

The Parts of a Proposal

Most proposals range from 35 to 50 pages and have three parts: **The Overview**, **The Outline**, and a **Sample Chapter**.

The Overview

Your overview must prove that you have a salable idea and that you are the right person to write about it and promote it. Provide as much ammunition about you and your book as you can, including:

- The opening hook, ideally a paragraph, that will most excite editors about your subject
- The book hook:
 - * the title and selling handle, up to fifteen words of selling copy about the book.
(Optional) If your credentials will significantly help sell the book, before the title, add an introductory phrase describing them, for example: “Based on an article in x / y years of research / y years as a z, [title of your book]...”
 - * the books or authors you’re using as models for your book
 - * the estimated (or actual) length of your manuscript and when you will deliver it
 - * the book’s benefits (optional)
 - * special features: e.g. illustrations, design elements, back matter (optional)
 - * information about a self-published edition (optional)
- **Markets:** The types of readers and retailers, organizations, or institutions who will be interested in your book. The size of each group and other information to show you know your audience and how to write the book for those readers. Other possible markets: schools, businesses, and subsidiary-rights markets such as film and foreign rights.
- **The Author’s Platform:** A list in descending order of importance of whatever will impress editors about your visibility to your readers. Online, this may include numbers for subscribers to your blog, website visitors, your contacts on social networks, and online articles you’ve published.
Offline, your platform may include the number of articles you’ve had published in print media as well as the number of talks you give each year, the number of people you give them to, where you give them, and your media exposure. Editors won’t expect authors of quote books to have a platform; business authors must. For certain kinds of books, an author’s platform is important for big and midsize houses.
- **About the Author:** Up to a page about yourself with information that isn’t in your platform. Begin with the most important information.
- **Promotion:** A plan that begins: “To promote the book, the author will:...” followed by a bulleted list in descending order of impressiveness of what you will do to promote your book, online and off, during its crucial two-week-to-three-

month launch window and after. Start each part of the list with a verb and use impressive numbers, if possible. Publishers won't expect big plans from memoirists, and the smaller the house you'll be happy with, the less important your plan is.

- (Optional) **Competing Books:** A list of about the six strongest competitors for your book—not just bestsellers. In addition to basic info about each book (title, author, publisher, year of publication, page count, format, price, ISBN), include two phrases—each starting with a verb—about each competitor's strengths and weaknesses. List the competitors in order of importance.
- **Complementary Books:** A list of about six books like yours that prove the market for your book
- (Optional) **Spin-Offs:** The titles of up to three related follow-up books
- (Optional) **Foreword:** A foreword by someone whose name will give book credibility and salability in fifty states two years from now. Obtain commitments for cover quotes as well, if you can.
- (Optional) **A Mission Statement:** One first-person paragraph about your passion or commitment to write and promote your book.

The Outline

A page called "Table of Contents" listing the chapters and the back matter. Then one or two paragraphs in the present tense about every chapter, using outline verbs like *describe*, *explain*, and *discuss*. For an informational book, you can use a bulleted, self-explanatory list of the information in the chapter.

A Sample Chapter

Usually one chapter that will excite editors by proving you will fulfill your book's promise to readers and make your book as enjoyable to read as it is illuminating. Include about 10 percent of the book, or about 25 pages. Memoirs should be finished. Agents' and editors' will expect more chapters and perhaps the whole manuscript.

This list is the *what* not the *how*. For our agency, you will need to follow the advice in *How to Write a Book Proposal* by Michael Larsen.

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The 4th San Francisco Writing for Change Conference / Changing the World One Book at a Time
September 15, 2012 / www.sfwritingforchange.org / sfwriterscon@aol.com
The 10th San Francisco Writers Conference / A Celebration of Craft, Commerce & Community
February 14-17, 2013 / www.sfwriters.org / sfwriterscon@aol.com / Mike's blog: [@SFWC](http://sfwriters.info/blog) / www.facebook.com/SanFranciscoWritersConference