients, and then we’ll provide guidance for finding one.

THE ROLES OF THE AGENT

Agents handle the business aspects of your writing career. As noted in the previous chapter, if you want to work with a major publisher, you must use an agent. With smaller presses, you can represent yourself. But having an agent can give you a leg up with publishers big and small: Editors respond more quickly to submissions from agents, and agents usually have more influence with publishers than do individual writers. Your agent can be a stable element in your career when editors change jobs.

Like publishers, agents are motivated by love and money. They need big books to make big bucks. They also love to get excited about their books and authors. The ideal agent plays the following roles:

- **RISK-TAKER AND TRUE BELIEVER:** Most agents work for a 15 percent commission and don’t get paid until you do (which can take years). This setup requires the agent to

have a great deal of faith in the authors they choose to represent.

- **MEDIATOR:** She communicates between two realities, you and the marketplace.
- **EDITORIAL GUIDE:** He provides edits himself or a connection to a trustworthy editor. Remember: The agent's reputation is on the line with every submission. It's as much in his interest as yours that your proposal be stellar.
- **MARKETER:** Your agent helps you brand yourself and your concept, providing advice and trusted resources for building your platform.
- **MATCHMAKER:** An agent knows which editors and publishers to submit to and which to avoid.
- **FINANCIAL PROTECTOR:** She oversees the licensing of all rights to your literary property, from calendars to large-print editions to translations to film to enhanced e-books to audiobooks.
- **DEAL MAKER:** He strategically submits your proposal to encourage and manage bidding wars. There's a world of difference between a yes and the best possible yes.
- **CONTRACT NEGOTIATOR:** Your agent hammers out the most favorable possible contract for your working marriage with your publisher.
- **REPRESENTATIVE AND LIAISON:** Agents help you answer editorial, financial, production, and promotional questions that arise throughout the publication process.
- **BOOKKEEPER AND OFFICE MANAGER:** He reviews royalty statements, issues checks, and keeps track of paperwork.
- **ADVOCATE:** When problems—a rejected manuscript, a bad cover design, a fired editor—arise, your agent will support your best interests.
- **CHEERLEADER:** An agent wants you and your books to succeed.
- **RAINMAKER:** She may be able to obtain assignments for future books from editors or come up with ideas for you.
- **MENTOR:** He can advise you about your writing and your career.
- **OASIS OF ENCOURAGEMENT:** She is a source of solace and nourishment in what may be a desert of rejection.

WHERE TO FIND AN AGENT

Writers often ask us where agents can be found; in fact, reliable and thorough lists of reputable agents are as close as your computer. Here's where to look.

- **YOUR WRITING COMMUNITY:** The writers you know, online and off, will recommend agents.
- **THE ASSOCIATION OF AUTHORS' REPRESENTATIVES (AAR)** (www.aaronline.org): Agents who are members of this organization are required to actively sell books to publishers and follow the AAR's code of ethics.
- **PUBLISHERS MARKETPLACE** (www.publishersmarketplace.com): This resource provides deal news and agent info for a fee.
- **AGENT WEBSITES:** Love a writer? Search online for his name and the words *literary agent*. When you find an interesting agent online, head to her website and read it closely. Different agents have different areas of interests and submission requirements.
- **ONLINE DIRECTORIES AND FORUMS:** You'll find a wealth of agent directories online, as well as publishing and writing forums on which writers hold nothing back, like the free AgentQuery (www.agentquery.com) and Predators & Editors (www.pred-ed.com) sites. Find interesting interviews with agents who are looking for clients on Writers Digest's comprehensive website (www.writersdigest.com). Search for active agents on Writer's Market (www.writersmarket.com), which requires a subscription.
- **LITERARY EVENTS:** Writing classes, readings, lectures, seminars, book signings, writers conferences, and book festivals present opportunities to meet and learn about agents and publishers.

HOT TIP

You don't have to attend a writers conference to access its list of featured agents. All major conferences post upcoming and past agent presenters on their websites, often with bios, areas of interest, and contact info.

- **BOOKS ABOUT AGENTS:** Many guides to agents are published and updated yearly. Before submitting, however, check the agent's websites to confirm guidelines.
- **OTHER BOOKS:** Check the dedication and acknowledgment pages of books like yours. Grateful authors thank their editors and agents (always a good idea).
- **MAGAZINES:** *Publishers Weekly*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Writer*, and *Poets & Writers* have articles by and about agents. *Publishers Weekly* also reports on recent deals. If you don't want to splurge on a subscription, read these publications at the library or select articles online.

- **YOU:** Let agents or publishers find you. Be visible online and off. Publish articles and op-eds, give talks, and publicize your work and yourself. When your fame hits a tipping point or something you do pops up in major media, agents and editors will knock on your door.

FIND AN AGENT STEP BY STEP

HOT TIP

To find out how to make yourself irresistible to agents and publishers, see Mike's book *How to Get a Literary Agent*.

In *Really Important Stuff My Kids Have Taught Me*, Cynthia L. Copeland wrote, “Just ... keep banging until someone opens the door.” This advice applies especially to the agent hunt—persistence is key. To find a literary agent, follow these steps.

1. Write your proposal.
2. Research potential agents.
3. Write an irresistible query letter (see the following chapter).
4. Submit your query to your top twenty agents. Follow the submission guidelines of the agents you contact.
5. If your query consistently receives no reply or a form letter, stop the process and get help on your query. Something needs changing.
6. If an agent asks to see your proposal, send it (see the next chapter for guidance).
7. If the agent offers a written agreement, read it closely and feel free to ask questions.
8. Chat with the interested agent to test the chemistry and to ensure the agent's communication style will mesh with your personality and needs.
9. If you get multiple offers for representation, choose the best agent based on passion, personality, performance, and experience in your subject area.

YOUR QUERY LETTER

The Hook, the Book, and the Cook

“I’m collecting rejections on a city-by-city basis, and San Francisco has come up.”

—FROM A QUERY LETTER MIKE ONCE RECEIVED

Here’s an eye-opening statistic: Active agencies receive more than *twenty thousand* query letters each year. Some agencies attempt to respond to each individually, and others respond only if interested. Agents have no obligation, not even an ethical one, to respond to your unsolicited query.

Some social-media-savvy agents handle the overload by hosting query parties, in which they open up for queries every few months, for several weeks, and promote the event through social media. Some agencies accept only snail-mail queries and answer only those that include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE).

However your query arrives at the agency, it must stand out from the other 19,999. How can you accomplish such a feat? By using three simple but important ingredients: *professionalism*, *suitability*, and *intrigue*. The same holds true for queries you send directly to publishers.

HOT TIP

Your query letter has one central purpose: to get the agent or publisher to request more material.

Every word of your query must convince agents or editors to read the next word. Your query letter doesn’t have to be funny or imaginative, but it must adhere to the submission requirements posted on each agent’s or publisher’s website. Many agents ask that you paste sample writing into the bottom of your query email; the amount of material varies with each agent. Read those guidelines carefully.

Your query must propose the kind of book the agent represents or the publisher publishes; it must be error-free and respectful. It must provide enough information to pique the reader's interest and no more.

QUERY LETTER FORMAT

Agent Katharine Sands says that the writing you do *about* your writing can be as important as the writing itself. She's right. And the first step to making a great first impression is to master the query letter's structure and format:

- **E-MAIL SUBJECT LINE:** Follow agency guidelines. Most ask you to write “query” in the subject line. If you have a *legitimate* personal recommendation, write: “Query: referred by [John Grisham].”
- **SALUTATION:** When in doubt, go formal: “Dear Mr. Larsen,” not “Hello, Mike.” For snail-mail queries, use standard business letter formatting.
- **LENGTH:** Your query letter should be one-page long, divided into three to four paragraphs.
- **SPACING:** Single-space your letter, with an extra space between each paragraph.
- **CONTACT INFORMATION:** List your contact info—name, address, phone, e-mail, and social-media links—either at the top of the letter or under your name at the bottom.

THE HOOK, THE BOOK, AND THE COOK

HOT TIP

Agent Janet Reid analyzes select query letters and posts comments and revisions on her website, www.queryshark.blogspot.com. Even though the queries are for novels, a few hours stalking her sharp comments will hone your query-writing skills like nothing else.

Without sounding self-serving or contrived, the query describes the why, what, and who: the hook, the book, and the cook.

The Hook: The First Sentences

Whatever will grab the agent's positive attention belongs in the first sentence of your query. Here's a strong hint: The procedures manual for new assistants in Jody's office contains this instruction: "Please bring to her immediate attention any query from someone who knows Jody or is recommended by someone who knows Jody." An effective hook typically includes the reason you're writing this agent specifically:

- **WHERE YOU MET:** "We met at the xxx conference last [date]."
- **THE NAME OF SOMEONE *THE AGENT KNOWS*, WHO SUGGESTED YOU CONTACT THE AGENT:** "[Name] suggested I write"
- **THE BOOK THAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THE LETTER, IN WHICH THE AGENT IS ACKNOWLEDGED:** "I'm a huge fan of [author's name]; in fact, reading [book title] inspired me to get in touch with you"
- **WHERE YOU HEARD THE AGENT SPEAK:** "I heard you speak about [topic] at the [conference name]"
- **WHERE YOU *WILL* HEAR THE AGENT SPEAK AND HOPE TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO DISCUSS YOUR BOOK:** "I will be attending [conference name] and look forward to hearing your presentation on [topic]"
- **HOW YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE AGENT:** "I was so impressed by your thoughts on [topic], which I read in your interview in [blog]"
- **YOUR RESEARCH:** "I was delighted to see on your website that you represent [author name], who ..."

If you don't have a personal connection, open with what is most salable about you or your book. Whether or not you have a personal connection to open with, if anything about your concept is absolutely jaw-dropping, put it at the very beginning of the letter: "When my opt-in e-mail list hit 100,000 people last month, I knew it was time to ..."

The Book: The First or Second Paragraph

Describe your book using the following techniques:

- Lead with your strongest suit. Describe the concept of your book *in the context of the market for the book*. Imagine you're a sales rep with twenty seconds to convince a bookseller that this book will sell to his customers. What must you say before the next rep

knocks on the door? Include the book's title and subtitle if you haven't already mentioned it. Nail the position in the competitive marketplace, without hyperbole.

- If your work is self-published, provide the most compelling sales information and/or convincing reasons there is a real, identifiable audience beyond those people you've been able to reach.

The Cook: You

In your third paragraph, describe:

- your credentials as a writer and your proven expertise in the subject.
- outreach and sales numbers if they're impressive.
- your promotion and book buyback plan if you're writing prescriptive nonfiction, especially business books.
- impressive people who have agreed to provide a foreword or blurb.

The Closing

Readers will get to this point in the query if they are sufficiently intrigued by the rest of the letter. Close with practical information that would disrupt the reading experience otherwise, such as:

- **LINKS TO SOCIAL MEDIA, VIDEOS, ARTICLES ABOUT AND BY YOU, ETC.:** "Below you'll find a link to my website, my published work (with reviews), etc."
- **INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PROPOSAL:** "My proposal is complete"; "My proposal will be ready for your review by [date]." If you have a completed memoir, say so and provide a word count.
- **SUBMISSION INFORMATION AND COMMITMENT TO OFFER AN EXCLUSIVE READ, IF POSSIBLE:** "This is a multiple submission. If you are interested in reading the proposal, I will be happy to give you an exclusive read for three weeks." Check submission guidelines: Some agents even ask that you let them know in your query whether your work has been seen and rejected by other agents! Many academic publishers ask the same question.
- **END WITH GRATITUDE, PROFESSIONALISM, AND A CALL TO ACTION:** "Please e-mail or call me if you would like to see my full proposal. Thank you for

considering.”

Query Letter Dos and Don'ts

- **DON'T** be coy. Teasers don't belong in queries. If you say, “My idea is so hot I can't write about it here, but e-mail me back and I'll tell you,” don't be surprised by your empty inbox.
- **DON'T** send anything to more than one person at the same agency or publisher. Mike and his partner, Elizabeth, receive enough submissions sent to both of them to convince him that some knave out there is suggesting writers do it. Duplication makes a bad impression.
- **DON'T** send anything to a company at large. Send queries to a specific editor at a publishing company and to a specific agent at an agency.
- **DO** check the agent's or publisher's website to verify the contact information of the person to whom you are submitting.
- **DO** track all your submissions; we notice when we're sent the same query twice.
- **DON'T** follow up on an unsolicited query unless you're certain there is a chance it didn't arrive. Agents who don't respond aren't interested.
- **DON'T** use mass-query-mailing services or mass mail your own query. We know when we're getting a generic query.
- **DON'T** offer contrived empathy, such as “I know that you must be deluged by submissions, but ...”
- **DO** proof your query on different e-mail services and software. As a test, send it to several friends. Some e-mail software can really mess up a query. Your beautiful document can look like a ransom note on the other end.
- **DON'T** describe more than one project at a time. Saying “I've written the following books; please tell me which you would like to see” is the kiss of death in a query.
- **DON'T** attach material to your query letter—nobody will open it.
- **DON'T** send us a query for your “nonfiction novel.”

IF THE *AGENT* SAYS YES ...

Ask the agent reasonable questions, such as:

- “Would you like me to send the proposal in Word or as a PDF file?”
- “May I send you a link to my Dropbox file? The files may be too large to e-mail.”
- “Would you like an exclusive review?”

If the answer is yes to that last question, make sure you politely provide a deadline: “I’m so excited that you’ve asked to see my proposal! Would a three-week period of exclusivity be acceptable to you?”

Send your proposal with an e-mailed cover letter. Begin your letter with “Many thanks for your interest in ...” or some other direct reminder that the agent indeed asked for the material. Close with a reminder that his time with your work is limited: “You will have this exclusively until [date]. I’ll touch base before I send elsewhere; thanks for understanding.”

HOT TIP

Even though agents will work with you to perfect your proposal, the proposal you send to them should be, in your mind, already perfect. As Jeff Kleinman of Folio Literary Management says, “You may have a drawer full of fabulous yet-to-be-published manuscripts, but only tell us about the one you feel is the most polished, the most ready to go.”

IF THE *PUBLISHER* SAYS YES ...

Don’t mention anything about exclusivity. If the publisher makes an offer and other publishers are interested, you’re in a negotiation (see the following chapter).

