

Sample Fiction Book Proposal Template

Formatting your proposal

IMPORTANT:

The headings on the sample proposal template below cover the critical elements of a thorough proposal. However, some agents and/or publishers may have variations in requirements. Once you have selected the agents/publishers you wish to approach, research each agent's/publisher's requirements, standards and procedures.

NOTE: **Each heading within a book proposal answers a key question.** Feel free to use the headings and format of the template below. Be sure to REMOVE the key question and explanation beneath each header. These are our explanations *to you*.

Format:

- 12 point Times New Roman font on standard 8 ½ x 11.
- Single-space the entire proposal EXCEPT the sample chapters which need to be double-spaced.
- Number ALL pages sequentially, including your sample chapters.
- Footer: include your name, title, and page number on the footer of every page
- NEVER BIND, HOLE-PUNCH, OR STAPLE PAGES!

The 4 C's of a FICTION Cover letter:

Courteous, Compelling, Concise, Contact

- Always include a cover letter (not in the template below, and not numbered as part of your proposal)
- Be professional and business-like rather than casual or quirky
- Use no more than 2/3 of a page, single-spaced. Include, *at the most*, four brief paragraphs
- Capture immediate attention by explaining why this novel will grab the reader when they see it on the shelf and compel them to pick it up and buy it. Is it because you, the author, already have a following, perhaps because of a blog or previous publications? Is it the timely nature or powerful impact of the plot?
- For fiction, your double task is to communicate the unique aspects of characterization and plot that make this novel compelling and unlike any other, but also to flag those aspects that will appeal to someone who enjoyed some similar, already successful novel. For instance: "Imagine *Christy* but played out

instead during the Spanish mission period in what is now Southern California, with a male lead that will make readers envision Antonio Banderas.”

- Always remember that readers purchase and read a novel because they’re looking for a great read, a powerful story that will capture their attention and emotions and keep their interest to the last page, leaving them smiling through their tears. You have to find a way to convince the editor that your book meets that criterion.
- Thank the agent/editor for their time and considerations and offer complete contact information.
- State whether this is a multiple submission (meaning that you are sending the same proposal to multiple agents/publishers at that same time).
- If the agent/publisher requires a physical copy of the proposal, include a SASE for response.
- Include all your contact information (physical address, email, phone numbers) on the cover letter as well as on the cover page of the proposal.

[Sample cover page]

A Proposal

Title
Subtitle

Author

Contact Information:

[If agented, use agent's contact info only]

Author Name

Address

Address

Email

Phones: home/office/cell/fax

What is the “can’t-put-it-down” aspect of the story?

- What is the unique plot hook that will compel readers to keep turning pages?

Readers always buy and read books because of some felt need, but in the case of fiction, that felt need is usually for a powerful story that will transport us out of our own lives and into the lives of the characters, into their world, for the duration of the novel and leave us wishing it were longer. Does your story have unique and compelling aspects that will grab the reader and not let go? Make sure the editor knows what those are right up front.

Brief Description (One to two sentences)

- How is this book best described, in one or two sentences?

Imagine yourself a writer for an Internet bookseller or a sales clerk in a bookstore. In one or two sentences, entice a shopper to grasp the unique and compelling aspects of this book’s story. This is sometimes called the “pitch” or “elevator speech” and the goal is to present the book in a nutshell. You want to leave the one who reads your proposal wanting to read the rest of the book to find out what happens. This section will be a tool for the editor, too, when she tries to persuade others in the publishing house that this is a book they *must* publish.

Overview (approximately 500 words)

- What’s the story?

You’ve already revealed to the editor the book’s unique hook. Now give them the rest of the story—briefly. Don’t feel that you have to give a play-by-play of every subtle plot twist. Nor should you feel you have to actually reveal the ending—it’s OK to leave the editor wanting to read the manuscript to find out. Stick with the big picture. Focus on the characters and their own personal developmental arc. After all, fiction is about character. What happens to your characters? Revealing that will tell the editor more about your book than a boring “this happens, and then this happens, and then...” And DON’T go over 500 words—fewer is better.

Primary Audience

- Who is the core target audience for this book?

Who is the dead-center target reader? Describe your “ideal” reader as specifically as possible including, as appropriate, the following: age range, generational identity, life stage, gender, marital status, parents, education level, spiritual state, professional or lay status (leaders, teachers, counselors, professionals, housewives, blue collar workers), geographic location, specific life needs. NOTE: If you identify a male target audience, you’d better explain in this section or the next one why women will buy your book too, either to read themselves or to give to their husbands and sons. Women are by far the dominant buyers of Christian books and also of fiction.

Secondary Audience(s)

- Who, in addition to the target audience, might read or purchase this book?
In addition to your core target audience, who might be the next most interested target(s)?

