Book Proposal

**TITLE**

Subtitle

by

Author Name

Submitted by:

[name and contact info]

**Table of Contents**

[For long proposals—those exceeding 15–20 double-spaced pages—include a table of contents for your proposal.]**Overview**

* **Length:** 1–4 double-spaced pages
* **Purpose:** the high-level pitch for your book (if done well, it can serve as the basis for your query, although the overview is usually longer and more detailed than a query)
* **Common mistake:** Focusing too much on the content of the book or otherwise explaining what is in the book.
* **A good way to start:** For everything *except* memoir, describe the situation, environment or problem currently and urgently experienced by society/culture (and/or your ideal reader), then introduce your book as the solution or compelling exploration that people want or need on the topic. Show how your book explores new ideas or new research, or introduces arguments that feel surprising or make us question what we think we know.
* **For memoir:** Consider starting with a scene or moment that’s symbolic of the tension or impossible situation that you must deal with. Do not tell the entire story from beginning to end; leave the reader with questions about how the situation will resolve.
* **Tip:** It’s usually best to write the overview last, as it usually incorporates the most important aspects of your overall proposal.

**About the Author**

* **Length:** 1–3 double-spaced pages
* **Purpose:** For everything *except* memoir, demonstrating why you are the perfect person to write this book and your credentials/authority to write on the topic. Memoirists: Focus on your publication credits and involvement in the communities that will likely be first to spread the word about your book when it is published.
* **Common mistake:** Telling your life story or going into a lot of detail that’s not relevant to your credentials to write the book being pitched. For academics: attaching a resume or CV that’s overwhelming (instead, offer a narrative).
* **Tip:** Always mention previous publication credits, media appearances, important positions held, and other experience or credentials that make you a good candidate to write this book.

**Target Audience**

* **Length:** 1–3 double-spaced pages
* **Purpose:** Demonstrating you’ve thought critically about the most likely reader to buy your book, and have meaningful insight into your intended readership.
* **Common mistake:** Assuming anyone and everyone is your audience, or thinking “book buyers” are your audience.
* **Tip:** Focus on the most likely or primary readership to buy the book. It can help to brainstorm look-alike media or influencers that your audience would pay attention to. Think about their behavior around the issues/problems your book addresses. Memoirists are often better off skipping this section and relying on their comp title section to demonstrate their readership.

**Comparable Titles**

* **Length:** 2–5 double-spaced pages
* **Purpose:** Agents and editors almost always pitch books by making comparisons with other authors and titles. You should know who you naturally sit next to on the shelf. List 5 to 10 of the most relevant titles here, with author, publisher, first published format (usually hardcover or paperback), page count, price and ISBN.
* **Common mistake:** Either saying there is no competition or mentioning only the books that have been blockbuster successes—the same titles that *everyone else* mentions. Show you have familiarity and knowledge of the category beyond the biggest success stories.
* **Tip:** It helps to begin this section with 100–200 words of introductory material, explaining the current landscape of books in your category and any high-level observations about trends, what’s missing or what’s over-represented.

**Marketing and Promotion**

* **Length:** 2–4 double-spaced pages (or longer!)
* **Purpose:** Demonstrating you’ve thought about how word will spread about the book and what you can do *today* to market and promote to your target readership (it should not be based on some future platform you don’t have yet).
* **Common mistake:** Just listing social media numbers or websites without indicating how and why they are effective today and how you use them for marketing and promotion. Demonstrate how you will put any and all of your assets to work, including relationships or organizations you belong to.
* **Tip:** It can help to divide this into subsections, such as your own media (website, email, social), speaking/events, media outreach, endorsements, and so on.

**Manuscript Specifications and Delivery**

This may be just one sentence long. How long is the book (word count) or how long do you anticipate? How long will it take you to finish? What special resources or permission do you require? Are there any costs associated with finishing the book?

**Table of Contents**

This isn’t necessary in most proposals, but it can be especially useful for how-to or prescriptive books. List chapter titles and subtitles, along with important subsections or features. You probably don’t need this if you have a chapter overview (coming next).

**Chapter Overview**

* **Length:** Variable, but usually 100–500 words per chapter, depending on how many chapters your book has. Try to keep it reasonable in length—usually less than 3,000 words.
* **Purpose:** Most nonfiction books (except memoir) are sold on the basis of a proposal and not a manuscript. The chapter overview shows how the book will develop and how each chapter delivers on the promise made in the proposal. For narrative nonfiction, the chapter overview should strongly indicate narrative flow or cause-effect sequencing from chapter to chapter.
* **Common mistake:** Going into so much detail that people’s eyes glaze over or that you fail to demonstrate the cohesiveness of the book’s narrative or argument.
* **Tip:** Memoirists should consider writing a synopsis instead (used for novels), as chapter overviews can include too much detail and make the narrative look weaker than it is.

**Sample Chapters**

* **Length:** Variable, but typically 25–50 double-spaced pages (or whatever the agent or publisher asks for)
* **Purpose:** To show that you can deliver on the promise made in the proposal, and for agents and editors to assess your writing ability, especially in the case of memoir and narrative nonfiction.
* **Common mistake:** Including a lot of front matter, like the foreword, introduction, etc, which may not contain the strongest sample material for some types of nonfiction books. For memoir: picking something from the middle of the book rather than starting from the beginning.
* **Tip:** For everything *except* memoir, choose the meatiest, juiciest material that shows what you are capable of. Memoirists: your opening pages should show what you’re capable of.