40

SELL YOUR BOOK WITHOUT AN AGENT

THE GOLDEN RULES FOR SELLING YOUR BOOK ON YOUR OWN

- Research all potential publishers.
- Follow their submission guidelines.
- Get help with the contract.

If you can't find an agent or if your book is a likely candidate for a small or specialized publisher, submit it on your own. Writers sell more books to publishers on their own than through agents. Here's how, in ten steps.

1. Make sure your proposal is ready to submit, but, unless otherwise instructed on their website, don't send it until the publisher responds to your query and asks to see it.
2. Create a list of likely publishers and the editors at each company. Thoroughly examine the track records of digital-only and hybrid publishers before including them on your list (see [chapter thirty-seven](#)).
 - Search reputable online directories like:
 - Writers Market (www.writersmarket.com): fees charged
 - Poets & Writers (www.pw.org): free
 - Duotrope (duotrope.com): fees charged
 - The International Directory of Literary Magazines and Small Presses (www.dustbooks.com): fees charged
 - Search print editions of reference books such as the latest editions of the exhaustive *Literary Market Place*, available in most libraries, or the print edition of *Writers Market*.

- Do a subject area deal search on www.publishersmarketplace.com and www.publishersweekly.com. Sometimes deals with small presses or academic presses are listed.
- To find the names of acquisitions editors who might be interested in your topic, read the acknowledgments in similar books and study publishers' websites, where staff bios may be posted.
- Visit bookstores and libraries; ask about niche and small presses they trust. Find the publisher of a similar book on the book's copyright page.
- Look into subject-specific trade organizations: Do they publish books?
- Talk to friends who participate in speaking groups like the Toastmasters or the National Speaker's Association: Do they know of niche publishers?

3. Review each publisher's submission guidelines.

4. Send your query letter to the appropriate editor by name—no generic "Dear Publisher" salutations allowed!

5. If the editor responds to your query and asks to see your proposal, send your proposal with a note asking when you should expect a response. Follow up politely if the date passes and you haven't heard back.

6. If the editor wishes to make an offer, talk with him but not about money. Ask specific questions about:

- his vision for editing and publishing your book.
- other similar books his company has published and how they promoted them.
- the timeline he envisions for publishing your book.

7. When you receive an offer, thank the editor and tell him you'll get back to him. Use one of the following options to find help.

- Find an agent to negotiate the deal for you. Many agents do contract negotiation on the side for a fee.
- Get help from writers' organizations, including the Authors Guild, the National Writers Union, and the American Society of Journalists and Authors, which advise members for free.

- Hire an intellectual-property attorney with experience negotiating book contracts to review your contract and either negotiate it for you or advise you as you negotiate.
- If you receive multiple expressions of interest, navigate this situation with advice from one of the people recommended above.

8. Negotiate, with outside guidance, the basic terms of the deal, and ask that these terms be memorialized and sent to you in an e-mailed “Deal Memo.”

- The amount you will be paid as an advance
- The breakdown and timing of your payment (half on signing and half on delivery, for example)
- The date your manuscript is due
- The word count and content of your manuscript (number of illustrations, for example)
- The rights you are licensing to the publisher (hardcover publication rights? digital rights? film rights?)
- The territories you are licensing to the publisher (North American only? Translation rights around the world?)
- Include any other terms that would otherwise be deal breakers for you. For example, your title may be the same as your related business, and you cannot allow your book to be published under a different title. In this case, title approval would be a basic contractual term; absent an agreement on it between you and the publisher, there is no reason to proceed to a full contract.

9. Negotiate, with outside guidance, the full contract when it arrives (usually a couple months after the basic terms have been settled). This contract, called a “boilerplate” if it is your first with the publisher, will include the basic terms—which you cannot renegotiate—and a host of additional terms, which are open to negotiation.

10. Wait another few months for the advance payment to arrive, and celebrate!

CONVERT YOUR PROPOSAL INTO A SELF-PUBLISHING PLAN

Book proposals are never wasted endeavors. Not only are they essential in traditional publishing, but if you don't find a publisher, your proposal can morph into a powerful springboard for an effective self-publishing plan.

Such a plan is critical for self-publishing nonfiction. While novels, especially genre fiction, can be inexpensively published digitally and marketed to an engaged audience, nonfiction typically requires a more complex interior design, a print edition, and a calculated launch and marketing strategy.

That said, self-publishing can be a great option for nonfiction writers. Nonfiction readers are often found outside regular book channels; this means you can cut out the middlemen: bookstores that take 50 percent of the cover price and publishers who pay small royalties. After the costs of publication are covered, you can easily make ten dollars per book (less mailing costs) on a fifteen-dollar trade-paperback book sold directly to consumers through your website or in the back of the room after speaking gigs. You would earn, through traditional publishing, a royalty of around \$1.13 per book on that same fifteen-dollar book. That's a big difference.

TEN SELF-PUBLISHING TASKS

The varied and complex components of bringing a book to market are no different for a self-publisher than for a traditional publisher; if you're not a big publisher with a full staff, you must either split into ten people to get the varied tasks accomplished or outsource these tasks. The big-picture tasks include:

1. Nail down your concept.
2. Identify your market and how to reach it.
3. Estimate the costs, and create a schedule.
4. Plan and create your platform (and once it's built, use it continually).

5. Outline your book.
6. Write your book.
7. Hire competent editorial services.
8. Hire competent production services, interior- and exterior-design services, and publishing services.
9. Send out your book for reviews; put launch plans in place.
10. Publish and promote your book.

YOUR SELF-PUBLISHING PLAN

Excerpt or redraft material from your proposal to create a broad-strokes plan to manage the ten big-picture tasks listed.¹ The system we recommend, which Jody developed for her self-publishing clients, includes the creation of two planning documents: the brief **Title Information Sheet** and the multipart **Self-Publishing Plan**.

1. Nail Down Your Concept: Create a Title Information Sheet

Create a handy one-page document for reference, and call it the **Title Information Sheet**. Throughout the self-publishing process, you'll refer to this sheet as you draft your book's cover copy, create press releases, fill in book and author descriptions on Amazon and elsewhere, and submit your book for reviews. Include the following information under headings that enable you to easily find content.

- **A PHOTO OF YOUR BOOK COVER:** You won't have this for a while. Write "book cover here" as a reminder to yourself for now.
- **A SALES HANDLE:** Derive from your proposal's pizzazz or overview section.
- **A TWO-PARAGRAPH SALES DESCRIPTION OF THE BOOK:** Pull ideas from your overview.
- **BOOK SPECS:** List the word count, design goals, trim size, format(s), cover price, ASIN and/or ISBN number, and current or past distribution channels. Pull word count and design goals from your proposal; fill in the rest when determined.
- **A BRIEF AUTHOR BIO:** Abridge from your author bio.
- **AN AUTHOR PHOTO:** If not in your proposal, have one taken for your book.

- **KEY SALES POINTS:** This should be a bulleted list; cull from your overview.

2. Identify Your Market and How to Reach It: Write Promotion and Launch Plan

Create another new document called **Self-Publishing Plan**. This plan comprises several sections; the first is **My Promotion and Launch Plan**. This may feel a little like putting the horse (promotion) before the cart (writing and publishing the book). We like starting the Self-Publishing Plan with identifying the market and planning out the promotion because self-publishers often forget that books don't magically find audiences and too often end up with a beautiful book that nobody buys. Don't let that happen to you. Use your proposal research to define your audience, and estimate how much it will cost in time and money to reach it. This work will inform the rest of your self-publishing plan.

Populate your promotion and launch plan section with material from your proposal's audience section, overview, and personal promotion plan. Tie the scheduling to the launch of your book rather than the calendar; fill in specific dates when you know your publication date. For now, use the system below.

Three months before launch, I will:

Two months before launch, I will:

One month before launch, I will:

At launch, I will:

One week after launch, I will:

[And so on.]

For each element of your plan, use the promotion research you conducted for your proposal to estimate costs. Include new costs and costs to outsource.

3. Draft a Financial Plan and Preliminary Schedule

The financial plan and preliminary schedule are separate sections within your self-publishing plan.

FINANCIAL PLAN: On a spreadsheet or table, write down all the estimated costs you can anticipate by category of expense, including the costs you estimated for promotion and those

you anticipate (or have already spent) on platform building. Material from your proposal will help increase the accuracy of the estimates. Show potential editors your proposal's sample writing; for production estimates share the book specs and design ideas you outlined. Self-publishing expenses generally include (but aren't limited to):

- editing (line editing and copyediting)
- interior design
- cover design
- proofreading
- conversion
- promotion
- platform
- base cost of each book, plus shipping

SCHEDULE: Scheduling a self-published book is complex; every part of your proposal will help. Once they have seen your proposal, ask potential vendors for estimated timelines as well as costs (“How long does it generally take for a developmental edit of 50,000 words?” “How long does it take to design a book cover for a trade-paperback business book?”). Don't forget to include the book-writing time you estimated in your proposal's book specs section!

These proposal-based estimates of costs and deadlines give you a foundation for good decision-making as you juggle time, money, goals, and realities throughout the self-publishing process.

HOT TIP

Publishing maven Jane Friedman shares her free, detailed, interactive, customizable, and downloadable self-publishing schedule on her website here: janefriedman.com/self-publishing-checklist. Thank you, Jane!

4. Build on Your Proposal's Platform

Reprint your platform description from your proposal in the Self-Publishing Plan. Improve the platform for self-publishing by increasing means of engaging with the target audience you defined in your proposal's audience section; it's all on you, now, without the support of a traditional publisher. Add to your platform and promotion by developing relationships with

other self-publishers; they're a supportive, reachable community. During the months it will take to write and publish your book, continue to interact with social-media communities that are interested in you and your topic and/or involved in writing and self-publishing.

5. Outline Your Book

Done! Your proposal's detailed outline will speed up your writing process enormously.

6. Write Your Book

The sample writing in your proposal provides a great head start.

7. Hire Competent Editorial Services

When your book is complete, refer to your Self-Publishing Plan to confirm costs and choose a service provider from those bidders who provided estimates (or find someone else if you're not satisfied with the bids or references).

8. Hire Competent Production, Interior and Cover Design, and Publishing Services

Confirm costs, and choose from bidders who provided the estimates for your Self-Publishing Plan. The comps in your proposal will save you time and angst. Use the models you've found to communicate to designers your vision for the look of your book inside and out, from typography to graphics to cover. Make all your final production decisions after carefully considering how successful comparable books look and feel.

9. Send Out Your Book for Reviews, and Put Launch Plans in Place

Fill in any missing elements in your Title Information Sheet. Use it to inform promotional documents like your press release, postcards, website, speeches, and other materials. It helps as well with pitch letters to potential reviewers.

Refer to your proposal's platform and author sections to remind yourself of the network of people who might provide reviews. (Purchase professional reviews very cautiously. Most have no impact on the potential buyer, other than possibly *Kirkus Reviews* and *Publishers Weekly*.)

10. Publish and Promote Your Book

Use your Title Information Sheet as your cheat sheet for the metadata you'll fill in for online retailers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble and online book discussion groups such as Goodreads. Use your promotion plans to promote. Good luck!

HOT TIP

ALTERNATIVES TO FORMAL SELF-PUBLISHING

- **Print It Out, and Collect the Cash:** People who do public speaking or have other means of reaching buyers sometimes simply print their books at a copy shop, pop them in a three-ring binder, and sell them—sometimes for more than one hundred dollars each.
- **Blog a Book:** Before you take the self-publishing plunge, experiment with blogging parts of your book or see if you can get paid to place articles in popular or trade magazines.

1. A second monitor helps! Remember [chapter six](#), way back when?

Part Seven

INSPIRATION AND THE FUTURE

You are a verb, and the verb is “becoming.”

FROM AUTHOR TO CONTENTPRENEUR

The Building Blocks for Growth

If you're alive, you need to keep growing.

A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store, but she couldn't find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?"

The stock boy replied, "No ma'am, they're dead."

If you're alive, you need to keep growing. The cost of living sure does, so you have to continue to be more productive to keep up with it. The late Václav Havel, author and former President of Czechoslovakia, captured the right attitude for an author: "Vision is not enough; it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs."

Life is indeed a journey, and you are both the traveler and the destination. As you approach the horizon of your possibilities, you will grow into them and become a more capable you. May your journey be filled with goals you reach and horizons that continue to recede as you advance into the best future you can imagine. Believe the words of Samuel Johnson: "Your aspirations are your possibilities."

Writers must be entrepreneurs; you've certainly learned that from these pages. But beyond thinking of yourself as an entrepreneur, think of yourself as a *contentpreneur*. Here are sixteen ways to do it.

1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR BOOK'S SUCCESS

Publishers are responsible for lists of books and are limited in what they can do for any one of them and in how long they can help. Therefore you must think of yourself as co-publisher and do as much as you can to make up for what your publisher can't do.

2. SERVE YOUR READERS

Venture capitalist Brad Burnham says, “Customer service is the new marketing.” Authors and publishers don’t keep books alive—readers do. In *What Would Google Do?* Jeff Jarvis wrote: “Your customers are your ad agency.” After writers, readers are the most important people in publishing. Serve them well enough, and they will spread the word.

British writer Wilfred Grenfell wrote: “The service we render to others is really the rent we pay for our room on this earth.” Author and speaker Zig Ziglar created the Law of Reciprocity: “You can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want.” Your readers want the same things out of life you do, so do whatever you can to serve your fans and maintain your relationships with them.

If your goal is to write books that lead to change, now is the best time to do it. Technology makes it easier for the right book to change the world. The world will never have too many writers devoted to putting their lives in the service of their ideas, their books, and their readers.

3. KEEP GENERATING IDEAS AND CONTENT

The essence of being a contentpreneur is a continuing flow of ideas and content, short and long, for free and fees. Short work can lead to long work, free work to paid work. In addition to creating unexpected opportunities, your writing helps you build, serve, and maintain your communities.

4. PRACTICE NICHE CRAFT

Don’t expect to build a career with a book alone. Your ideas create opportunities for talks, articles, books, and publicity and for building communities and finding ways you can profit from them. Writing books on different subjects requires learning about new fields and bringing people together for each one. Rather than putting all your proverbial eggs in one basket, it’s better to be a niche crafter: Find an idea for a series of related books you will be passionate about writing and promoting, and then create a career out of it. Niche craft will enable you to build your brand and identity and create synergy between everything you do. It’s the fastest, surest road to success.

5. HONOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR CAREER

There's a cartoon showing a man and a woman on a couch talking. The man is saying, "Look, I'm not talking about a lifetime commitment. I'm talking about marriage." Becoming a successful contentpreneur will take a lifetime commitment. Everything you do is an expression of your commitment to your goals. The fewer things you consider more important than becoming a successful author, the more likely it is that you'll become one.

6. COME UP WITH WAYS TO BUILD YOUR BUSINESS BY SERVING YOUR COMMUNITIES

Rishad Tobaccowala of Publicis Groupe says, "Make money through the side door." In *The Author's Guide to Building an Online Platform* by Stephanie Chandler, Dan Kennedy—author of the No B.S. business series—reports that the deep connections his books make with readers result in more repeat customers for his other products and services than any other promotional strategy.

But Dan uses promotion to drive readers into what he calls a *marketing funnel* that makes them customers for life. Many successful authors create a profit pyramid in which books are the base of their business and may sell the most but are the least profitable part of their enterprise. They use books to sell:

- other books, audiobooks, and e-books
- CDs and DVDs
- other products, such as workbooks
- talks, teleseminars, webinars, and weekend and weeklong events
- coaching, consulting, and training

These authors create and control almost all of these products and services, which maximize their profits. They continue to build an e-mail list of fans who buy whatever they produce. If you're writing the kinds of books that lend themselves to this kind of brand extension and you want to build a career, think of yourself as a multimedia, multinational conglomerate of one.

Thoreau once said that it's not what you look at that counts but what you see. What's important is not the problems you look at but the opportunities you see in them. More

millionaires were created during the Depression, which predates the advent of technology, than in any other period in our history.

7. DO WHAT YOU CAN TO CONTROL YOUR FUTURE

You are at the mercy of luck—the unexpected—and you depend on the effort and goodwill of other people and businesses. But do what you can to control your life instead of relinquishing control to others.

8. BE PRAGMATIC

Business is sustained by the purity of profits—if there aren't any, businesses go under. They're forced to focus on what generates profit and abandon what doesn't. Psychologist Havelock Ellis said, "All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on." So does your life; you will always be judging how to keep what you need, shed what doesn't work, and adapt to new circumstances.

9. WELCOME NEW TECHNOLOGY

The computer is the greatest tool writers have ever had for researching, writing and promoting their books, and building communities. In the past, technology advanced in stages. Planes, trains, and automobiles would advance in some way and then would remain at the same level until the next innovation came along. But now we are on the vertical slope of technology. Driven by competition, new products and services, and the imperative for growth, advances in technology will continue to drive us at an accelerating rate toward a future no one can predict or control. This makes it imperative for you to do what your competitors are doing. Continue to improve your effectiveness by integrating new technology into your work and balancing the value of your efforts with the time they require.

10. EMBRACE CHANGE

As publishing reinvents itself, you need to track changes in the industry and the culture, understand how they affect you and your books, and take advantage of the opportunities that

arise. Charles Darwin believed the smartest creatures aren't the ones who survive, nor the strongest, but rather the most adaptable. We are going to have to adapt more in this century than our species ever has.

Although people still want and need the same kinds of information they always have, how they consume it affects how you write about and present it. You will need to adapt to challenges and opportunities created by technology and other media and how they change our culture. The world's problems are complex and connected, their effects unpredictable. The human family, with writers at the forefront, can only solve them together. As Benjamin Franklin warned, we will either hang together or we will hang separately.

11. MAKE MISTAKES

A.G. Lafley of Procter & Gamble says, "Being willing to make mistakes is the key to innovation." Mistakes are part of the learning process. Accept that you will make them, but console yourself by knowing that you will survive them and that your communities will help you avoid and fix them. As long as you learn from your mistakes, regard them as painful favors that enable you to grow. And follow Groucho Marx's advice: "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can never live long enough to make them all yourself."

12. OVERCOME OBSTACLES

Obstacles test commitment—the greater your goals, and the greater the obstacles in your path, the sweeter your success. You can't have achievements without challenges any more than you can have courage without fear; obstacles are the hills you climb to get where you want to go. Prevent problems by minimizing risk, but look at problems as opportunities to do something different and better, and be resourceful at solving them.

13. EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE

The people who help you deserve an expression of gratitude commensurate with the value of their assistance. The criterion for whether your responses are effective is how recipients feel about continuing to help you.

14. BE A LIFELONG LEARNER

The British statesman Benjamin Disraeli once said, “The most successful people in life are generally those who have the best information.” Make learning about writing, marketing, publishing, and working smarter—as well as your field in general—a perpetual endeavor. If you want to keep earning, you’ve got to keep learning. Know what you can do, and find help for the rest. This will require friends who will help you for free, as well as paid professionals.

15. BE CREATIVE IN EVERYTHING YOU DO

There’s a T-shirt that says, “I hate it when my cat thinks outside of a box.” Today, you not only have to think outside of the box, you have to think outside of the room the box is in. Your ability to be creative separates you from everyone else on the planet—it’s what you alone can bring to everything you do. Being creative is like working a muscle: The more you stretch, the more creative you become.

Hundreds of thousands of authors have books and websites. Using your creativity to do what you do differently and better is one way to cut through the static of other books and authors.

16. GROW YOURSELF

Hunter S. Thompson said, “I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence, or insanity to anyone, but they’ve always worked for me.” Finding what works for you as your life evolves is a continuing process of experimentation. You are the most important element in your success, so continue to nurture your skills, your body, your intellect, your passion, and your spirit. To fulfill your potential, you must continue to seek challenges that enable you to grow.

This advice has helped us in our personal as well as our professional lives, so we hope it serves you well. The book ends with the promise of spring.

43

SPRING IS COMING

The Prologue

“We are the people we have been waiting for.”

—THE MOTTO OF THE MIT VEHICLE DESIGN SUMMIT

Success doesn't come in *cans* but in *wills*—the *will* to do whatever it takes to get where you want to go. We promise you can accomplish far more than whatever you think you can. More people in more places than ever want what only you can bring to the world, so plant yourself in the biggest pot you can. Spring is coming.

You are a verb, and the verb is *becoming*. Ernest Hemingway once said that the act of becoming is the more enjoyable part of success. We wish you a long, rewarding life of becoming an evermore successful author. As actress Sarah Bernhardt said, “It is by spending oneself that one becomes rich.”

THANK YOU!

Huge thanks for spending your most valuable asset—your time—with this book. We welcome any suggestions you may have to improve it. Please contact us directly if you have questions or comments:

Jody: coach@jodyreinbooks.com

Mike: larsenpoma@aol.com

Onward!

APPENDICES

The Full Publishing Process (a Chart)

Contents of a Media Kit (a List)

Four More Sample Proposals

APPENDIX A

THE PUBLISHING PROCESS

A Graphic Look

This outline of the publishing process will give you a sense of how complex and collaborative an enterprise publishing your book will be.

You write your proposal.

↓

You decide whether you want to submit to a big house or a small one and therefore whether you want to hire an agent or submit on your own.

↓

You research literary agents or small publishers.

↓

You send your query to many people.

↓

One or more publishers or agents ask to see your proposal.

↓

If an agent has requested your proposal, you send it, honoring requests for exclusivity as appropriate.

↓

One or more agents offer to represent you. You interview, choose, and hire one.

↓

You or your agent submits your proposal to one or more interested publishers.

↓

An editor (or several editors at different houses) reviews your proposal, likes it, and puts together a plan to convince other in-house employees.

↓

The editor pitches your work to colleagues and usually, the editorial board. If the board approves, publishing executives and people in the finance department decide whether to offer to acquire your book and how big of an advance they'll approve.

↓

The editor(s) make(s) you or your agent an offer to publish.

↓

You or your agent negotiates the basic terms of the deal. If you receive several offers, your agent guides you through negotiation strategies.

↓

The publisher sends you a contract. You and your agent review it and negotiate the finer points.

↓

You sign the contract and receive the first part of your advance against royalties.

↓

You write your book.

↓

Your assigned in-house editor edits your book.

↓

You respond to your editor's suggestions.

↓

Your editor accepts your manuscript.

↓

You receive the second part of your advance.

↓

Your editor sends your book to the production department.

↓

The production department outsources the copyediting.

↓

You respond to your copyeditor's comments.

↓

The art department creates or outsources the interior design and the cover for a paperback or the hardcover jacket.

↓

The editor or, in a larger company, an in-house copywriter, drafts the copy for the back cover or book jacket. The editor sends it to you or to your agent for input.

↓

In a series of launch meetings, your editor and the sales, marketing, publicity, and advertising departments do the following.

- Position your book on one of your publisher's seasonal lists.
- Create a trade and consumer-marketing strategy.
- Choose the print, broadcast, and electronic-trade and consumer media to carry out the strategy.
- Prepare sales materials for sales conferences.

(Sometimes the launch meetings occur before your manuscript is submitted, sometimes after.)

↓

Before your book is submitted and throughout the rest of the process, your agent and your publisher try to sell subsidiary rights.

↓

Your book and the plans for it are presented to the sales reps at a sales meeting.

↓

Sales reps sell your book to booksellers online and off, distributors, wholesalers, specialty stores, warehouse clubs, and other outlets.

↓

Your publisher sells your book to public libraries as well as those in schools and colleges.

↓

Your publisher's education department sells books with course-adoption potential.

↓

Your publisher's special-sales department sells books with premium and bulk-sales potential (this sometimes occurs before your manuscript is submitted, sometimes after).

↓

The production department arranges for your book to be printed.

↓

Your publisher's warehouse receives books from the printer, ships orders, and later receives returns.

↓

Your publisher's advertising and publicity departments do the following.

- Start prepublication promotion.
- Send out review copies of your book with a news release or media kit.
- Carry out their plans.

↓

Book critics review your book.

↓

Your publisher promotes your book for as long as sales justify it.

↓

You promote your book for as long as you want it to sell.

APPENDIX B

THE VIRTUAL MEDIA KIT

If you self-publish, create a media kit and post it on your website. If you publish with a traditional house, coordinate your efforts with your publisher; big houses may ask that you simply provide links to your publicist and her materials; small houses may appreciate your participation in writing the documents as well as posting them on your website. Choose from the following options those documents that best suit you and your book.

- a one-page release (updated periodically)
- a list of ten to fifteen interview questions and answers, in Q&A format your bio
- a photo of you
- a photo of the book cover
- illustrations from the book
- positive reviews
- a bulleted list of tips
- a bulleted fact sheet on the subject
- a list of appearances
- articles about you, your book, and your subject
- links to a book trailer, audio or video clips of one of your interviews or speaking engagements
- a list of media coverage you have received
- endorsements and testimonials about the book or yourself
- an excerpt or sample chapter
- information about how to buy your book
- a list of resources about the subject with links to them

APPENDIX C

FOUR SAMPLE PROPOSALS

These four proposals were sold to major publishers by reputable literary agencies. We have abridged the proposals for space, and we have not reprinted the sample writing. To protect the privacy of the authors and agents, we have omitted agent contact info and redacted some proprietary information. Deletions appear in brackets, such as “[number here].”

Notice that each proposal is markedly different, and all diverge in some ways from the structures listed in this book. Read closely, though, and you’ll see that whether the book table of contents is called a “List of Chapters,” or the author bio comes early or late, each of these proposals nails the five questions all proposals must answer, listed way back in [chapter two](#):

1. What’s in the book?
2. Can the author write it well?
3. Is the author qualified?
4. Will people hear about it?
5. Will people buy it?

Each of these proposals also demonstrates crucial consistency between the voice and style of the proposal, and the nature of the book proposed. And, most important: The proposals are interesting and enjoyable to read.

The resulting books, listed below, are available at your local independent bookstore, online at www.IndieBound.org (the independent-bookstore online retailer) or at other major booksellers both online and off, except for *Anzio*, which is slated for a 2018 publication. Notice that two of the proposal titles were changed slightly by the publisher for the published books.

1. **NARRATIVE NONFICTION WITH A PRESCRIPTIVE TWIST:** *The Scalpel and the Soul: Encounters with Surgery, the Supernatural, and the Healing Power of Hope*¹ by Allan J. Hamilton (TarcherPerigee/Penguin Random House)
2. **PROMOTION-DRIVEN PRESCRIPTIVE NONFICTION:** *You Can Draw in 30 Days!* by Mark Kistler (Da Capo Press/Hachette)

3. **MEMOIR:** *An Unquenchable Thirst: Following Mother Teresa in Search of Love, Service and an Authentic Life* by Mary Johnson (Speigel & Grau/Penguin Random House)
4. **NARRATIVE NONFICTION, MILITARY HISTORY:** *Anzio, Desperate Valour: How Courage Beyond Measure Turned the Failed Anzio Invasion into a Defensive Victory* by Flint Whitlock (Perseus/Hachette Book Group)

NARRATIVE NONFICTION WITH A PRESCRIPTIVE TWIST

About This Proposal

The strongest selling points of this moving, life-changing book were the foreword from the renowned best-selling author Dr. Andrew Weil and the author's job as a technical adviser to the hit series *Grey's Anatomy*. The book went on to win a Silver Nautilus Award.

The publisher changed the title from *The Soul and the Scalpel* to *The Scalpel and the Soul*. This proposal did not open with stand-alone pizzazz, but the overview did begin with a strong callout to hook editors into the story.

A Proposal for

The Soul & the Scalpel

Surgery as a Path to Spiritual Transformation for Physicians and Patients

Includes Life-Saving Advice Based on the Author's Thirty Years of Experience

By Allan J. Hamilton, M.D., FACS

Professor of Neurosurgery & Clinical Professor of Radiation Oncology & Psychology

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Foreword by Andrew Weil, M.D.

PAGE BREAK

Table of Contents

Overview	
The Proposal on a Page	3
The Author’s Platform	15
Promotion	16
About the Author	18
The Outline	21
Sample Chapters	33

PAGE BREAK

Overview

- A young burn victim remains in a coma until a ghost appears.
- A doctor discovers he can predict when a patient will die.
- A physician needs the help of a Navajo shaman to exorcise the spirit of his dead patient.
- A group of residents must decide if they can secretly let a convicted child murderer die on the operating table.
- A patient has a premonition he’s going to die, but his surgeon promises to prove him wrong.

