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Writing an Effective Publishing Proposal

There are five essential components to a good publishing proposal:

1. an accurate description of the **content** of your book
2. an equally accurate description of your **intended audience**
3. a discussion about **competing texts**
4. an estimated **word count** for the finished manuscript
5. a rough idea of the **timeline** for completing the final draft

1. The content of your manuscript

A brief (no more than two page) discussion of your manuscript should include a very specific description of its content but also the purpose of writing the book. What would motivate someone to buy and read it?

Include any outstanding features that will be included. Will the manuscript contain any apparatuses, such as cases, questions, problems, glossaries, bibliography/references, appendices, or an index? Do you plan to provide supplementary material (web content, solutions, answers, workbooks, or other material) to accompany the book? How many and what sort of figures (e.g. drawings, half-tones, charts, etc.) will you use? You should include a Table of Contents as a framework for the text.

2. The intended audience for your book

A description of your intended audience is arguably the most critical part of a good prospectus. You need to know *who* you're writing to before deciding *what to write*. A good academic title will appeal to three distinct audiences. First, to college, university and public libraries. Second, to individuals in your discipline. Third, to students and, ideally, undergraduate and graduate classrooms as an adopted text. This last point is extremely important. Even adoptions at the graduate level can double or triple sales. The quality of the content of your manuscript is the single most important deciding factor in whether or not we offer to publish your book, but sales potential is also a consideration.

3. A discussion about competing texts

The fact that there are other competing titles on your topic is not a barrier to publication. You need to collaborate with your editor to properly situate your unique ideas about your subject in the marketplace. List the four or five leading, most direct competitors to your

project, describing the good and the bad about them. You need to convince the peer evaluators of your prospectus that you are creating new scholarship rather than rehashing existing ideas. Your proposal is written for reviewers and not for publication, so be as frank as possible.

4. The size of your final project

Your editor will need to know the estimated word count of your final draft. Remember Strunk and White: “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.” Word counts are a better estimator than page counts. For reference, a typical *manuscript* page contains 300 words; a typical *typeset* page contains 425 words. Also remember that photos, charts and graphs can add significantly to the final page count.

5. Timeline for completion of your draft

What portion of the material is complete? When do you expect to have your manuscript completed? Is the timeline for completion that you put into your prospectus realistic?

Additional items

If possible, include two or three sample chapters so that reviewers can evaluate your writing style and determine if draft chapters match the description of the work. Also, include a recent copy of your CV. Finally, we will use reviewers of our own choice, but we may also try to include some whose opinion you feel will be valuable. Can you suggest any? If the book has several distinct markets, try to recommend at least one reviewer for each.

With this material in hand, we will initiate peer review with the goal of making a publication decision as quickly as possible. Please feel free to contact us if you have any further questions. Good luck and we look forward to receiving your material.

Please note that we do not accept proposals by mail—all material must be submitted as email attachments. Thank you

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