

NONFICTION: THE LONG STUFF

or

Finding Your Sweet Spot



Melanie Rigney
Creative Word Seminar, Herndon, VA
November 1, 2008

What We'll Do This Afternoon



- 📖 How do I know if my idea would make a good book?
- 📖 How do I get started?
- 📖 How many words/chapters do I have to have?
- 📖 What about the different kinds of book publishing?
- 📖 How do I find an agent or publisher?

It's All About Goals



📖 Why do you want to write this book?

📖 Who will read it?

📖 Why will they read it?

📖 Where will they read it?

What's Your Book About?



- 📖 How to have firmer thighs in 10 days
- 📖 How to spend less, enjoy life more
- 📖 How my home-based business went from \$0 to \$1 million in revenue in five years
- 📖 If God can welcome back this prodigal daughter, He will welcome back anyone.

Your Editorial Vision



I'm writing this because:

- 📖 I'm called to do it
- 📖 I want to fill a need I or the readers have
- 📖 I want to help people solve this problem
- 📖 I want to share knowledge
- 📖 I want to change the world
- 📖 I want to be a famous author
- 📖 I want to make a million dollars and retire

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Start with the Action



📖 As with novel writing, nonfiction books begin with a problem.

📖 Every scene or chapter must move the book along to its logical, satisfying conclusion.

📖 Show, don't tell. Write in the moment.

Where's *YOUR* sweet spot?



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Sampling Other Sweets



Study the competition:

📖 Page count/word length

📖 Writing style/pacing

📖 Use of charts/pullquotes/
illustrations/photos

📖 Title words

Sampling Other Sweets



📖 How long/how many chapters or words?

📖 What must each chapter or section accomplish?

📖 What special issues must you consider?

Where's *YOUR* sweet spot?



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The State of Nonfiction Book Publishing Today



📖 The Association of American Publishers (AAP) estimates sales were down 0.3 percent to \$24.2 billion.

📖 As membership in mainline Protestant denominations has declined, publishers including United Methodist Publishing House, Augsburg Fortress (owned by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and Westminster John Knox (owned by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.)—have seen the traditional markets for their books and other products shrink. Like many university presses, publishing houses owned by churches are now expected to be self-supporting.

BOTTOM LINE: BOOK PUBLISHING ON THE WHOLE IS STAGNANT OR DECLINING.

What Does That Mean to Me?



📖 It's riskier for publishers to take on first-time authors.





📖 While nonfiction still represents a safer choice, publishers are looking for:

📖 Authors with a proven track record

📖 Authors with a platform (contacts, a name in their field, marketing savvy)

What Does That Mean to Me?



-  If you don't have the credentials or platform, team up with someone who does
-  Explore publishing options
-  Your book proposal must be bullet-proof
-  It's more important than ever to develop a strong marketing plan

Types of Publishing



- 📖 Traditional/commercial publishing: Typically receive an advance of \$1,000 or more and a percentage of sales. You don't pay anyone.
- 📖 Subsidy publishing: You pay money up front and sell your rights.
- 📖 Self-publishing: You (or your contractors) do it all, including editing, layout, cover design, printing, distribution. Print on demand technology is a subset of this type of publishing.

BOTTOM LINE: NO MATTER WHICH TRACK YOU PURSUE, YOU WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MOST OF THE MARKETING.

Resources



- 📖 Literary Marketplace (searchable distributor list):
www.literarymarketplace.com
- 📖 U.S. ISBN Agency: www.isbn.org
- 📖 Library of Congress Site for Publishers:
www.loc.gov/loc/infopub/
- 📖 Dan Poynter's self-publishing site: www.parapublishing.com
- 📖 Penny Sansevieri's publicity site: www.amarketingexpert.com
- 📖 Brian Jud's special sales site: www.bookmarketingworks.com
- 📖 John Kremer's list of top independent distributors:
www.bookmarket.com/distributors.html

What Is a Book Proposal?