These events happened, and I was involved in them. Each left me with an unforgettable, haunting lesson. Although I am a Harvard-trained brain surgeon, nothing prepared me for the spiritual challenges I faced caring for patients or the pitfalls in which I failed them.

Based on thirty years of experience, *The Soul and the Scalpel: Surgery as a Path to Spiritual Transformation for Physicians and Patients* will tell the stories of these remarkable patients and share their moral and spiritual lessons.

For physicians, these supernatural inklings and intrusions are disturbing. Doctors can’t be candid with colleagues or patients because they’re trained to disregard the inexplicable and unbelievable. They’re taught to discount the elusive, evanescent powers of the soul. Superstition, omens, and divine spirits smack of madness. Doctors are supposed to practice medicine, not voodoo.

But patients have the same experiences. Life-threatening illness or surgery frequently brings dormant spirituality to life. The soul often needs more intensive care than the body. *The Soul & the Scalpel:*

- explores how premonition, superstition, hope, and faith not only become factors in how patients feel but change outcomes
- validates the spiritual manifestations physicians see every day
- empowers patients to voice their spiritual needs when they seek medical help
- addresses the mysterious, attractive powers the soul exerts during life-threatening events

The book can help save the lives of people facing surgery or suffering from a major illness. It will also help healthcare professionals save lives.

The Book’s Structure

The first part of the book is eighteen stories. They start with the author’s first job as a janitor and culminate in experiences drawn from his position as Chief of Neurosurgery and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Arizona. He made mistakes, and he pulls no punches in describing them.

The book addresses ten spiritual or emotional crises that may occur during surgery and hospitalization.

- Removing patients’ hope

- A premonition of death
- Near-death experience
- Divine intervention
- Scientific and clinical biases of physicians
- The impact of religious belief
- Physicians' fear of mortality
- Statistical lies and cancer survival
- How alternative medicine goes mainstream
- Failing to see God's purposes

The second part of the book is advice extracted from the stories to help patients and physicians achieve the best possible outcomes from surgery. The suggestions will help patients through the medical crises and the spiritual doubts that can arise during recovery.

The advice covers topics such as:

- why the best doctor is one who is dumb and safe
- how patients can make sure they're not victims of a medical error
- when to fire a doctor
- when *not* to consent to surgery
- how to avoid *ghost surgery*—surgery being done by someone other than patients' surgeon while they are under anesthesia
- how to get good food—even in a hospital

The guidelines will also help doctors address the emotional issues and spiritual catastrophes their patients may encounter.

It will explain:

- why physicians should try to spot omens or premonitions
- why it's better to see patients in the evening than first thing in the morning
- how intuition can lead to the correct diagnosis
- why doctors should never give casual, free medical advice
- the three things that make every patient smile
- why doctors should never run to an emergency

The manuscript contains 95,000 words in twenty chapters. The final manuscript will also include a five-page resource directory and an index.

Andrew Weil and the author have known each other and worked together for fifteen years. Andrew has read drafts of the manuscript, and he will write the foreword.

Audience

The book will attract three large groups of readers.

- Individuals and their families confronting a serious illness or surgery
- Healthcare professionals
- Readers interested in spirituality, alternative medicine, and mind-body connections

In March 2005, *USA Today* had a cover story on evolving trends among books that became bestsellers in the preceding decade. By far, the most popular category between 1994 and 2004 was books about spirituality and religion.

The second-largest group constituted self-help books, especially those focusing on health improvements aimed at the aging baby boomers (like Andrew Weil's books or Bill Phillips's *Body for Life*). *Soul* will appeal to these top two groups, combining advice relating to major surgery or illness while guiding readers through the spiritual issues affecting their well-being.

Thirty-five percent of Americans will confront major illness or surgery in the next five years. Everyone in such a crisis needs help. In 2005, the American Hospital Association reported almost forty million admissions to our hospitals.

According to Solucient Leadership Institute data, an astounding five million patients went into intensive care last year, which suggests that their illnesses were life threatening. The book will help potential patients, be a get-well gift for individuals in recovery, and serve as an inspirational book for families confronting a loved one's illness or death. As of 2005, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that over 1.3 million people a year facing terminal illness are enrolled in hospice or home healthcare.

Few groups of patients touch the heart more directly than those diagnosed with malignant brain tumors. The book discusses cases involving patients with brain tumors—the author's subspecialty. There are twenty-five to thirty thousand new cases of malignant brain tumors diagnosed a year, and the number is climbing. *Soul* will appeal to these patients. The author hopes that the book will help relieve anxieties and empower patients to harness their spiritual and emotional resources when they confront health crises.

The book assists healthcare professionals in becoming more comfortable in anticipating and responding to spiritual questions. There is a trend toward developing curricula in medical schools that address spiritual issues. According to a 2004 report from Yale University in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, from 1994 to 2004, the number of medical schools offering courses in spirituality rose from seventeen (13 percent) to eighty-four (66 percent).

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis reported that in 2001, enrollments in allopathic (traditional, evidence-based) medicine were sixty-six thousand, with an additional two-hundred thousand in the nursing field.

Osteopaths, podiatrists, dentists, and other health professionals are also looking for leadership from the medical professions. There is therefore a large and growing pool of healthcare workers who will be motivated to read about the spiritual issues they will encounter.

The book will have adoption potential in spiritually oriented curricula in medical schools. Professionals around the country who lead courses on spirituality and medicine, have expressed interest in the manuscript. They include:

- Joseph Alpert, M.D., University of Arizona
- Stephen Kliemer, D.Min., Oregon Health Sciences Center
- Rev. James Evinger, University of Rochester School of Medicine

Readers' interest in the mind-body connection is at an all-time high. This stems from a profound interest in religious and spiritual issues as baby boomers face serious illness and death. They want emphasis on both allopathic and alternative medicine. The National Institutes of Health revealed that 62 percent of individuals reported using alternative medicine or prayer in the previous twelve months. The book reinforces and encourages individuals to incorporate their spiritual practices and beliefs into traditional medical care.

The book also appeals to doctors and patients because it contains valuable information and insights for helping them. *Soul* validates their desire to connect to powers beyond their own, to call on the divine and supernatural forces to rally around them and help sustain them.

The book enables family members of someone who's either a patient or a healthcare worker to help those they love when they confront challenges. They will understand what their loved ones face and how best to support them.

Bookstores

Just as *The Purpose Driven Life* has sold so well in trade and Christian bookstores, *Soul* will also sell in both kinds of stores. The book's stories are inspirational with respect to faith in God and the scientific proof of the existence of the soul and life after death.

According to the Christian Booksellers Association, Christian-oriented medical books that have sold well in both kinds of stores include:

- Dr. Joe Vander Veer: *A Surgeon's Devotions*
- Dr. G. Scott Morris: *Relief for the Body, Renewal for the Soul: A Doctor's True Stories of Healing and Hope*
- Margaret Carroll Lamkin: *My Flesh and My Heart May Fail: Life on the Edge of Open Heart Surgery*

Community cancer centers sponsor patient-support groups, and this book will inspire discussion of spirituality among cancer patients and the growing number of survivors. There are more than 650 cancer hospitals and treatment centers to which the author is highly motivated to speak. The promotion plan discusses this.

The Author's Platform

During the last ten years, the author has given more than three-hundred presentations and earned an average of [figure here]. Many of these have been professional and academic appearances related to the author's research and expertise, but they have also included speeches for the public with up to two hundred in attendance at such venues as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the New Orleans aquarium, and an outdoor address in an amphitheater in Puerto Rico.

Many of these were sponsored by Fortune 500 pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacturers such as [list here].

The author is consistently ranked among the top-tenth percentile of speakers in terms of audience feedback and evaluations. He will launch a mailing campaign to land himself back on corporate speaking circuits, aiming for inspirational talks for conventions and sales meetings. In addition, there has been an increasing acceptance in standard medical venues for talks on spirituality ("Spirituality and the Neurosurgeon," at the 2006 Western Neurosurgical Society in Seattle, had the largest audience of the three-day conference).

Dr. Hamilton has appeared on National Public Radio, CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360°*, and The Discovery Channel on a wide variety of topics. He has earned a reputation as a speaker who can discuss sophisticated topics in a way that the public enjoys.

Allan has written more than forty scientific peer-reviewed articles, a dozen medical textbook chapters, and a monograph on treating brain tumors, and he has also published five articles for the public on his experiences as a physician.

He and his family host three conferences a year to help empower cancer patients and survivors to increase their spiritual awareness for a better recovery and quality of life.

Promotion

To promote the book, the author will:

- Hire a publicist. The author has already contacted [publicists' names here]. He will meet with them and discuss this decision with you. The publicist will do a television satellite tour, promote speaking engagements, and coordinate bookstore events as well as obtain interviews.
- In collaboration with the publisher, have a staff member arrange three talks a day in four cities
- Continue to speak during the year of publication at six annual meetings or conventions and do two other talks in the convention cities
- Continue to travel to six conventions a year and use this business-related travel to obtain other speaking and bookselling opportunities

- Continue to give one or two additional talks a month and sell books or arrange to have them sold
- Sell [number here] copies the year of publication
- Send 650 promotional copies of book to:
 - 350 directors of the top community cancer centers (also offering to speak)
 - one-hundred leaders in the area of spirituality and medicine, and academic, philanthropic, religious, hospice, and hospital chaplaincy organizations
 - one-hundred directors of a curriculum on spirituality and medicine with an offer to speak, do a teleconference, and a Q&A session if they adopt the book
 - fifty chairpersons of conferences on the subject of spirituality and medicine
 - fifty columnists and commentators with expertise in both medicine and spirituality
- Use a full-time administrator to mail [number here] brochures about the book, the website, and ordering information to hospital chaplains, hospital-based social workers, and mental-health workers to encourage group and class adoptions
- Start a virtual reading club with scheduled teleconferences for discussion. Encourage members to send inspiring stories for posting on the site.

Competing and Complementary Books

Books with overlapping themes include:

- Zhi Gang Sha: *Soul Mind Body Medicine: A Complete Soul Healing System for Optimum Health* (New World Library, 2006, 364 pages). Includes mind-body spiritual methods outlined for one hundred ailments, New Age-oriented how-to, not anecdotal or by a physician.
- Bernie S. Siegel, M.D.: *Love, Medicine & Miracles: Lessons Learned About Self-Healing from a Surgeon's Experience with Exceptional Patients*, HarperCollins, 1998, 226 pages). A bestseller that talks about the power of love in surgical practice, offers cancer-related anecdotes that are more emotionally than spiritually oriented.
- G. Scott Morris: *Relief for the Body, Renewal for the Soul: A Doctor's True Stories of Healing and Hope* (Paraclete Press, 2001, 140 pages). Stories from a minister-physician working with inner-city poor in Memphis, Christian orientation, no professional or academic tension between the high-tech world of surgery and spirituality.
- Katrina Firlik: *Another Day in the Frontal Lobe: A Brain Surgeon Exposes Life on the Inside* (Random House, 2006, 264 pages). Describes author's experiences as the first woman resident in the neurosurgical residency program at the University of Pittsburgh, coming-of-age story focused only on first five years of training and aspects of neurosurgery in the future, does not aim at mind-brain conundrums in neurosurgery and is not inspirational.

Soul is the first memoir that covers a whole surgical career and focuses on the spiritual surprises and challenges involved in the journey. The book allows readers to share in the spectrum of surgical experiences from beginning medical school to the insights of a chairman of a surgery department.

While there are books that allow readers to experience coming of age in medical school or surgical residency, none enables readers to become privy to the pitfalls and failings that physicians, struggling with the arrogance of science, the greed for money, or the appetite for power, endure. This book is unique because it takes readers from the seduction of surgical initiation to the humbling revelations of spirituality.

The book allows readers to judge the impact of manifestations of the supernatural: ghosts, taboos, omens, intuition, premonition, prayer, religious faith, and finally, the author's reflections about coming into contact with the soul. The book is a journey into the realm of spiritual transformation where science and spirit meet.

About the Author

Allan Hamilton never envisioned becoming one of the top brain surgeons in the country. He began his college career wanting to be a painter and landed his first job as a janitor. He is a board-certified, Harvard-trained brain surgeon and a tenured professor of neurosurgery who has clinical professorships in the departments of radiation oncology and psychology at the University of Arizona Health Sciences in Tucson. Allan also served as the chief of neurosurgery and then as the chairman of the department of surgery.

He has received more than two dozen honors and awards including:

- being voted by peers as “One of the Best Doctors in America” for seven consecutive years
- the Bernard Cosman Award, the highest honor in the United States for innovation in neurosurgery
- being the only American neurosurgeon awarded the Lars Leksell Award, the highest international award for innovation for discovering and developing the field of extra-cranial radiosurgery
- being recognized as “One of the Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century”
- the Robert G. Ojemann Award from the Upjohn Company for Outstanding Educator in Neurosurgery
- Arizona Dean’s Teaching Scholar Award for Teaching

Dr. Hamilton has been a proponent of reestablishing what he terms “intimacy as the heart of modern medicine” and has criticized the escalating rate of errors in healthcare.

He is a professor of neurosurgery and a director of a medical think tank—the Arizona Simulation Technology and Education Center—which serves seven clinical departments developing innovative educational and simulation scenarios to improve surgical technique, enhance medical care, and reduce mistakes committed by physicians, nurses, and emergency-response personnel.

At his ranch outside of Tucson, the author raises rare Lipizzaner horses, descendants of the legendary Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Because of his janitorial skills, he’s still quite fond of mucking out the stalls in his barn.

PAGE BREAK

The Outline

List of Chapters

1: Crystal Ball	20
2: Ouguee: River of Doubt	21
3: The Dying of the Light	22
4: Is There a Doctor in the House?	23
5: No One Dies with Harvard Numbers	24
6: From Flesh to Spirit	25
7: Queen of the Gypsies	26
8: Goldfinger	27
9: Incidental Finding	28
10: Mother and Child Reunion	29
11: The Exorcist	30
12: A Bullet Runs Through It	31
13: Thread of Hope	32
14: Singing in the Brain	33
15: For the Love of God	34
16: The Surgeon Who Became a Murderer	35
17: The Luck of the Draw	36
18: The Book of Rules I: Advice for Patients	37
19: The Book of Rules II: Advice for Physicians	38
20: Soul Survivor	39
21: Epilogue	40

PAGE BREAK

[Chapter descriptions were included here.]