Reader Benefits

- What specific benefits will the reader experience upon reading this book?
Editors want to publish fiction that sells—in other words, they want to publish can’t-put-down fiction that generates great word of mouth. But they also want to publish fiction that affects the reader’s life—that, in fact, changes lives. What are the specific life benefits your story might provide for your readers’ lives? In what ways might they never be the same after reading your story?

Author Biography, Brief (one brief paragraph ideal for flap on book jacket)

Describe your position, brand, expertise, and qualifications. Close with your city and state and family. Example: Christina Doe resides in Minneapolis, MN with her husband, two children, and their Saint Bernard, Hugo.

Author Biography (500 words or less, an expanded version of the above)

Describe your position, brand, expertise, and qualifications. Include education, career, and life experiences that qualify you as a voice who has earned the right to be heard on this topic.

Author’s Writing Experience

- What previous writing experience (and audience) does the author have?
Include all previously published work, magazines, newsletters, and professional papers. Include complete bibliographic information and sales or distribution numbers for each.

Author’s Platform

- What audience reach does this author already have?
Describe your platform (your exposure and interaction with audiences) such as media, speaking, teaching, social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.). Include numbers of people touched by each, speaking schedules, past media appearances and contacts, upcoming opportunities, etc. Why does this matter for a novelist? It matters because today’s publishers don’t have the budget or manpower to do much to promote your book—you will have to do most of the promotion, whether for fiction or for nonfiction. And the publisher will want to know how well positioned you are to do it. Have an active, well-read blog? Ten thousand followers on Twitter? Those things matter to a publisher.

Unique Positioning among Competition in the Marketplace

- What other novels are written to this audience, and how does this book compare?

Describe at least three (preferably five or six) other novels in the marketplace that are similar in nature or seek to reach the same general reader. Then for each, offer a few sentences describing how your book is different from the competition.

Include statistics and research that help quantify the reading audience or sales potential. For instance, if your main character is a woman struggling with a diagnosis of breast cancer, offer statistics on how many women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

- How is this book unique from every other book?

Complete the following sentence:

If (insert core audience) reads (insert title)

Then (insert target audience) will experience (insert reader benefits)

Because (describe HOW the book will accomplish its objectives).

Example USP of a time management book for women:

*If women who feel overwhelmed by overly demanding lives and impossible to-do lists, read **Escaping the Time Trap: 10 Strategies to Bring Balance to the Overwhelmed Woman***

Then they will discover effective strategies to prioritize their lives and successfully balance the conflicting demands on their time,

Because they will have been led through self-tests to discover their unique time traps and learned proven and tested techniques to bring balance into their lives.

It might seem like a stretch to create such a statement about a novel. After all, the main selling point for fiction is that it's a great story, powerfully told, that grabs hold of you and won't let go until the last page. But I guarantee you that, even for fiction, Pub Boards want such statements and use them in their selling presentations.

Potential endorsers

- What endorsers are likely to recommend this book to their own readership and following?

List potential endorsers in approximate order of the breadth of their influence as far as you know. If you already have relationships or connections with some well-known endorsers, list those first and include comments about your connection.

Marketing

- What ideas does the author have for marketing and promotion and how personally invested will he/she be spreading the word and capturing readers?

How will you invest your time, energy, and funds in marketing? Be proactive. Be specific.

How will you and the publisher reach the intended audience? List networking organizations, magazines, associations, etc., that reach the same audience as your book. **MUST INCLUDE** your social media plan! List all social media in which you are involved (should be listed above in PLATFORM as well). Here you explain what your social media promotional strategy will be.

Length of manuscript

- How long will the book be?

Give approximate word count range. (Note: Assume a rough estimate of 300 words per bound book page of completed book. Assume an average 12 point 8 ½ X 11 double-spaced MSS page is 250 words.)

Manuscript completion time (length of time from contract to due date)

- When will the manuscript be completed?

Common times given are anywhere from six to twelve months from contract, but this can vary greatly. If there is a unique reason for the book to release in a particular month (a conference, media opportunity, seasonal opportunity, etc.) mention that here as well.

Keep in mind that once you've submitted your completed mss most traditional publishers will require 9 to 12 months between manuscript due date and release month, as this allows for editorial work, interior design, lead-time for selling to retailers, promotion planning, PR, printing, and warehousing.

Sample Chapters (3) (Double spaced)

Include three sample chapters that

- Cast the vision and scope of this book
- Demonstrate the author's best craft and skill

For a proposal for a novel, this is the most important part of the proposal by far. Many editors (including me!) will simply skip everything else and go straight to the sample chapters. If they like the chapters, they'll look at the rest of the proposal. If they don't like the chapters, there's no point in looking at the rest, because with fiction, the writing is everything. So make sure your sample chapters are compelling, that they show your ability, and that they present your story in a way that will leave the editor wanting to read more. If your chapters aren't yet up to that standard, then you aren't ready to present your novel to an editor.