- 📖 It provides a quick snapshot for prospective agents and publishers
- 📖 It helps clarify your goal
- 📖 It makes life easier for agents and editors

Nonfiction Book Proposals



📖 Query letter: One page that “hooks” the agent or publisher in the first paragraph with what’s fresh about your book, then in the second paragraph describes how the book will execute this vision, and in the third paragraph states why you are the ideal person to write it.

📖 State how far along you are, when you will be finished, and how long the book will be.

Nonfiction Book Proposals



- 📖 One-sentence summary
- 📖 75-word summary
- 📖 Chapter-by-chapter outline: Often, one paragraph (6-10 lines) per chapter
- 📖 Overview: One to three pages about the book's content and benefit
- 📖 Three sample chapters, usually the first three
- 📖 Competitive analysis: Three to five books on the topic published in the past five years that have sold well—and how yours is different.

Nonfiction Book Proposals



- 📖 Author biography: Typically one page, specific to your qualifications for writing this book.
- 📖 Marketing analysis: At least three, hopefully at least five pages, about how you and your contacts will help the publisher sell books.
- 📖 Reader profile: Your target reader, where he or she buys books, other demographic information.
- 📖 Endorsements

Where's *YOUR* sweet spot?



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Seeing Is Believing



Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel
AMG Publishers *God's Word to you is our highest calling*

New Releases Trade Books Bibles Bible Study Reference Church and Pastors Search

Manuscript Submission

Procedures for submitting a manuscript to AMG & Living Ink Books

STEP 1: Query Letter

Before an actual book proposal is submitted, I would like to see a **query letter** for your manuscript, via e-mail (danp@amginternational.org) or via post office mail.

This letter should be one page in length, no longer. Include the proposed page count of your book.

1. Include a brief, tantalizing description of the book that you propose.
2. State who and how large the market or audience is for your book--be specific.
3. Include a few words about yourself, the author why you're expertly qualified to write the book.

Then, at that point, I can inform you if your proposed book fits into our current publishing plan. If your query letter indicates a possible fit with AMG Publisher's focus, we will then ask you to submit an actual book proposal following the guidelines on the back.

Please note:

AMG Publishers' focus is on books that:

- Help the reader get into the Bible, directly or indirectly.
- Facilitate confrontation and interaction with Scripture toward a positive change in thought or action.
- Give a hunger to studying, understanding, and applying Scripture.
- Encourage and facilitate one's personal growth in such areas as personal devotion and a skillful use of the Bible.

We have a broad interest in biblically oriented books including: Biblical Reference, Applied Theology and Apologetics, Christian Ministry, Bible Study Books in the *Following God* series format, Christian Living, Women/Men/Family Issues, Single/Divorce Issues, Contemporary Issues, (unique) Devotionals, Inspirational, Prayer, and Gift books. We are also introducing a new life of young adult Fantasy fiction.

Our interests, though, *do not* include General Fiction, Poetry, Children's books, Personal-experience stories, and Autobiographical stories.

STEP 2: Guidelines for actual proposal submission?

- Think of the submission proposal as your sales brochure. It should show your idea in the best light. Put extra effort into this piece. It should be between 10-20 pages, plus sample chapters. You are making your *first impression*.
- Your manuscript should be clearly typed, double-spaced on white paper. Photocopies are not acceptable.
- Keep in mind that although your book is for a wide audience, this proposal piece is meant to attract only one person--the editor.

AMG Publishers : Manuscript Submission Inquiries - Guidelines for Submitting a Manuscript Proposal to AMG Publishers