Chapter 17

The Luck of the Draw

The chapter compares the treatment of two patients with malignant, aggressive brain tumors who are unlikely to survive. The first part of the chapter is about a hard-drinking, chain-smoking man who endures the usual litany of surgical, radiation, and chemotherapy treatments while his brain tumor advances relentlessly. He is admitted to hospice care and awaits the end. After six months, he flunks out of hospice because he's not dying. Seven years later, his tumor appears to have stopped dead in its tracks for no reason that science can explain.

The second part of the chapter is about a patient who is a clean-shaven, hardworking engineering student at the university. His tumor is removed, he undergoes treatments, and his scans remain tumor free. He goes on to finish a Ph.D. in engineering, marry, and raise a family.

The chapter ends with the author concluding that statistics have limited ability to predict the future. Both patients defy all odds of how and when they should die. They take remarkably different paths but find a cure for a cureless disease.

[Chapter descriptions continue; sample writing follows.]

PROMOTION-DRIVEN PRISCRPTIVE NONFICATION

About this Proposal

Author Mark Kistler faced two big obstacles: scores of competitive titles and editorial skepticism about a children's book author trying to write a book for adults. To keep editors' heads in the proposal, he named and addressed these objections early. He also made the audacious claim that he would break through the crowded field and become a category leader. His promises, based on documented audience numbers and careful competition research, all came true. This book is now a consistent top seller in its category. It has sold more than 125,000 copies and has spawned a six-figure 2017 sequel: *You Can Draw It in 30 Minutes*.

This proposal uses many of the variations we've described in this book. It opens with a sweet drawing as pizzazz. Because Mark's professional identity is enmeshed with his platform, he combines several sections and names them creatively. (Look closely—you'll see all the building blocks are covered.) His distinctive voice is present throughout. The proposal is written in third person, but where he wants to speak directly, he quotes himself! Also, because each instructional chapter contains similar content, a detailed outline is unnecessary.



YOU CAN DRAW IN 30 DAYS!

by

Mark Kistler

PAGE BREAK

Proposal Contents

Overview

What's in the Book

Promotion

Mark Kistler

Sales of Previous Books

Venues and Opportunities

Comps

Book Contents

Lesson Chapter Structure

Table of Contents

Sample Chapters

Sample Art

PAGE BREAK

Overview

Mark Kistler is the most popular and most recognized drawing teacher in the world. He's written nine books, which have sold a combined total of more than a half-million copies. Yet his most successful book has yet to be written.

For the past twenty-eight years, Kistler's target audience has been kids. He is now poised to publish a basic drawing book that will become a category leader in the adult market.

The how-to-draw market is ripe for a shake-up. It's been forty years since the now classic *How to Draw What You See* by Rudy de Reyna broke through the then-uninspiring collection of student guides to appeal to the nonprofessional hobbyist and twenty-five since Betty Edwards first crashed through the multitude of standard instruction books with her best-selling *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. Both books continue to sell strongly on the backlist. In *You Can Draw in 30 Days*, Mark Kistler has crafted a fresh and exciting basic drawing book that is sure to both grab the attention and meet the needs of anyone who has even toyed with the notion of learning to draw. If anyone knows what will have surefire appeal to drawing novices, it's Mark Kistler. At the same time, his name recognition and continuous promotion will provide a grassroots consumer base guaranteed to generate strong sales from the moment Kistler's adult fans get a hint that this book is in the offing.

The Concept

Minor Time Commitment; Major Results

Mark's new book directly addresses the biggest obstacle people face in considering any new hobby: "How can I find time when I barely have time to brush my teeth each day?" Today's adults are overloaded with demands from family, work, and

community. By promising a small, definable time commitment, this book instantly encourages even modestly interested consumers to drop their objections and at the least pick up the book to take a look. Once they do, they won't be disappointed. It's clear from a thumb-through that the twenty-minute promise is real, and the beautiful illustrations inside seal the deal. One twenty-minute lesson each day for thirty days and the reader will learn how to create amazing three-dimensional renderings.

No Pressure, No Embarrassment: Just Fun

Attempting to draw can be intimidating to an adult, but many current drawing books don't set the reader at ease. *30 Days!* is nonthreatening in look and content. The reader won't even realize he's learning sophisticated instructional concepts until he's already drawing like a pro and having fun doing it.

How to Draw What You See—and Don't!

Many purchasers of basic drawing books want to learn to draw what they see (hence the popularity of both Betty Edwards and de Reyna). Those readers will find plenty of instruction for and examples of realistic drawings. *30 Days!* broadens its market by providing alternative approaches and instruction for people who want to draw from their imaginations, to draw for their jobs, and even to draw for computer-generated graphic design, a group Mark sees as a "sleeper" market (while the computer-graphics field is burgeoning, many such artists find themselves stymied when they realize they have to pick up a pencil to sketch out their designs).

The Big Question: Can a Kid's Teacher Appeal to Adults?

Mark Kistler is no ordinary teacher. His classes are as entertaining to the parents who watch along with their kids as to the kids themselves. This point was driven home to Kistler a few years ago, when teachers suggested he broaden his audience.

"The reason I thought of writing this book is the astonishing popularity of my family evening You Can Learn How to Draw workshops, which I began offering a few years ago," says Mark. "The program began when one school asked me if I would offer an evening workshop parents could attend along with their kids. I agreed to give it a try and was stunned at the response. Over two-hundred adults participated! Since then I have been offering my family workshops on the days I've already presented my children's "Dare to Draw in 3-D" elementary-school assemblies. I had no idea that even though the kids had already seen my program, they would be back in droves, accompanied by their enthusiastic parents, who were even more eager to learn to draw than their kids. My method of using lighthearted instruction to teach solid fundamentals is such a hit with the parents and teachers, I really believe they have more fun at these workshops than their children! I can't wait to write this entirely new book for this huge group of adults who tell me they would buy it in a heartbeat.

"Attendance at these family evening workshops consistently averages two-hundred to three-hundred participants, and I do about 150 such evenings a year throughout seventeen states. So I directly teach around forty-thousand adults each year."

Mark is known for teaching children, but his instructional style has never been childish. Even without those family workshops, the millions of parents who have been entertained and instructed alongside their kids over the years will welcome a book just for them. Bookstore managers, librarians, classroom teachers, and home schooling parents frequently ask for a Mark Kistler book written specifically for adults. And, of course, although the numbers are hard to define, among the millions of children who grew up watching Mark's PBS series are many who have remained fans as adults.

While the appeal to Mark's current audience is undeniable, this book is designed to grab the attention of adults, whether or not they've ever heard of Mark Kistler. Certainly his name recognition will inspire significant grassroots purchases, but it's the groundbreaking and appealing content that will continue to drive sales.

What's in the Book

The heart of this book is thirty progressive lessons, each requiring only twenty minutes a day to complete.

- Each daily lesson focuses on one fundamental skill, using Mark’s entertaining approach to teach the basics.
- Each daily lesson is uniquely satisfying to the reader. Because Mark teaches shading from the first lesson on, each day the reader will feel as if he or she has created a masterpiece!
- Each daily lesson features pages from Mark’s sketchbook, giving the reader a behind-the-scenes look at how Mark created the lessons.
- Each daily lesson also features adult-student sketchbook pages, illustrating what other adult students are drawing as they progress through the course. These samples will inspire student progress by sharing other students’ actual lesson sketch work.
- Mark shows students how the technique taught can be applied to many drawings.
- Mark includes a “Bonus Challenge” at the end of each twenty-minute lesson.
- The lessons are progressive and build skills in a specific order. This is where Mark’s twenty-eight years of teaching experience shine through. He takes these thirty sequenced lessons and makes each one satisfying and fun in itself.
- Multiple appendices provide quick access to key terms and instructions and help students track their progress.

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Promotion

Mark Kistler

During the course of Mark’s twenty-eight-year career, he has evolved from a classroom educator to a large-audience presenter to a national television personality to a best-selling author/illustrator to a significant online presence. Now, with *You Can Draw in 30 Days!*, Mark takes another huge step in reinvention, straight into the world of teaching the millions of adults who have always wanted to learn how to draw.

Mark has received more than one-million letters from viewers, and his websites have been visited by more than seven-million viewers. He speaks to more than one-hundred thousand students, teachers, administrators, and parents yearly at schools nationwide, and his nine previous books have sold over a half-million copies.

Mark Kistler Book Sales

Kistler has written and illustrated nine popular children’s books. Five titles are published by Fireside/Simon & Schuster, and four titles are published by Scholastic, Inc.

Unit sales figures for his books to date:

[Book titles, with sales figures and pub dates, were included here.]

Venues and Opportunities

No drawing instructor comes close to Mark Kistler in national exposure and dynamic product promotion. Mark Kistler will promote this book through many vehicles:

Television

Mark Kistler’s PBS series, *Mark Kistler’s Imagination Station*, has aired nationwide for over a decade. On any given day, many thousands of students watch him energetically educate them through step-by-step lessons, student examples, and state-of-the-art digitally animated Web-based art lessons. Kistler’s exciting drawing programs have been prominently aired on public television in all TV markets in America (and eighteen foreign countries) and, as a result, have been seen and enjoyed by millions of viewers.

Pending a publishing agreement for this new book project, *Mark Kistler's Imagination Station* will be satellite feeding episodes #401–#465 (sixty-five episodes) this June for all participating PBS stations. These episodes bring the total to over three-hundred children's Public Television episodes that Mark Kistler Media has produced and distributed. For episode descriptions, PBS station-carriage-listing information, and other details, see Mark's website, linked below.

National Touring

Each year, Mark Kistler visits over one-hundred schools presenting his "Drawing in 3-D" assemblies and his evening Family Workshops. Each participant receives a "Mark Kistler Drawing in 3-D Lesson Paper" that advertises his published books.

Universities

With the publication of this new book, Mark will lecture at thirteen college campuses in Chicago, Grand Rapids, New York City, Orlando, Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Milwaukee, Denver, and Philadelphia. He speaks to 3-D animation and game-design students about the importance of understanding the fundamentals of three-dimensional hand drawing. Ward Makielski, the director of programs for the Ferris State University 3-D Animation and Game Design program in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has already invited Mark to speak to his students on several occasions. Ward Makielski contends there is a serious void of basic 3-D drawing skill in 95 percent of his new enrolling students. He acknowledges this younger generation's computer-manipulation skills are phenomenal; however, you just can't effectively design and animate in 3-D without understanding how to draw in 3-D. Mark's previously published book, *Drawing in 3-D with Mark Kistler*, has been adopted into this program's curriculum syllabus, and Kistler will encourage other colleges to adopt *You Can Draw in 30 Days!*

Bookstores

During these national tours, Mark visits dozens of bookstores for book signings. He is available to visit more and will be pleased to coordinate his touring schedule with the publisher's scheduled signings wherever possible.

Internet Ads

Over seven-million readers have visited Mark's website; his current traffic boasts as many as five-thousand new visits daily. He will prominently feature *30 Days!* throughout the site. In coordination with the publisher, Mark will direct visitors to bookstores online and off.

School Mailings

Every year, Mark mails approximately thirty-thousand promotional flyers to schools, school PTA presidents, school principals, teachers, media-resource purchasing agents, and librarians. A special promotional piece featuring *30 Days!* will be featured in such mailings.

Student Mail

Over the last twenty-eight years, Mark has received over 1.5 million letters and e-mails.

Each writer sending a S.A.S.E receives a "Mark Kistler Learn-to-Draw in 3-D Lesson Mini-Booklet" promoting all of Mark's books. Mark Kistler's new book will be featured in this publication. Hundreds of these wonderful letters are posted on his website.

Summer Family Art Camps

Each summer, Mark Kistler's staff organizes between seven- and ten-week-long "Drawing in 3-D" workshops in seven states. Each site is attended by an average of 150 families. Each site is heavily promoted with ten-thousand student handouts distributed throughout the local school systems, public television announcements, and newspaper advertising. In addition, Mark often conducts radio, television, and newspaper feature interviews promoting the summer family art camp and his published

books. Mark Kistler's new book will be prominently promoted during these summer media campaigns. His camp schedule with photos from past years, parent and student comments, and a curriculum guide are posted on his website.

New Adult Show for PBS

Mark self-produces his PBS show for kids and is developing a new art-education series to offer to PBS stations, for adults, that mirrors the curriculum taught in *30 Days*.

Quotes from Alumni

Many of Mark's alumni students have pursued creative careers and will be helpful resources both for prepublication quotes and word-of-mouth sales. Mark's alumni students are on the design teams that design space-station kitchen and sleeping modules, Space Shuttle cargo bay components, and critical design elements of both the Mars explorer landing bags and the Saturn space probes' solar-energy-collection panels. Alumni students have worked on many recognized animation projects including *Shrek*, *Madagascar*, *Over the Hedge*, *A Bug's Life*, *Ants*, *The Incredibles*, *Happy Feet*, and many Marvel Comics titles.

Push from Teachers and Fans

Mark found strong support when he did some informal market research for this project. Here is what a few teachers and booksellers have to say about his new concept (see the many related comments and requests on Mark's website). Hundreds of teachers and other adult fans will take it upon themselves as a personal mission to help sell this book!

Emily Stavrou, the director of marketing and special events for the multiple-store chain of Schuler Books & Music in Grand Rapids, Michigan, says: "Mark's weeklong author/illustrator special family workshop event is a big hit here in our store each year! We carry all of Mark Kistler's how-to-draw books. His books really sell well; we keep a display island featuring his books in our art section. Fifty percent of Mark's students are parents who choose to sit in his family workshops and participate rather than drop their kids off and browse.

"Considering our store has a full-service café and thirty-thousand square feet of shopping, this is a good indicator that most adults do have a latent desire to learn how to draw.

"I think Mark's idea for a how-to-draw book for the adult market is a great one. Our store chain will most definitely carry this new Mark Kistler book; I'm sure it will be a big seller in our stores."

