

Lights! Camera! Your Book Proposal!

*... and Why You Need One,
Even if You're Self-Publishing*



Melanie Rigney
Bay to Ocean Writers Conference
February 23, 2013

Topics

- ★ What Am I Going to Do with a Book Proposal?
- ★ Do Self-Publishers Need to Bother with All This?
- ★ Elements of a Book Proposal
 - ★ Query Letter
 - ★ Synopsis/Project Description/Chapter Outline
 - ★ Comparative/Competitive Analysis
 - ★ Reader Demographics
 - ★ Marketing Plan/Resume/Platform/Endorsements
 - ★ Sample chapters
- ★ Why Isn't There a Standard for All This Stuff?
- ★ How Can I Find Out More?



What Am I Going to Do with a Book Proposal?



- ★ It's not just about the writing; it's also about showing that you know your place in the market (and showing how you're going to sell books)
- ★ Any reputable agent or publisher is going to want to see at least some of these elements
- ★ Progressive goal: From query letter to proposal to contract!



? Why Don't Agents and Publishers Put These Things Together for You?

Do Self-Publishers Need to Bother with All This?



- ★ Generally, self-publishers want to sell a few books too!
- ★ Analyzing the competition and the marketplace helps you see ways in which you might improve your manuscript (too long, too short, does or doesn't meet genre conventions)
- ★ Developing the proposal elements can help with creation of back cover and other “sell” copy, and identification of potential sales venues
- ★ Creating a book proposal helps you understand that publishing, no matter who does it, is a business—and helps you be realistic about the work required to be successful

Elements of a Book Proposal

- ★ Query Letter
- ★ Synopsis/Project Description/Chapter Outline
- ★ Comparative/Competitive Analysis
- ★ Reader Demographics
- ★ Marketing Plan/Resume/Platform/Endorsements
- ★ Sample Chapters





? : What about formatting?

Elements: Query Letter



- ★ Generally, needed for both fiction and non-fiction proposals
- ★ One page
- ★ Three paragraphs
 - ★ Hook (compelling “what if” premise for fiction; compelling market need for non-fiction; title)
 - ★ Exposition (how will the book meet the need; how will the novel answer the “what if,” including basic plotline, main characters, and resolution; word count)
 - ★ Why you’re the one to write it (credentials, connections, etc.)

Elements: Synopsis/Project Description/Chapter Outline



- ★ Synopsis = fiction; generally 3-5 pages double spaced, 1-2 single spaced, fleshes out the story (including plot and major subplots) and characters; generally told in present tense
- ★ Project description/outline are among the terms you'll see in non-fiction; for a memoir or narrative non-fiction, it'll look like a synopsis; other genres, provide a rundown on how the book's content will be organized (number of how-to projects, number of profiles, etc.)
- ★ Chapter outline: could be either fiction or non-fiction; generally, 100-200 words per chapter, high points of what happens (including key conflict point)

Elements: Comparative/Competitive Analysis



- ★ Always a non-fiction proposal staple and, increasingly, an important element for fiction proposals
- ★ At least three (often five or seven) books that are similar to yours, published in the past three years or so by a traditional publisher; author should be someone at your level; the book should have done well (based on Amazon ratings, unbiased reviews, any other sales figures or book club adoptions you can find)
- ★ Identify the comparable titles through online bookstore sales or bricks and mortar
- ★ Explain how the books are similar to yours... as well as what your book's unique selling proposition/special element is
- ★ DON'T trash the competition

Elements: Reader Demographics



- ★ Who's going to read this book? **Hint: The answer is not "everyone!"**
- ★ Women? Men? Children? Baby Boomers? Generation Xers? Millennials? Tweens?
- ★ Can you quantify the market size? Research the number of romances/Civil War histories/cookbooks published each year through trade/special interest associations
- ★ Remember, a book doesn't have to sell a million copies to be profitable; even with a small audience (left-handed civil engineers), if the content is compelling and meets a need/desire and the marketing plan is tactically strong, the right publisher will be interested

Marketing Plan/Resume/Platform/Endorsements



- ★ Other than your writing, likely the most important part of the proposal
- ★ Marketing for first-time/relatively unknown authors often is limited to catalog/publisher Web site presence
- ★ Present what you will do “in concert with the publisher,” not that you expect to be in charge of marketing
- ★ Include speaking experience
- ★ Include association/club memberships relevant to the subject of your book
- ★ Engage experts/influencers in the area as you write; they’ll be happy to consider writing endorsements

Elements: Sample Chapters



- ★ Typically, the first three chapters; don't cherry-pick
- ★ Make them as strong as you can
- ★ One typographical or grammatical error won't doom your chances; however, a general disregard for the rules will
- ★ The first five pages must sing, in particular the first paragraph
- ★ While you can work on your proposal as you write the manuscript (and some prefer to write the proposal first), don't send it out until those sample chapters are as compelling as you can make them



? Should I send out a proposal before my manuscript is complete?



? What about e-queries?



? : Why Isn't There a Standard for All This Stuff?



? How Can I Find Out More?

Resources



- ★ <http://macgregorliterary.com/resources/>: Includes sample proposals you can download and review
- ★ <http://stevelaube.com/guidelines/>: Detailed guidance
- ★ <http://kimberleycameron.com/submission-guidelines.php>: An example of what you might be requested to provide in an e-query
- ★ <http://www.avonromance.com/impulse/>: An example of a publisher's online query engine
- ★ *Write the Perfect Book Proposal* by Jeff Herman and Deborah Levine Herman
- ★ *Formatting & Submitting Your Manuscript* by Chuck Sambuchino and the editors of Writer's Digest Books

Thanks for Coming Today



★ Melanie Rigney (www.editorforyou.com--editing;
www.melanierigney.com--writing)

★ Follow me on Twitter
(<https://twitter.com/MelanieRigney>), Facebook
(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Melanie-Rigney-Author/133200806702077>), and Pinterest
(<http://m.pinterest.com/melanierigney/>)

★ editor@editorforyou.com;
melanie@melanierigney.com; 4201 Wilson Blvd.,
#110328, Arlington, VA 22203