**OVERVIEW OF A BOOK PROPOSAL**

A proposal is a sales tool to demonstrate to an overworked editor that a book is irresistible; that it presents strong ideas well told and it offers something no other book available does. Its form can change to suit the subject, but wherever placed the following elements should appear in the proposal.

1. A brief description of the book, touching on:

--the book's subject and its importance

--the author's editorial approach and style

--the book's market or readers--how many are there?

--competing or similar books, and how this one differs from them

--proposed length (in approximate number of words) and delivery date

--a table of contents (1 page or less)

This "brief description" section can range from 3 pages to 20. Use subheads unless the description is extremely short. The purpose is to get an editor's attention fast and never let it flag.

With this in mind, try to include, early on, a one-sentence description that sums up what this book does and distinguishes it from all others. ("The only popularly written aerobics manual for people under seven.") Make sure to mention the strongest points early on (e.g. the subject unlocks a key area of contemporary life for the first time; the author is a nationally known expert on this or a closely related field; the U.S. Army has already committed to buying 10,000 copies). If there's a gripping story involved, the proposal could open with a vignette.

2. A chapter-by-chapter summary: A few lines or paragraphs, or even several pages, detailing the content of each chapter. (A narrative description is better than bullets or an outline.) The chapter summary should convey a clear impression that the book is completely thought out. However, it is generally understood that the outline will change and develop as the book is actually written.

3. Profile of the author(s), stressing qualifications for writing (and promoting) this book, especially past writings and accomplishments in the field the book covers. Write this in the third person and restrict it to half a page.

4. Sample chapter(s). Ideally, include an introduction and the most interesting or exciting chapter in the book.

5. Other writing samples by the author.

Be brief. A typical proposal (items 1 through 3 above) is 20-30 pages long. Of course the sample chapters and other examples of the author's writing, which form additional sections, may be considerably longer.

In sum, a book proposal should be engaging, readable, and representative of the book it describes. One agent has suggested that a good proposal will provoke a progressive response something like this in any editor reading it:

"Interesting. . . . Not bad. . . . This may be a book. . . . This is going to be a big book. . . . I hope no one else has seen this proposal!"

**COMPONENTS OF A BOOK PROPOSAL**

Proposals

We can most effectively represent your work to publishers by submitting a proposal containing the sections listed below. The look of your proposal is important. It should be double spaced and paginated. Each section should start on a new page. We will add a cover page to the final submission to publishers.

**Contents**

A guide to the contents of your proposal, not your book. It should identify all of the other sections of the proposal (Summary, Author, etc) and the page on which each section starts.

**Summary**

Pretend this is the jacket flap copy that people will read once your book is on display at Barnes & Noble or your local bookseller. It should make somebody want to read your book. No more than one or two pages.

**Author**

Don't be shy in developing this biographical sketch. Your reader wants to know why you are uniquely qualified to write this book—by dint of training and/or experience. If you have published other books, let us know what they are and if any were critically and/or commercially successful. If you lecture or make frequent media appearances, let us know. Err on the side of tooting your own horn too loudly; we'll help you tone it down if necessary. No more than one or two pages.

**Audience**

Who are you writing for? And most important, why will they buy, keep, and talk about your book? What benefits will your book offer—and which ones can't they get elsewhere? It's important to describe your audience—and their motivation to buy—as specifically as possible. One to three pages.

**Competition**

Are there other books similar to yours? Have they been successful? Without knocking the competition, set your work apart. Be sure to identify the title, author, publisher, and year of publication for all competitive titles you cite. One to three pages.

**Special Marketing and Promotional Opportunities**

By virtue of your position or background, do you offer a publisher any advantages in promoting your work? Do you have a regular newspaper column, preside over or belong to an association or forum, or in any other way draw the attention of potential readers? Is your work likely to be adopted for use by colleges, schools, or membership organizations—and is it likely to be used year after year by these audiences? Are foreign sales likely? Be as specific as possible. One to three pages.

**Manuscript Specifications**

What is your proposed book length (multiply your estimated number of manuscript pages by 250 words per page)? How many photographs and illustrations will you have, if any? Are there special considerations about book size, format, or style that are important to the presentation of your ideas? Last, but not least, when will you be able to deliver a completed manuscript?

**Outline**

Start with a table of contents, just as you would see in any book. This gives the editor a snapshot of the organization of the entire book. Then start a new page for an annotated version—in effect an outline—that shows how the book will unfold in more detail. The outline is not a final commitment; by the time you have completed the book, it may or may not follow the outline. But at this stage, it shows that you've got a plan for moving ahead, that you have several discrete chapter subjects that come together to form a cohesive whole. The outline should contain section and chapter headings; beneath each heading, present from one to three paragraphs explaining what the chapter contains and how the content moves the book forward.

**Sample Chapter(s)**

No matter how good your idea or how well organized your outline is, a publisher needs to know that you can translate that idea effectively in your writing. He or she needs a representative sample of your style and approach. That does not have to be the first chapter, though it can be. If different parts of your work are different in tone or approach, you can submit selections from different chapters. However, it is best to see at least one chapter carried through from beginning to end.