Sean Morrison, a customer-service manager with the Barnes & Noble store in midtown Manhattan, commented during Mark's recent autographing visit: "The how-to-draw book market has grown a lot over the years, with credit going to Mark Kistler as one of the pioneering authors of this hot trend in instruction books. We now have this entire wall section of how-to-draw books. Mark Kistler titles always move quickly. We try to keep several copies of each of his titles in stock. I'm sure Barnes & Noble would carry Mark's new book. I like his idea of a learn-to-draw book for adults, the Betty Edwards book for the W, X, and Y generation! This is a good analogy since Betty Edwards books all remain good sellers."

George Rodriguez, the store manager for Jerry's Artarama in Houston, Texas (artists' supplies and books), commented, "Our customers are eager for more Mark Kistler book titles. We stock all of his titles, and they all sell well. A Mark Kistler how-to-draw book for adults is a terrific idea!"

Tammy Jones, a media specialist at a public library in Houston, Texas, e-mailed this note: "Mark Kistler's how-to-draw books are very popular; they are always checked out of our library. We have several copies of each title, and we have had to create a waiting list for checking them out! Not surprisingly, there are as many adults on the waiting list as children. Adults love Mark Kistler how-to-draw books. A Mark Kistler book written specifically to teach adults how to draw? Yes! Yes! Yes! I would definitely order several copies for all of my library sites! I'm sure they will fly off my library shelves."

Patricia Le'salle, a home-schooling mother in Houston, Texas, e-mailed this note: "Many parents in my home-schooling group use many of your books and videos as our home-schooling art lessons. Do you have any books written specifically to teach adults? I know all the parents (myself included!) who have used your books with their children would love to learn from you as well! Perhaps a lesson book for parents?"

[Links to key sites here.]

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Comps

Obviously, there is a huge field of drawing books already published; entire companies have built their lists on instructional art titles. Nevertheless, for the average consumer, there are only a few category leaders that consistently sell well. Moreover, there are only a few names writing many of these books. No category-busting new drawing book has been published since 1979. Mark's book is vastly different in presentation and tone from the books listed below, while at the same time, this fresh new book includes the key elements that make these category leaders so popular: promise of success without too much time; accessible and realistic illustrations; and friendly, easy-to-follow instruction (note the pub dates of these books—once a book works in this category, it stays in print forever).

Category Leaders

The Art of Drawing, Willy Pogany, reissued in 1972 and 1996, Madison Books, \$14.95.

Posthumous reissue of classic instruction book, good basic instruction, quite dated

Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, 1979; Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, Revised Edition, 1989; The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, 1999, paperback, \$16.95; hardcover, \$27.95; all by Betty Edwards; Tarcher/Penguin.

These wonderful drawing-instruction books, now with more than two and a half million books in print, focus on the shift in consciousness that takes place when drawing and how to attain that shift. The language is clear and compelling, and the instructions easy to follow and inspiring. *30 Days!* takes a different, extraordinarily practical, down-to-earth, and humorous approach to the same end, although Edwards begins with drawing what you see, while Kistler begins with drawing basic shapes. The books complement one another.

[Comps section continues with brief descriptions of more recent books.]

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Book Contents

Lesson Chapter Structure

Each instructional chapter includes the same elements:

- Introduction
- Warm-up
- Instruction
- Explanation of technique learned/application to other drawings
- Bonus challenge

Table of Contents

Introduction

Attitude, Structure, and Method

Lesson One: Start with a Sphere

Lesson Two: Multiple Spheres

Lesson Three: Drawing Advanced-Level Spheres

Drawing Tools That Really Work

The Big Picture! From Imagination to Real-World Application—Apples and Oranges, Basketballs, and Moons

Lesson Four: The Cube

Lesson Five: Stacking Cubes

The Importance of Repetition in Skill Building

Lesson Six: Drawing Advanced-Level Cubes

[Contents continue.]

Glossary

Appendices

Lesson Achievement Chart

Twelve Key Words Chart

Art Elements Chart

Inspiring Examples from Students

Practice Drawing Log

Drawing Direction Compass Chart

Two-Point Perspective Tip Sheet

Scrolls, Ribbons, Flags Reference Sheet

Recommended Websites

Bibliography

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Sample Chapters

[Introduction and Lesson One were included here.]

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Supplemental Material

[A mock-up of a possible design for the first chapter was included here.]

MEMOIR

About This Proposal

This terrific proposal was sold for a substantial advance in an auction that attracted nine bidders. The book, published in hardcover as *An Unquenchable Thirst: Following Mother Teresa in Search of Love, Service and an Authentic Life* and in paperback and digital editions as *An Unquenchable Thirst: A Memoir*, went on to be named a “Best Book of the Year” by *Kirkus Reviews*, received many critical accolades, and continues to sell very well. Everything about this proposal emphasizes the quality of the writing and the salability of the concept, without any overt selling. The promotion material is relegated to the back of the proposal; what editors see first is riveting pizzazz: a photo of the author with Mother Teresa. More smart pizzazz—an engaging quote that suggests the secular views of the author—follows the proposal contents. The overview, called “Introduction,” compels with first-person immediacy, demonstrating the author’s skills and voice in a manner that’s very close to the narrative letter of passion (the primary difference between this proposal and the letter of passion is that there’s no “Dear agent”; otherwise the content is very similar). The photos inserted throughout tell their own story and modernize the proposal without being gimmicky. Unfortunately, space constraints prevent us from reprinting the photos, but we’ll show you where they appeared.

An Unquenchable Thirst

[Photo of Mary with Mother Teresa]

One Woman’s Extraordinary Journey of Faith, Hope, and Clarity

By Mary Johnson

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Proposal Contents

Introduction	4
About the Author	10
About the Book	12
My Life as a Missionary of Charity (Writing Samples)	
The Beginning: Aspirancy	13
The Vows	26
Poverty	27
Chastity	33
Obedience	40
The Discipline	52
Traveling With Mother	59
Leaving	81
Audience	95
Competition	96
Promotional Strategies	100

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“All people hunger for love, whether they are Christian or Muslim, Hindu or atheist.”

—MOTHER TERESA

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INTRODUCTION

I’m in New York on my way to meet a potential literary agent for my book—*this* book—when her stubborn blue eyes stop me at a newsstand on West 23rd Street. I reach into my pocket and hand five dollars to the guy in the stall. If I still believed in signs, this would be a big one.

Mother stares out from the cover of *TIME Magazine* with nearly the identical expression her face bore the last time we spoke, a little over ten years ago. I see the disappointment in her eyes again. Mother would no more approve of the meeting I’m about to have than she would the cover of this magazine, which promises to reveal her “secret life.” Mother’s secrets aren’t the type normally associated with magazine covers—no adulterous affairs, no shady financial dealings. Mother’s were secrets of the soul.

Though Mother Teresa was one of the most recognized and admired women in the world, she always kept her inner life close. She discouraged questions about her original inspiration or about her continuing prayer life, usually by simply smiling and refusing to say anything. She instructed us to keep quiet, too, especially about events in the convent. When I was handed two sheets of paper and an envelope to write my first “home letter” as an aspirant in the Missionaries of Charity, the sister in charge issued detailed instructions: “Write an uplifting letter. Don’t tell your family of your difficulties, and never mention what happens in the community. Urge your people to pray the rosary every night.” My letters home were so boring I was sometimes ashamed of them.

The fine print on the cover of *TIME* reads, “Newly published letters reveal a beloved icon’s fifty-year crisis of faith.” Mother had begged her spiritual directors to burn her letters. They didn’t. Soon after Mother’s death in 1997, Father Brian and the sisters working on Mother’s beatification had issued a call for any and all information about her life, and the priests and bishops to whom Mother had turned for advice forked over files full of her correspondence.

[Photo of *Time* cover.]

Mother Teresa's crisis is not news to me. Several years ago I'd read an early draft of Father Brian's interpretation of the "dark night" Mother's letters described. Some sisters had been shocked. It was hard to imagine that the sweet certainty we heard in Mother's prayers was the result of stubborn faith, not ecstatic vision. Nothing had wrapped me in the presence of God more surely than Mother's steady voice intoning, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" as she traced the Cross over her sari.

Yet I hadn't been too surprised to learn that she sometimes wondered where God was, wondered sometimes if he were out there at all. Desolation in prayer is not uncommon, especially when you spend four hours a day praying as we did, when you average less than five hours of sleep a night as Mother did, and when you deliberately deprive yourself of human intimacy as we all did or were supposed to do. Mother's distress at not feeling God's presence was all the more intense because she had previously felt Jesus so close, had indeed heard him ask her to found a community of sisters to care for the poorest of the poor. With advice from her spiritual directors, Mother came to see the feelings of abandonment as a gift, a way of sharing Jesus' passion. She referred to herself as "the Spouse of Jesus Crucified" and to suffering as "the kiss of Jesus." I have my own theory about why her agony may have lasted so long, but it's unlikely that my explanation will gain traction in the Catholic Church from which I've been steadily distancing myself for the past ten years.

As I cross West 25th Street, I glance again at the magazine in my hand and I remember another *TIME* cover, some thirty years ago. Mother and I had first met on the pages of *TIME* in 1975.

That earlier cover had rendered Mother in watercolor, with the heading "Living Saints." When I'd spotted the magazine in my southeast Texas high school library, I'd dropped into a chair behind the reference shelves to read it, skipping French class, drawn by the magnetic call of the wrinkled nun's farseeing eyes. As I read of the needs of the poor and of the brave and generous way Mother and the sisters ministered to them, time seemed to stop. I felt as if the world had opened itself before me and revealed my place in it. Since my preparation for First Communion as a six-year-old, I'd known that loving others was life's most important calling. That conviction had grown through the years as I'd experienced love's power, and its lack, for myself. In that moment in the library, with a seventeen-year-old's clarity, I knew that this nun in Calcutta loved those who needed love the most and that I was meant to follow her.

Within a week and without a word to anyone, I wrote my first letter to "Mother Teresa, Missionaries of Charity, Calcutta, India." I begged her to take me as one of her own sisters, sending the letter off with an airmail stamp and a prayer. Eighteen months later, in a convent in the South Bronx, over my parents' objections, Mother pinned a crucifix to my blouse, saying, "Receive the symbol of your Crucified Spouse. Carry his light and his love into the homes of the poor everywhere you go." I did just that for twenty years.

As that first magazine marked a change in my life, I feel the second one doing the same. Love now urges me down a path where some secrets are meant to be shared.

West 26th Street: I locate the agency, climb the front steps, and take a deep breath. I utter no prayer. Through more than a decade of wrestling with my own dark nights, I've replaced marriage to God with a new sort of integrity. I reach to ring the bell, ready to tell my secrets to the agent and to anyone else who will listen. I would tell them to Mother if I could. Mother would have called these secrets blasphemy, but I call them freedom.

For twenty years I was a Missionary of Charity, a nun in the order founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta. My name for those two decades was Sister Donata, a name meaning "freely given," the name Mother assigned me in Rome the day I wore the white habit and sari for the first time, the day she cut my hair. As Sister Donata I came to be one of the most trusted members of Mother's community. She sent me to study theology, a rare occurrence in our community, and assigned the spiritual care of sisters preparing for final vows to me. I was with Mother when she met Princess Diana for the first time. On occasion, I

traveled with Mother. When the Vatican issued a new Code of Canon Law and mandated changes in the governing documents of all communities of nuns, Mother gave the task of revising the *Constitutions* to me. Mother had first written the *Constitutions* on her knees, eight years before I was born.

The name my own mother gave me when I was born in 1958 was—and is again—Mary Johnson. I was the first in what would become a swarm of seven children. As eldest, I became a second mother to my five sisters and one brother, bandaging scraped knees and teaching my siblings how to tie their shoes before I'd even reached second grade. Our Catholic family had an unusual bent; my parents led a Catholic charismatic prayer group, speaking in tongues and praying for healing. The strong emotional component of their spirituality, with its lifting of hands unto heaven and its shouts of "Praise the Lord," made me uncomfortable, but I liked the music.

At seventeen, I ranked third of 420 in my senior class in Beaumont, Texas. I edited the school newspaper, often battling the principal and the school board in my weekly column. As one of the stars of the debate team, I was known for humiliating my opponents. In my spare time, I led a Girl Scout troop for fourth graders with learning disabilities and played flute in the music group at church. Trophies, medals, ribbons, and certificates lined the walls of my room, and my classmates voted me Most Likely to Succeed. Most people at school thought I would grow up to follow in the footsteps of Woodward and Bernstein, or perhaps I could be a white Barbara Jordan. I was looking for something different, though.

[Photo of 1975 *Time* cover.]

That was when I saw the 1975 *TIME* cover and knew, almost at once, my true calling. I wrote letter after letter to Mother Teresa, all unanswered. I graduated from high school and needed to do *something*, so I enrolled in the liberal arts honors program at the University of Texas in Austin and wrote more letters. I chose the freshman seminar on social inequality and wrote a paper comparing the civil rights struggles of African Americans to those of India's Untouchables. My professor told me he'd never seen such a fine paper so poorly typed. On the last page, in red ink, he wrote, "Research at a graduate level." Then one evening back at the dorm, I pulled a letter out of my mailbox. The return address read, "Missionaries of Charity, 335 East 145th Street, Bronx, NY." I slammed the mailbox shut and rushed onto the streets of Austin. Envelope in hand, I sang as I ran, revising Simon and Garfunkel for the moment, "Jubilation! He loves me again! I fall on my knees and I'm laughing." Finally, behind the biology building, under the streetlight near the goldfish pond, I opened the letter. The sisters had invited me to join them in the South Bronx.

What did I imagine I would find with these sisters in the big city so far from the oil fields and bayous of southeast Texas? Who was that seventeen-year-old girl who decided "success" meant something different to her than it did to her classmates? What power did radical poverty, chastity, and obedience yield over someone with an ego as large as hers? How many more surprising twists would this girl's path take, and who are the extraordinary people she would meet along the way?

This is the story of my journey—toward faith, spirituality, self. In 1997 when I told Mother Teresa that I intended to leave the community and renounce my vows, she told me, "I could believe this about anyone, but I cannot believe it about you." I began a new journey that day, a journey toward a new understanding of self, spirituality, faith. Mother Teresa used to say, "God made us to love and to be loved." This is the story of how I learned to do just that, with God and without him, at Mother Teresa's side and far from her.

When all is said and done, my story is a love story. Of a very particular type.

About the Author

At nineteen, I joined the Missionaries of Charity, the group commonly known as the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa trusted me, and I rose quickly in the ranks. She appointed me to guide sisters prior to their religious vows and entrusted to me the updating of the *Constitutions of the Missionaries of Charity*, the group's governing document.

