

# TIPS FOR BOOK PROPOSALS

A proposal is the most effective method by which to tell a prospective editor/publisher about your work. A clearly written, well argued proposal enables an editor to best determine whether or not your proposed book is suitable for the publishing program she oversees. An introduction or excerpt from your manuscript is not a substitute for a proposal.

Not every good proposal is precisely the same but here are some elements that good proposals include:

## Overview

A brief description of your book in which you explain the argument and lay out the arc of your book.

Do so in the style in which you intend to write your book.

What kind of contribution is the work? Be more specific than “a contribution to the literature.” Talk about what kind of contribution it will make to understanding the issue.

## Annotated table of contents

## Sources

It need not be comprehensive but say what kinds of archival documents, oral histories, collections, etc. you are drawing on.

## Market

Discuss the intended audience for your book. Is it written primarily for scholars (if so, what discipline(s)), professionals (if so, what fields), students (if so, what level), or general levels (who generally are interested in what time of book). If particular scholarly or professional organizations would be targets, identify them. Be as specific and realistic as possible. Few books appeal to all of these markets, and you run the risk of appearing naive to a potential publisher. There is nothing wrong with identifying a particular subfield and saying that your book is a monograph intended for specialists in this area.

## Comparable/competitive books

List three or four similar titles (including author, title, publisher, publication date) and how your book is like/unlike these.

## Nuts and bolts

Anticipated details of finished book—number of words (include text, notes, and bibliography), number and type of illustrations you hope to include, timetable.

Also in your submission package:

Cover letter/letter of inquiry

Your c.v.

Sample chapter (optional)

## Cover letter

If you have letterhead for an institution you're at, use it.

Make sure your contact information (including e-mail) is clear.

Address letter to an editor by name (and make sure the name matches the publisher).

Give title of your work and a succinct description.

Briefly state your qualifications.

Be honest about the status of the manuscript.

Describe the state of play—is it a solo submission or a multiple query? If this is a multiple query, you must tell editors this. Not all presses will allow multiple submissions.

Make explicit the purpose of the letter.

If you have a sabbatical, this is a good place to mention this.

If you have unique timetable requirements (i.e. your tenure clock is ticking very fast; important anniversary), this is a good place to explain.

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