1. **Cover Letter:** introducing your book proposal, yourself, and HOOK the editor immediately.
2. **Cover page:** must contain the book title, author name, address, contact information, and word count of the manuscript.
3. **Production specifications:** state the length of the book, if there are illustrations, and the proposed delivery date.
4. **Proposal contents:** table of contents of the proposal with page numbers.
5. **Overview:** one page overview summarizing your book with a unique "hook" that generates excitement.
6. **The market:** identify who your audience is and how to best reach them. Who is the intended buyer of the book? Men, women, college-age, pastor, singles, mothers, and so.
7. **About the book:** describe your book in detail including special features and benefits. Clarify the focus, purpose, and argument of the book. What is its thesis? What are you advocating, defending, or otherwise trying to achieve in the book?
8. **Competition:** show how your book fills a void or provides a new slant on your topic. Provide your rationale for writing this book. Why is this book needed? Will your book be superior to or different from other comparable titles? What will be its unique contribution? Convince the editor that you know what you're doing.
9. **About the author:** tell me about yourself--your present position, educational background, biographical information, and previous publications.
10. **Table of contents:** provide a one page, actual table of contents for your book.
11. **Chapter summaries:** summarize each chapter with a two to four sentence paragraph, highlighting important components.
12. **Two sample chapters:** showcases your writing. Include chapter one and one other chapter.
13. **Publicity, promotion, and marketing:** outline a plan for selling your book along with marketing--ideas. Make a list of the ideas you're planning to promote your book. This is probably ten times more important than the content of the book.
14. **Bulk sales:** do you have the possibility of large sales to groups? Will you be holding seminars?
15. **Endorsements:** are there so-called celebrities who will endorse your book?
16. **Attachments:** include best newspaper clippings and magazine articles about you or your topic.
17. **Tentative Title:** include the tentative title, alternative and provocative titles, and subtitles.

Additional notes on actual submission of a manuscript if proposal has generated interest:

- Please allow up to four months for your manuscript to be evaluated by our review committee and editors.
- If your manuscript is accepted for publication, we ask for close adherence to the *Chicago Manual of Style* and/or *The Little Style Guide to Great Christian Writing and Publishing*
- The author is responsible to obtain permission to use any copyrighted material.
- We prefer Microsoft Word when you prepare your electronic file.

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<http://www.amgpublishers.com/www/docs/145/guidelinem-manuscript.html> (2 of 3) 8/5/2007 7:44:06 AM

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Seeing Is Believing



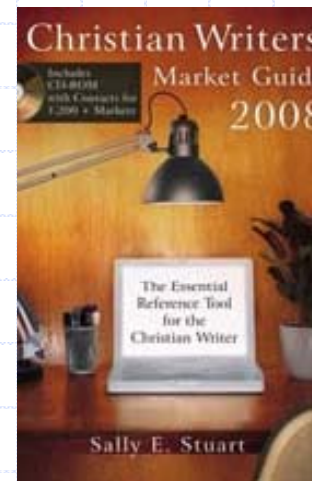
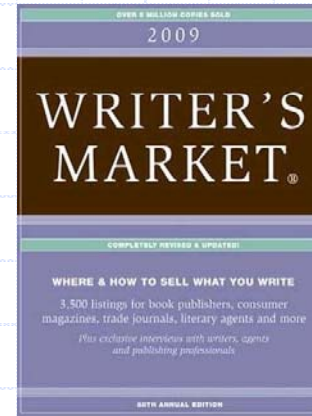
13. **Publicity, promotion, and marketing:** outline a plan for selling your book along with marketing-- ideas. Make a list of the ideas you're planning to promote your book. This is probably ten times more important than the content of the book.

Check the Guidelines



📖 While publications like *Christian Writers' Market Guide* and *Writer's Market* aren't always as up to date as we might like (not even WritersMarket.com), they can provide leads on publications the target market reads.

📖 Be sure to consult the latest version; you'll find them at your library or bookstore as well as for sale online.



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Check the Guidelines



📖 Increasingly, you'll find the most up-to-date guidelines at publishers' Web sites.

📖 If you can't readily find the guidelines on the home page, search for "guidelines" or try the "About Us" or "Contact Us pages."

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Book Proposal Resources




 www.stevelaube.com

 *Book Proposals That Sell* (Terry Whalin)

 *Formatting and Submitting Your Manuscript*
(WD Books)

 *Write the Perfect Book Proposal* (Jeff
Herman)

 *How to Write a Book Proposal* (Michael
Larsen)

Questions?



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