[Photo of Mary as Sister Donata.]

Mother sent me to study theology at Regina Mundi, a pontifical institute aggregated to the Gregorian University in Rome, where I received a diploma in religious studies, *summa cum laude*, and wrote a thesis on the spirituality of the Missionaries of Charity. I was a much-requested speaker at continuing education sessions of the sisters throughout Europe, where I taught Mother Teresa's spirituality. During my twenty years as a sister, I met privately with Mother at least once each year. For fifteen of those years, I was stationed in Rome and often lived with Mother for weeks at a time.

After leaving the sisters in 1997, I completed a BA in English, *summa cum laude*, at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. While studying, I also edited Lamar's literary magazine, served as liturgical director at St. Anne Church, and founded an inter-religious discussion group.

I subsequently received an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College. My work has been published in *Fourth Genre*, *Texas Review*, *Pulse*, *The Hippo*, and *Pitkin Critical Review*. I also wrote the entry on Mother Teresa for the Eighth Volume of *The Interdisciplinary Biographical Dictionaries of the Western World's Great Cultural Eras* (edited by Joseph Nordgren, forthcoming from Greenwood Press).

[Photo of Mary today.]

A well-respected teacher and public speaker, I've led retreats, workshops, classes, and training sessions of various kinds for nearly thirty years. I currently teach creative writing and Italian to adults and am Creative Director of A Room of Her Own Foundation's retreats for women writers. I've been named a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony, with a residency there in early 2008. I am married and live in Nashua, New Hampshire.

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About the Book

An Unquenchable Thirst will be written in the first person, with a conscious focus on the narrative of events as they unfolded rather than on sociological or theological analysis. My wish is to allow readers to witness firsthand the experience of a young girl—a bright, headstrong American teenager—who dedicates her life to God and who, twenty years later, makes the momentous decision to leave the world that had become her entire life. The narrative voice remains very close to the experience as it occurred—identifying, for instance, the many hardships and conflicts (and satisfactions, too)—and attempts to record them without judging them unduly from the changed perspective of the woman I would later become.

Structurally, *An Unquenchable Thirst* is told chronologically, beginning with my entry into the convent and concluding with the day I actually left. My early family life and my experience of being “called” are dealt with in flashbacks. An epilogue set in 2008 lets the reader into my present reality and thoughts, illuminating, especially, my worldview as someone who has left the church. Today I consider myself an atheist.

An Unquenchable Thirst is based on my memories and on notes I kept while a Missionary of Charity. I've checked facts against the monthly letters I wrote my family and against available documents of the Missionaries of Charity and public information about Mother Teresa's life. I have changed the names and masked the identities of some sisters and other people in the narrative out of respect for their privacy and have chosen to retain the names of sisters elected or appointed to office within the Missionaries of Charity.

Three-quarters of the manuscript has been drafted. I expect to deliver a final manuscript of 100,000 words by January 1, 2009. It will include a glossary as an aid to convent jargon.

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My Life as a Missionary of Charity

Writing Samples

[Sample writing included here.]

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Audience

The readers for AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST include:

- **Mother Teresa fans:** Mother Teresa appeared on Gallup Poll's "Most Admired Woman" list nineteen times and continues to receive a significant number of nominations each year. Six-hundred-thousand people crowded St. Peter's Square for Mother Teresa's beatification in 2003; Vatican watchers predict her imminent canonization. The Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, laypeople who live Mother Teresa's spirituality in their daily lives, number over one million worldwide. *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* (September 2007), a collection of her letters, opened at number two on the *New York Times* best-seller list and remained on the list for eight weeks.
- **Believers, unbelievers, seekers, and doubters:** *An Unquenchable Thirst* chronicles the spiritual journey of someone who, initially, was delirious with certainty yet today considers herself an atheist.
- **Catholics and ex-Catholics struggling with spiritual identity:** *An Unquenchable Thirst* recognizes both the comfort and the curse of being Catholic today.
- **Social workers and counselors:** Mother Teresa is often seen as a role model for a life of service. *An Unquenchable Thirst* illuminates numerous aspects relating to effective service and counseling.
- **Feminists:** *An Unquenchable Thirst* authoritatively examines the difficulties created by using Mother Teresa as the image of the ideal woman and the model for love.
- **People questioning their sexuality:** Sister Donata receives her first kiss while a nun (from a male co-worker), engages in her first sexual relationship with another nun, and falls in love with a priest.
- **Anyone who has ever been curious about the life of nuns**

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Competition

An Unquenchable Thirst is unique. *An Unquenchable Thirst* is the only memoir written by someone who lived with Mother Teresa over a significant period of time as a Missionary Sister of Charity. *An Unquenchable Thirst* tells the complex story of my relationship with one of the world's most beloved icons, with the religious community she founded, and with God. While none of the books currently on the market attempt to cover all the ground my book will, several share characteristics with *An Unquenchable Thirst* and address similar audiences.

Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light by Mother Teresa and Brian Kolodiejchuk (Doubleday, 2007)

A collection of Mother Teresa's letters to her spiritual directors and other acquaintances, with theological commentary by Koldiejchuk, describing fifty years in which Mother Teresa did not enjoy the feeling of God's presence but felt herself rejected by God while continuing to believe. *An Unquenchable Thirst* will reveal the dark nights of the soul undergone by a trusted follower of Mother Teresa who, in the end, chose a different path.

Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta by Malcolm Muggeridge (Harper & Row, 1971)

The classic Mother Teresa memoir, a slim introduction to Mother Teresa and to Muggeridge's spiritual awakening while he worked on a BBC documentary of Mother Teresa's work. Unlike *An Unquenchable Thirst*, this short book includes nothing of

the inner workings of the Missionaries of Charity and limits itself to the beginning of a spiritual journey and Muggeridge's spiritual infatuation with Mother Teresa.

The Spiral Staircase: My Climb out of Darkness by Karen Armstrong (Knopf, 2004)

Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery by Karen Armstrong (SMP, 1981)

Armstrong's first memoir, *Through the Narrow Gate*, perceptively details her entrance into a British convent in 1962 at the age of seventeen and her eventual departure in 1969. *The Spiral Staircase* speaks of the years immediately following Armstrong's departure from the convent. Armstrong's books are set in Britain, fifteen to twenty years prior to *An Unquenchable Thirst*, and describe Armstrong's doubts and difficulties, though she retains a theistic faith.

[Comps continue.]

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Promotional Strategies

I am an experienced and enthusiastic public speaker and am prepared to travel and to meet with the media, as well as with large and small groups through conferences, workshops, retreats, my author website and e-newsletter, and an outreach to national book clubs and local book groups.

Conferences and Retreats

I will energetically pursue conference appearances and longer retreat offerings. My experiences and studies have prepared me to speak on a wide variety of topics. I have a detailed, expanded plan for approaching conferences, available on request. Some possibilities follow.

- To groups with a deliberately secular, rationalistic stance, including the Council for Secular Humanism, Atheist Alliance International, International Humanist and Ethical Union, and Rationalist International:
 - "When a True Believer Finds Another Way: An Ex-Nun's Story"
 - "The Joys of Doubt"
- To groups of divorced people, including Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics, Divorce Support Groups, and DivorceCare:
 - "Divorcing Jesus: My Story"
 - "Dealing with Those Who Disapprove of Your Fundamental Life Decisions: Tips from an Ex-Nun's Perspective"
- To those interested in the spiritual life, including Collective Wisdom Initiative, Kripalu Center, and Omega Institute:
 - "Translating Four Traditional Methods of Western Christian Meditation for Modern Life, Christian or Otherwise"
 - "Mother Teresa's Dark Night of the Soul: Unexpected Lessons"
- To women's conferences, including Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Professional Women's Clubs, and international meetings of the General Federation of Women's Clubs:
 - "Why Mother Teresa May Not Be a Good Role Model: Obvious and Not So Obvious Considerations"
 - "Mother Teresa and Princess Diana: Why They Captured Our Hearts"

- To organizations seeking reform within the Catholic Church, including Call to Action, CORPUS, and Women’s Ordination Conference:
 - “Outgrowing Mother Teresa, but Not Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater”
 - “Adventures, Misadventures, and Growth: My Experiences Within and Beyond Consecrated Chastity”
- To social workers, counselors, and those who work with the disadvantaged and the homeless, including American Public Human Services Association, Coalition on Human Needs, and National Association of Social Workers:
 - “Mother Teresa: Both a Model and a Cautionary Tale, from Someone Who Knew Her”
 - “Helping the Poor Where They Are: What I Learned from Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity”

Readings

I will aggressively seek readings with groups likely to have a particular interest in *An Unquenchable Thirst*: divinity schools and seminaries, spirituality centers like ElderSpirit Community and the Anna Howard Shaw Center, women’s centers, especially those with strong spirituality programs like Tufts University Women’s Center’s Programs on Spirituality, The College of St. Catherine’s Center for Women and Spirituality, and the California Institute of Integral Studies.

[Promotion continues.]

NARRATIVE NONFICTION, MILITARY HISTORY

About This Proposal

Perseus, a division of Hachette, acquired this proposal. The author has had a long and successful career as a military historian. You may notice how brief the promotion section is—just one paragraph offering to work with the publisher. Whitlock is known to the publisher and writes a niche book into an identifiable category. His proposal’s success is a perfect example of how, in some cases, social media isn’t a factor. Whitlock also did not include details of each chapter; instead he spoke directly to the publisher to explain why.

Anzio: Desperate Valour

By

Flint Whitlock

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Contents

1. Overview
2. The Manuscript
3. Audience
4. Promotion
5. Competing Books
6. About the Author
7. List of Chapters
8. Sample Chapter

1. THE BOOK—AN OVERVIEW

For most military-history buffs, the story of Operation Shingle—the January 1944 invasion and brutal, five-month-long battle at the Italian coastal resort town of Anzio, forty miles south of Rome—may seem a familiar one.

As students of the Italian campaign know, in the early weeks of 1944, the world’s attention was focused on a titanic struggle taking place at Anzio—a fishing village and sleepy resort town where Roman emperors once played, located thirty-seven miles southwest of Rome on the west coast of Italy.

The Allied landings at Anzio, six months before the Normandy invasion, were intended as an “end run” around the stalemate that had developed along the Germans’ “Gustav Line,” anchored by Monte Cassino. The planners hoped that Shingle would threaten the Germans’ rear and cause them to abandon the Gustav Line, thus opening the route to Rome.

The seaborne invasion by the U.S. VI Corps, commanded by Major General John P. Lucas, caught the Germans totally by surprise. But Lucas, expecting a fierce counterattack (as had happened previously during the invasions of Sicily and Salerno, on the Italian mainland), was encouraged by his superior Mark Clark not to do “anything foolish” or “stick your neck out.”

As a result, the invasion stalled a few miles inland from the shoreline, allowing German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring to build an iron ring around the invasion area and subject the British and American forces to months of savage shelling, bombing, and tank-and-infantry attack. During the first five months of 1944, the struggle for Anzio became a deadly gladiatorial arena for almost 300,000 troops on both sides.

And one of the great defensive stands of all time.

This courageous stand is at the heart of *DESPERATE VALOUR*. (The title is derived from a statement about Anzio by Winston Churchill: “But fortune, hitherto baffling, rewarded the desperate valour of the British and American armies.... The fighting was intense, losses on both sides were heavy, but the deadly battle was won.”)

Whitlock feels that the courage and heroism shown by the common British and American soldiers during the unrelenting slugfest—into which the Germans threw everything they had at the Allies in order to push them back into the sea—has not been fully heralded and appreciated. *DESPERATE VALOUR* will correct history’s oversight.

Also, for the first time, the author also devotes considerable pages to the fighting that centered around a tiny village ten miles inland—fighting that has been glossed over in most of the histories of the larger battle—a village called Aprilia, which had been established by Mussolini in 1936 as a “model Fascist town” as an important part of his public-works program to reclaim the malarial Pontine Marshes along Italy’s west coast.

For both the Allies, who wanted to get to Rome, and the Germans, who wanted to push the Americans and British back into the sea, control of Aprilia was critical. It stood on the one major paved highway that connected Anzio with Rome; the muddy farm fields on either side of the road would not support tanks or vehicles. Therefore, whichever side controlled Aprilia would control the battle and, possibly, would determine the outcome of the entire Italian campaign.

Evacuated by the civilian population before the struggle began, Aprilia changed hands frequently between the British, the Germans, and the Americans. As the battle raged, the town’s modern buildings, designed in Art Deco style, were destroyed, and

the two tall, square towers—the church bell tower and the tower of the town hall that caused many of the soldiers to think the town was actually some sort of industrial complex and dub it “The Factory”—were reduced to rubble.

Surprisingly, no book about Anzio or the Italian Campaign (that goes into much detail or pays proper homage to the drastic nature of the fighting at Aprilia) has yet been published. It is a place where American and British units fought intermingled, side by side, against fanatical German opposition and tremendous counterattacks. Aprilia is almost always mentioned in histories of the battle of Anzio, but only briefly and without much detail.

As with Whitlock’s previous books, he lets the voices of those who were there carry the story. Using much unpublished material, including a vast reservoir of memoirs from American, British, and German veterans, Whitlock makes the story come alive. The reader will gain an appreciation of what it was like for Yanks and Tommies forced to spend endless days and nights in muddy, freezing, water-filled foxholes while struggling to hold off waves of fanatical German infantry accompanied by panzers.

The reader will also understand from firsthand accounts what it was like to be relentlessly attacked night and day by German aerial assault and saturated by immense artillery barrages that were without equal.

Rare are the accounts by ordinary German soldiers of their side of the battle, but the author has managed to find a number of first-person tales that describe how they were able to survive the attacks by American and British warplanes and artillery barrages, and the orders of their commanders to plunge in suicidal charges across open ground into the face of deadly Allied fire. The reader will even come to realize what the battle was like for the Allied doctors and nurses (and patients) at the defenseless beachfront hospitals that were subjected to the aerial and artillery attacks.

Using the memoirs of the main architects of the battle—British Field Marshal Harold Alexander, American Generals Mark Clark, John Lucas, Lucien Truscott, Ernie Harmon, the U.S. Rangers’ commander Colonel William Darby, German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, and General Eberhard von Mackensen, and especially British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the one whose idea Shingle was—the reader will come to better understand the crucial decisions that were made regarding one of the most controversial and still-debated operations of the entire war.

