Margot Starbuck

FREE NONFICTION Book Proposal Guide

with coaching tips!

To garner the attention of an agent or traditional publisher, your proposal must offer 3 things:

- **A Fresh Concept**
- **A Growing Platform**
- **Strong Writing**

If your book proposal demonstrates that all three of these elements are strong, it will be hard for a publisher to say "no. If your proposal lacks one or more of these, it will be hard for a publisher to say "yes."
*[**Note:** Wondering if hybrid or self-publishing might be for you? Get clarity* **HERE**.]

TITLE PAGE

Genre
Nonfiction Self Help Book Proposal (or another nonfiction genre)

Title: Subtitle

Don't get too clever. Very loose working rule: the title hooks the reader's interest and communicates the book's *premise*; the subtitle communicates the book's *promise*, or what the reader gains by buying and reading this book. Show the reader what benefit they will receive. (Are there exceptions? Sure. You know there are.)

- **TITLE :** communicates the book's premise. (it tells reader what the book is about)
- **SUBTITLE :** communicates the book's promise. (tells the reader what they get if they read the book)

[Because the rule is as loose as can be, fine to swap title/subtitle, promise/premise.]

Author Info
Author Name
123 Street Way
Anytown, State 12345
919.555.1234
MyEmail@email.com
Date

CONCEPT

In this section you must convince an agent or publisher that this book needs to be published.

PREMISE

Create interest by crafting a compelling 1-sentence description of the book's premise. This premise statement is your unique fresh angle! **A strong premise will connect with a reader's felt need and promise to meet that need.** When an editor sets down the proposal, this is the compelling idea that stays with him or her.

1. A compelling premise is simple, clear, and easy to grasp.
2. A compelling premise is saying something fresh and unique.
3. A compelling premise meets the reader's need.

OVERVIEW

This section is similar to the back copy, or Amazon description, of your favorite books. Offer 7-8 sentences to entice a reader to keep reading. It should capture the reader's attention and compel the reader to purchase and read the book.

AUDIENCE

Who is the audience for this book? (Hint: the wrong answer is "everyone.") Know your reader! **When you know your reader, you know the reader's need. When you know the reader's need, you can meet that need.**

- How old is my reader?
- What is my reader's gender?
- Is my reader married or single?
- Does my reader have children?
- What is my reader's culture?
- What is my reader's level of education?
- What type of work does my reader do?
- Is my reader a person of faith? Active in a church?
- What books, podcasts, movies, tv shows, etc. does my reader enjoy?
- Where is my reader active on social media? What is he/she consuming there?

In your proposal, you can communicate your intended audience in one of two ways:

- **Corporate Readership:** "They are…"
  Describe the demographic of the group of people who will be reading this book. (They are single, male, young adults, college grads, who grew up in households with financial challenges, and are learning how to manage their finances.)

- **Individual Reader:** "She is…" or "He is…"
  Identify a single target reader.
  (Jessica is single, 25, Latina, and she lost her mother to cancer when she was thirteen. She's finishing her MBA and hopes to marry one day.)

Either way, know who your "someone" is. Tape his or her picture on your computer screen and write every word, sentence, page to meet your reader's needs.

> *Note: It can often help a publisher if you list "Primary," "Secondary," and "Tertiary" audiences. The secondary audience includes the readers who will also benefit from the book (the family member, friend, or counselor of the target reader). And the tertiary audience includes anyone else who might have a reason to buy and read the book.

NEED FOR THE BOOK

What's the pay-off for the reader who buys and reads this book? What does it offer that other books do not? Communicate to a publisher the benefits to the reader.

If a reader buys this book, he or she will:	**Because**
• Think…	• X
• Feel…	• Y
• Do…	• And Z

ALTERNATE TITLES

In the event that an agent or publisher does not naturally connect with the working title you've chosen, list a few alternate titles and subtitles.

COMPETITION

To demonstrate that there are book-buying readers who need your book, show a publisher books similar to yours that have done reasonably well in the market. List 4-6 recent titles. (For each book, give the title, author, publisher, and year of publication.)

In 3-5 sentences, for each comparable title, I want you to hit these 3 points:

1. Here's the **big idea**, or premise, of this book; 1 sentence
2. Here's how mine is **like** this title, 1-2 sentences
3. Here's how mine is **different**, 1-2 sentences

Tips for the comps section:

- Avoid referencing blockbuster bestsellers. This may signal naivety.
- Be thoughtfully critical about competition, but not unkind.
- Be clear about the differences between your book and the comp, highlighting how yours is unique.

MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

Word Count: (trade paperbacks are typically 50k-60k words)
Current Status: (number of chapters completed)
Deadline: (typically 6 months after a signed agreement)
Special Features: (Informational side bars? Discussion questions? Downloadable devotional guide?) Add value by adding value.

PLATFORM

In this section you must convince an agent or publisher that you're already reaching readers.

AUTHOR BIO

Your author bio lets a publisher know who you are and what you're bringing to the table. Write in the third person, as if a collaborator, or literary agent, is bragging on you. Whether you highlight your education, experience, work in the field, or proven results, convince the publisher that you're the author to write this book. Include a quality headshot and a link to the website featuring you as a writer. (Don't *not* have an author website. Fer real. I show you how to nail it, **HERE**)

PREVIOUS WRITING

If you've published previously, list title, year, publisher, sales figures.

ENDORSERS

List the people who have agreed to consider endorsing the manuscript upon completion. This is not a wish list. Please don't list J-Lo, Jim Gaffigan or Lebron unless they've actually agreed to endorse your book. For each endorser, include the person's name and role.

PERSONAL MARKETING

Demonstrate to a publisher that you're the type of writer who will work with them to sell books.

First, show what you've *already* done...

- How many times have you spoken in the last 12 months? Next 12 months? (Indicate venue/client and audience size.) Are there organizations or conferences to whom you speak regularly?
- Have you been publishing articles relating to the content of the book? Share links.
- How many followers do you have on various social media platforms?
- How many subscribers do you have to your personal newsletter?
- Are there other mailing lists, such as the organization for which you work, to which you have access?
- How many followers does your blog or podcast have?
- What about website traffic? How many hits per month?
- Have you received any special recognition, awards, or honors, connected to your content?

Second, show what you *will do* to promote this project…

This is not a list of what you're *willing* to do. This is a list of what you will orchestrate to promote your book. Get creative with strategies that will work best for you.

- What podcasts will you pitch to invite you as a guest?
- What speaking gigs will you secure to promote your book? Be specific.
- What articles will you publish? For what publications?
- Where will you be a guest on someone else's platform?
- What media opps on tv or radio will you wrangle?
- How will you create buzz and word of mouth excitement?
- What other unique opportunities fit with who you are?

RELEVANT AFFILIATIONS

Are you a member of an extensive writer's network? A leader of a national non-profit? Do you have access to somebody else's large platform? List significant affiliations that could impact book sales. (Money *talks*. Are you connected to an organization—a ministry, business or nonprofit—that would buy copies in bulk and help promote the book? Say so.)

FUTURE BOOKS

Publishers like to work with authors who may publish more than one book if their first book sells well. Suggest a few titles, with a sentence of description each, that you hope to publish in the future.

WRITING

In this section you must convince the gatekeeper that you have the skills to write this book.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Your chapter summaries are like an annotated table of contents for your book, and they give the publisher a sense of how the book unfolds. Offer 2 to 4 sentences of description for each chapter.

- Use creative/engaging chapter titles.
- Reveal the intentional structure you've given to your book.
- Emphasize your unique premise.
- Identify reader takeaway. In each summary, identify what the reader will discover in that chapter.

*[**Note:** Need help structuring your book? I show you how, **HERE**.]*

Ensure That Your Chapters:

- Demonstrate your strongest writing
- Are error-free
- Are easy to read: Black Times New Roman 12-pt font, double-spaced (the rest of the proposal should be single-spaced).
- Make good on the book's promise!

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Offer the publisher:

1. Your first chapter
2. Your favorite chapter
3. Depending on length, a 3rd chapter. (Typically you offer the publisher 10%-15% of the book.)

✦

Have you demonstrated to a publisher that you are offering a fresh concept, a growing platform, and strong writing? If your book proposal demonstrates that all three of these elements are strong, it will be hard for a publisher to say "no. If your proposal lacks one or more of these, it will be hard for a publisher to say "yes."

Want Margot to review your proposal?

MargotStarbuck.com

☞ I teach you how to deliver a winning book proposal in my **Build Your Book Proposal Blueprint Course**, **HERE**!

☞ And when you're pitching gatekeepers—agents, editors, publishers, or even podcast hosts—learn how to craft an email pitch that *compels them* to open your proposal or pitch: **HERE**.

Need more?

Find all the tools you need
to publish your nonfiction book
at **www.BuildYourBestBook.com** !

Learn more @ **MargotStarbuck.com!**