

GUIDE TO WRITING A PROPOSAL

This document is designed to give you an idea of why a proposal is an important part of the publishing process, and what the main elements should be. It is always best if you contact Sigel Press before submitting your proposal to discuss your ideas in more detail.

Preparing Your Proposal

Writing a book is a major undertaking. Faced with such a prospect, even experienced authors often wonder where to begin. We firmly believe the first step towards getting your book on paper (and eventually into print) is an exciting and well-conceived proposal.

Why Write A Proposal?

Many authors are eager to plunge into the actual writing of their book. They wonder why they should spend time and effort on something that will not be part of the finished book. A good proposal is anything but a waste of time.

☛ The Proposal as a Sales Tool

A positive reception of your proposal by the academics or professionals called on by the publisher to review it will assure confidence in the saleability of your book. It will also help 'pre-sell' the book and garner the kinds of constructive criticism that will help you produce a book with the greatest possible appeal.

☛ The Proposal as a Writing Tool

A good proposal is also the framework for the book. It - and the editor's and reviewers' comments - should serve as a guide in preparing an initial manuscript. If you can execute the ideas embodied in a well-received proposal, you may expect a similarly warm reception for your book.

☛ The Proposal as a Preface

Finally, you should look at your proposal as the basis of the preface you will eventually need to write. If you incorporate the elements specified below, you will have already written most of a preface that will sell your published book.

What Belongs In A Proposal?

The following notes are intended as a guide only to what you can include in a proposal. However, a strong, well thought out and detailed proposal will help create a successful book.

If your proposal is to achieve all the above goals, it needs to tell your book's story:

Your Vision of the Book

The vision statement should reflect the philosophy behind your book, your purpose in writing it, what makes it unique and what will sell it against the competition. The vision should provide:

- A general frame of reference and outline for your work
- The philosophy behind it
- Why you are writing it
- Why another book?
- Why should someone be interested in your book?
- What aspects will set your book apart from existing ones?

The Outline of the Book

The outline is a road map guiding both the reviewer and the publisher through your ideas. The outline should provide:

- An overview of the entire work
- Chapter headings followed by subheads that explain the content in a greater detail
- Description of the content as needed to clarify the outline

The Book

It is sensible to provide the following information about your book:

- Brief description:* In one or two paragraphs describe the work, its approach and your purpose in writing such a text.
- Outstanding features:* List briefly what you consider to be the outstanding or unique features of the work.
- Pedagogical features:* Will the book include learning outcomes, chapter summaries, interim summaries, examples, case studies, questions, problems, etc.? Outline what these features are and how you will use them in the text.
- Supplements:* Do you plan to provide supplementary material such as a teacher's manual, study guide, lab manual, solutions manual, software or the like?
- Level:* For whom is the book intended and at what level? What are the student prerequisites, if any?

Your Vision of the Market

How do you view the market for your book?

- What is the primary course for which the book is intended?
- What level is this course?
- What is the typical profile of your target audience (majors, non-majors, etc)?
- What is your expectation of the size of the market?
- If you have done any market research of your own, we would appreciate receiving a brief summary of your findings
- What other courses would it serve?
- Is there an audience for your book outside of university courses? If so, what is the audience like? How can it be reached?

The Competition

When you put together your proposal it is important to be clear about the key titles the proposed text will compete with – who are the competitors, why is another book needed in the field how will you ensure that your book is sufficiently different?

- Which books now available will your proposed text most closely compete with, and why?
- What are the top three book in the field?
- Why do you think these books have succeeded?
- How does your book compare and/or contrast with them?
- What aspects will set your book apart from existing ones (for example, approach, organisation, special topics, illustrations, boxed inserts, etc.)?
- Please discuss each competing book in a separate paragraph - include author, title, publisher, publication date, length and price (if known).
- Please compare topical coverage, organisation, level, writing style, art programme, pedagogy, and any other relevant similarities and differences between your project and the competing books
- Be frank! This information is written for reviewers, providing them with a comparative framework and should accurately reflect your views
- Are you aware of any similar works in progress but unpublished?

You, The Author

- Please provide a description of your background, relevant professional activities, number of times you have taught this course, and other writing experience
- Please attach a copy of your curriculum vitae
- Do you have other writing plans when this project is complete?

Additional Information

Final pieces of information to round out the proposal:

- What schedule of completion do you have in mind for your book?
- What will be the approximate length of your work?
- What kind of art programme is needed for the book?
- What is the estimated number of line drawings and photographs?
- Any other questions or comments?
- Prepare the material carefully. If the manuscript is full of typographical or grammatical errors, the reviewer's attention will be diverted from the more important consideration of content

Supplementing Your Book

Although the book is still the heart of a learning and teaching package, today many publishers provide auxiliary materials such as Web sites, instructor's guides, student study guides, workbooks, transparencies, test banks, etc.

- Which supplements do you see as crucial to the success of your book in the market?
- What supplements would be desirable 'extras'?
- What features would you want to include in these ancillaries?
- Do you envisage any supplements that would be new or unique to your market?
- If so, do you plan to create these yourself?
- Do you think that software or other media are needed to support your book?

Is A Proposal Enough?

The proposal is a vital element in the publishing decision process. However, reviewers - and editors - can give more specific evaluation of your proposed book if they are given complete details. To give a full sense of the scope of the project **a detailed table of contents is essential**. Moreover, because the proposal is targeted at a specific audience, including one or more chapters that reflect the level and writing style you plan to use will give a more accurate picture of your book. (This is especially true for introductory level books and those with specialised writing or presentation styles).

The Sample Chapters

Sample chapters should illustrate the strongest and most distinctive aspects of your work.

- It is best to submit three chapters. Two chapters or less leave the reviewer in doubt and the entire manuscript tends to overwhelm the reviewer.
- Selected chapters should include what best represents your work's basic idea, its quality, and distinctive features. Do not include the introductory chapter.
- The chapters need not be in sequence.
- The selected material does not need any illustrations other than rough pencil sketches; remember that the reviewers are your peers and will quickly understand a brief suggestion of an illustration. At the same time, it is crucial to have the suggested illustrations integrated with the full manuscript.
- If your manuscript features problems or exercises, please include some examples.

We believe that writing a proposal is an important phase in a book's development. For us, it represents the pre-planning and attention to detail vital to creating a successful book. We hope that, when your proposal is complete, you will give us the opportunity to consider your project for publication. Together, we can produce a book that satisfies the market and reflects your enthusiasm and expertise.

PROPOSAL CHECKLIST

When submitting a proposal please provide the following information. The more detail you are able to provide, the better able we are to obtain constructive feedback on your proposal.

- Your Curriculum Vitae - including previous publications.
- A synopsis of the book's vision/ philosophy.
- A synopsis of the subject matter of the book including a detailed table of contents.
- Marketing features (i.e. features that distinguish it from the competition).
- Key features of the book, i.e. learning aids, case studies, illustrations, examples, exercises, summaries, readings, etc.
- Any new theories or developments in the subject that you intend to cover.
- Target audience for the book, their learning needs and challenges.
- Course(s) for which the proposed book would be suitable.
- Analysis of the competition, including strengths and weaknesses.
- What (if any) professional market is there?
- Present state of the project (i.e. idea, partial manuscript, lecture notes, etc.)
- Estimated final number of pages, words, diagrams, tables, etc.
- Any sample material you may have including chapters, preface, etc.
- Details of any supplementary material you plan to provide.