The reader will also meet ordinary American and British soldiers—Americans like Paul Brown, a member of a graves-registration casualty-collection team whose job it was to crawl out onto the battlefield at night and bring back the mangled corpses of men killed during the day—who drank himself senseless to try and forget the awful nature of his job. British soldiers like Major David M.L. Gordon-Watson, who killed twelve Germans with his pistol while leading his men out of a German ambush. American army nurse Avis Dagit whose best friend was killed during an aerial assault on her seaside tent hospital. Eric Alley, a British sailor aboard a Royal Navy destroyer that came under attack by remote-control flying bombs—the world’s first “cruise missiles.” GIs such as Audie Murphy (the most decorated American soldier in history) and James Arness (who later became famous as Marshal Matt Dillon in the TV series *Gunsmoke*). Even Italian civilians like nine-year-old Pasqualino Nuti, whose family was forced to take shelter in a slaughterhouse in Aprilia while the battle raged around them.

And an Epilogue will take the reader back to Anzio and Aprilia—the latter once a completely destroyed ruin of a town then inhabited by two-thousand people and today one of Italy’s great post-war success stories, with dozens of factories and high-tech firms and a population of over seventy thousand (with success, however, has come trade-offs; many of the battlefields on which thousands of men bravely fought and died are now forever covered over and desecrated with residential and commercial development).

The battle of Anzio lasted from January to May 1944, with varying degrees of intensity. Not until the end of May 1944 did the Allies finally manage to break out of the circle of steel the Germans had formed around Anzio and make the push for Rome. By

that time, the battle had cost the lives of some twelve thousand Allied and German soldiers (not to mention over sixty-six thousand wounded or missing).

DESPERATE VALOUR will honor the memory of all those who fought, died, and suffered there.

2. THE MANUSCRIPT

The manuscript for *DESPERATE VALOUR* will be approximately 100,000–120,000 words in length, will have approximately twenty to twenty-five photographs and several maps, and will be completed within nine months after receipt of the publishing contract and advance.

PAGE BREAK

3. AUDIENCE

Interest in World War II is certain to remain strong as we have entered the 70th–75th anniversary of important historical events in which a number of significant dates and events will be memorialized. And because of the British Army's involvement during the battle for Anzio, there should also be a strong market in the U.K. The book also invites translation into German and Italian for those markets.

This book is sure to appeal to a wide variety of audiences, including:

- American, British, and German veterans of World War II and their families
- history and military-history buffs of all ages
- members of the Military Book Club
- history teachers and professors
- military academies and schools
- libraries
- Museum gift shop/book shop buyers

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4. PROMOTION

In addition to efforts by the publisher to promote *DESPERATE VALOUR* nationally and internationally, the author looks forward to personally promoting it at various venues around the U.S.

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5. COMPETING BOOKS

Several books have been published about the battle of Anzio

[Comps continue here.]

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6. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After five years on active duty as an officer in the U.S. Army (which included tours of duty in West Germany and South Vietnam) and twenty years on the creative side of the advertising industry, the Denver-based author began writing military history in the early 1980s and is now considered one of the leading experts on World War II.

Whitlock is the award-winning author of twelve books (nine of which deal with World War II), dozens of magazine articles, and has been the editor-in-chief of a national magazine, *World War II Quarterly*, since 2009.

He has led battlefield tours for the Smithsonian Institution, National Geographic, the Minnesota World War II History Roundtable, and the Colorado National Guard. He has also made repeated trips to the Anzio area to do field research.

In 1998, Whitlock's second book, *THE ROCK OF ANZIO: A HISTORY OF THE 45th INFANTRY DIVISION*, was published by Westview Press. Since then he has gained a reputation as an authority on the history of Anzio and the Italian campaign.

Whitlock is in demand around the country as a speaker at veterans' reunions, museums, commemorations, schools, and historical conferences. He has also appeared several times on The History Channel and *War Stories with Oliver North*, as well as in documentaries and on local and national radio programs. He is excited to be actively involved in the promotion and marketing of *DESPERATE VALOUR*.

Whitlock's published military histories include:

- *Soldiers on Skis: A Pictorial Memoir of the 10th Mountain Division* (Paladin Press, 1992)
- *The Rock of Anzio: A History of the 45th Infantry Division—From Sicily to Dachau* (Westview Press, 1998)*
- *The Fighting First: The Story of the Big Red One on D-Day* (Westview Press, 2004)*
- *Given Up for Dead: American GIs in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Berga* (Westview Press, 2005)
- *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums: The Union Response to the Confederate Invasion of New Mexico* (University Press of Colorado, 2006)
- *The Depths of Courage: American Submariners at War with Japan, 1941–1945* (Penguin/Berkley, 2007)*
- *If Chaos Reigns: The Near-Disaster and Ultimate Triumph of Allied Airborne Forces on D-Day, June 6, 1944* (Casemate, 2011)*
- *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl & Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War-Crimes Trial of the Century* (Cable Publishing, 2011)
- *Buchenwald: Hell on a Hilltop—Murder, Torture & Medical Experiments in the Nazis' Worst Concentration Camp* (Cable, 2014)

* = Featured Selection of the Military Book Club

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7. LIST OF CHAPTERS

The chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning with January 22, 1944, the date the invasion was launched, and ending in May 1944, when the stalemate at Anzio ended and the Allied breakout to Rome began.

Each day, too, is a chapter unto itself. This is because the number of units and personalities involved and the actions that take place can be somewhat confusing unless they are placed in chronological order within the context of the overall story.

Due to the fact that these chapters are still being researched and written, it is not possible at this time to present a synopsis of each one here.

[Sample chapter was included here.]

1. These are the titles of the published books; some, as you'll see, were different in the proposal.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE PROPOSAL INDEX

2048: Humanity's Agreement to Live Together, Dr. John Kirk Boyd, Berrett-Koehler

[Chapter Fourteen: Author Platform](#)

Anzio: Desperate Valour, Flint Whitlock, Da Capo Press/Hachette

[Appendix C: Four Sample Proposals](#)

The Big Year, Mark Obmascik, The Free Press/Simon & Schuster

[Chapter Eleven: Book Table of Contents](#)

[Chapter Eighteen: Overview](#)

Bringing Up Geeks, Marybeth Hicks, Berkley

[Chapter Ten: Comps](#)

Buy Ketchup in May and Fly at Noon, Mark Di Vincenzo, William Morrow

[Chapter Seventeen: Detailed Outline](#)

Climbing the Corporate Ladder in High Heels, Kathleen Archambeau, Career Press

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

Comfort Zone Investing: Build Wealth and Sleep Well at Night, Ted Allrich, St. Martin's Press

[Chapter Fifteen: Audience](#)

[Chapter Eighteen: Overview](#)

The Compassionate Carnivore, Catherine Friend, Da Capo Lifelong Books

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

Creative Visualization for Writers, Nina Amir, Writers Digest

[Chapter Sixteen: Personal Promotion](#)

Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor, Robert Stinnett, The Free Press

[Chapter Eighteen: Overview](#)

The Everyday Advocate: Standing Up for Your Child with Autism or Other Special Needs,
Areva Martin, NAL Publishing Group

[Chapter Eighteen: Overview](#)

Guerilla Marketing for Job Hunters 2.0, Jay Conrad Levinson and David Perry, Wiley

[Chapter Fifteen: Audience](#)

Guerilla Trade Show Selling, Jay Conrad Levinson, Mark S.A. Smith, and Orvel Ray Wilson,
Wiley

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

Halfway to Heaven, Mark Obmascik, Atria/Simon & Schuster

[Chapter Thirty-Three: Voice](#)

Hetty: The Genius and Madness of America's First Female Tycoon, Charles Slack, Ecco
Books/HarperCollins

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

In the Cradle of Storms, Mark Obmascik, Atria/Simon & Schuster

[Chapter Twenty-Eight: The Narrative Letter of Passion](#)

Jolt Your Life! The Power of Intentional Change in a World That's Constantly Changing,
Phil Cooke, Thomas Nelson

[Chapter Seventeen: Detailed Outline](#)

The Lakota Way: Stories and Lessons for Living, Joseph Marshall III, Viking

[Chapter Ten: Comps](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four: Format for All Devices](#)

The Probiotics Revolution, Gary B. Huffnagle, Ph.D. and Mairi C. Noverr, Ph.D., ghostwriter
Sarah Wernick, Bantam

[Chapter Seventeen: Detailed Outline](#)

The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes and Other Stories by Lucy H. Spelman, DVM and Ted
Mashima, DVM, Putnam/Penguin Random House

[Chapter Ten: Comps](#)

Rock of Anzio, Flint Whitlock, Basic Books

[Chapter Thirty-Four: Format for All Devices](#)

The Scalpel and the Soul, Allan J. Hamilton, TarcherPerigee/Penguin Random House

[Appendix C: Four Sample Proposals](#)

The Seashell on the Mountaintop, Alan Cutler, Dutton/Author Planet Press

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

[Chapter Seventeen: Detailed Outline](#)

Sensational Kids, Dr. Lucy Jane Miller, Putnam

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

[Chapter Fourteen: Author Platform](#)

She Flies Without Wings, Mary Midkiff, Delacorte Press

[Chapter Thirty-Four: Format for All Devices](#)

Skeletons on the Zahara, Dean King, Little, Brown & Co./Hachette

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four: Format for All Devices](#)

Stooples, Kevin Reifler, St. Martin's Press

[Chapter Nine: Pizzazz](#)

[Chapter Eighteen: Overview](#)

Teaching Savages to Fly, Logan Ward, sold to Riverhead

[Chapter Twelve: Book Specs](#)

An Unquenchable Thirst, Mary Johnson, Spiegel & Grau/Penguin Random House

[Appendix C: Four Sample Proposals](#)

What Would Betty Do?, Betty Bowers (aka Andrew Bradley), Simon & Schuster/Touchstone

[Chapter Twenty-Eight: The Narrative Letter of Passion](#)

You Can Draw In 30 Days! Mark Kistler, Da Capo Press/Hachette

[Appendix C: Four Sample Proposals](#)

You Can Draw It in Just 30 Minutes! Mark Kistler, Da Capo Press/Hachette

Chapter Twelve: Book Specs

You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid or Crazy? Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo, Scribner

Chapter Nine: Pizzazz

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Find these additional resources online at www.writersdigest.com/book-proposals:

- An Opinionated Glossary of Publishing Terms
- The Practically-Painless Proposal Writing System (a downloadable checklist)
- Book Proposal Content Checklist: What to Write When (a downloadable checklist)

We'll be adding more resources to this page from time to time, so visit often!

Find more resources on our websites:

- jodyreinbooks.com
- sfwritersauthorplanet.org
- authorplanet.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JODY REIN

Formerly an executive editor with imprints of Penguin Random House and HarperCollins Publishers in New York, Jody now lives near Denver with her two sometimes-home sons and their two cats; she runs the boutique literary agency Jody Rein Books and the publishing consulting company, AuthorPlanet.org. She has ghostwritten two acclaimed books and has edited, represented, or acquired hundreds of books, including *New York Times* and international bestsellers, and multiple books optioned for film and television. Jody is a popular speaker and her work has been featured in such publications as *USA Today*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Publishers Weekly*. She has been a member of the AAR and the Authors Guild, and the Board of Directors for Writing for Peace. Jody offers author and publisher coaching at coach@jodyreinbooks.com. Visit her websites: www.authorplanet.org and www.jodyreinbooks.com.

MICHAEL LARSEN

Born and educated in New York City, Michael Larsen worked in promotion for major publishers before moving to San Francisco. He and his wife, Elizabeth Pomada, started Larsen-Pomada Literary Agents, through which they sold books to more than one-hundred publishers and imprints. Mike is the co-director of the San Francisco Writers Conference, www.sfwriters.org, and the San Francisco Writing for Change Conference, www.sfwritingforchange.org. He is the author or co-author of eleven books, including *How to Get a Literary Agent* and *Guerrilla Marketing for Writers: 100 Weapons for Selling Your Work*. Mike believes that now is the best time ever to be a writer and gives talks on getting published. He also offers author coaching, at www.michaellarsenauthorcoaching.com. You are welcome to write him with questions at larsenpoma@aol.com.

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From Jody

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From Mike

You and I are hugely indebted to Jody for researching and writing this book, making it state-of-the-art and more helpful than I ever could. Jody's personal gifts are even greater than her professional knowledge, skills, and experience. She was born to nurture, and connects with everyone lucky enough to meet her, hear her speak, or work with her.

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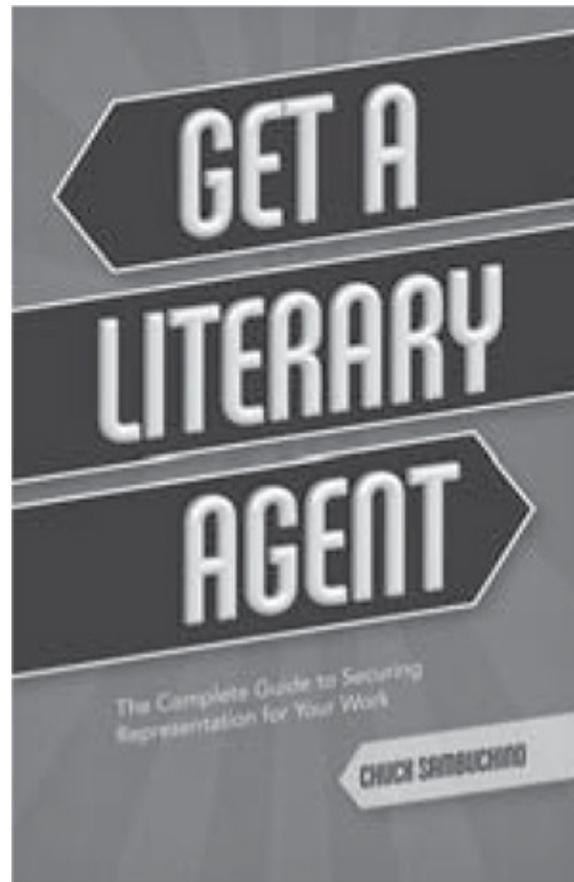


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BY CHUCK SAMBUCHINO

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