

Writing a Killer Book Proposal

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Welcome!

- We're going to do a quick icebreaker
- I'm going to give you three quick lessons based on my professional experience
- Then I'm going to walk you through the basic elements of a book proposal and show you why you need to be working on it now—even if you haven't finished or even started writing your book yet



Ice, Ice, Baby!

YOU ARE AMAZING! You are a superhero!

Only YOU can write your book.

Your book matters!

I believe in you, and I want you to succeed, so I'm going to share my tips from working in the book publishing industry for nearly two decades.

Power Pose!

Amy Cuddy, author of *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*, demonstrating a power pose to show how body language affects confidence and mood.

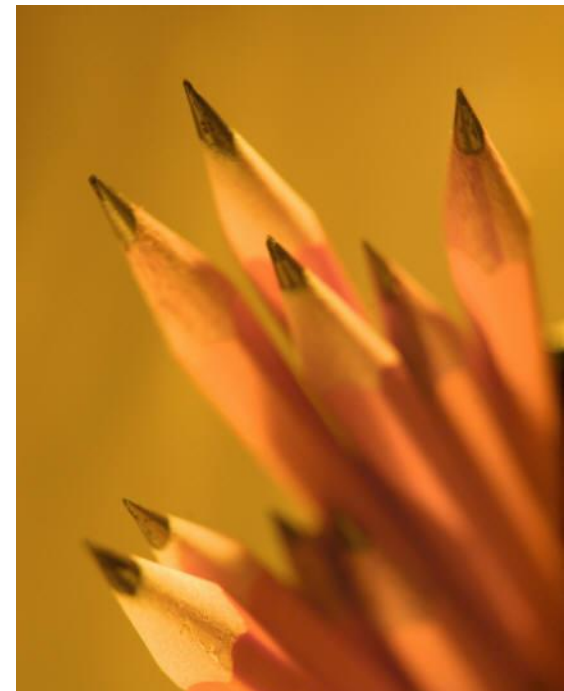
The Slush Pile

Lesson #1:

If you want to get your manuscript into the right hands, you should be approaching *agents* instead of publishing houses.



Lesson #2: You want to be as *professional* as possible when sending out queries and proposals. This means submitting a formal book proposal comprised of the basic components to the right agent.



Lesson #3: You must be tenacious in building your *platform*.

What is a platform?

- “[A]n ability to sell books because of who you are or who you can reach.” ~Jane Friedman
- “Your writer's platform is basically the group of activities you engage in that get your name and work noticed by the public. It's marketing, not of a specific work, but of you as the author. It's everything you do to build your brand.” ~Cliff Daigle in *The Balance*
- *We’re going to spend a lot of time talking about that and doing exercises to help you get there.*

**Start writing your proposal now—
before you've even written your book!**

- **Fiction and poetry:** You're selling the book based on your craft and story, so it should be completed and ready to send should the agent ask for it.
- **Nonfiction:** You do not need to have the entire book finished before you pitch.

The basic elements of a proposal are:

- Overview/synopsis of your book
- Author bio
- Target audience
- Competitive titles
- Marketing and promotion
- List of chapters and their synopses
- Sample chapter

Author bio

- The author bio usually comes after the synopsis of the book you're proposing, but we're tackling it first because who you are as a writer is foundational to succeeding as an author.
- Who you are, your expertise, are part of the platform for selling your book.
- Don't be afraid to promote yourself!

Who are you?

- **Tone** – Your tone should always be professional, but keep in mind your audience. If you're writing humor, inject some humor into your bio. If you're writing for children, it's okay to be a little more whimsical. If you're writing researched work, be more formal.
- Refer to yourself in the third person.

What are your *literary* accomplishments?

You don't have to have an answer for each of these, but they will give you ideas for what accomplishments you may already have and where you might want to seek out opportunities.

Publishing:

- What **literary journals** have you been published in?
- What **newspapers** and **magazines** have you been published in?
- What **blogs** do you run and/or have you written for?
- What **books** have you published?
- What **literary contests** have you won?

Tips!

- Start building your reputation NOW, before you even start pitching your proposal, by getting published.
- Query big name publications (*Washington Post*, *New York Times*, etc.) with article ideas that are relevant to your book.
- Hint: Find current event angles and evergreen hot topics as hooks that tie in with your book for a better chance of publication and to go viral.

Traditional Media:

Instead of being the writer, where did a reporter talk about you? List the names for each category that have written about you and/or your work. :

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- TV programs
- Radio programs



Tips!

Publications aren't banging down your door to interview you? Create your own opportunities!

- Follow editors on Twitter so you know what they're seeking.
- Pitch story ideas.
- Write your own press releases and send to publications.
- Sign up for Help A Reporter Out (HARO) to offer advice.

Social Media:

- What social media sites are you on?
- How many “followers” do you have on your various social media sites?
- What blogs have mentioned you and/or your work?

TWITTER:: @STEPHANIEENIKO

INSTAGRAM:: @STEPHANIENIKOLOPOULOS

WEBSITE:: WWW.STEPHANIENIKOLOPOULOS.COM



Tips!

- You don't have to be on every social media outlet. It's better to do one well than to do all of them poorly.
- Hootsuite can help you manage multiple social media sites at once and schedule posts.
- Try to post 2-3 times a day. (*I'll give you ideas as we go on!*)
- Keep your brand in mind: Be consistent in content; voice; graphic style.

Tips!

- Be generous! Leave comments on other people's posts. Always reply to comments people leave for you.
- Be personal. You're awesome!
- Giveaways attract attention.
- Participate in popular and trending hashtags.
#followfriday #callforsubmissions
- Guest post on people's blogs.

Expertise and experience:

- What **education** do you have **related to writing**?
- What **education** do you have **related to your subject matter**?
- What **awards** have you won related to your writing and/or subject matter?
- What **writing residencies** have you attended?
- What **public speaking engagements** have you done?
- What **teaching** on writing and/or your subject matter have you done?

- If you didn't have a lot of answers to those questions, now is the time to build your platform.
- **→ *Write down 3 specific steps you are going to take after this workshop to accrue more accomplishments.***

Book synopsis and overview

- This is a short synopsis of your book that should grab the readers' attention both in terms of your literary style/craft and your convincing argument that your book stands out as unique and important. Think of it as the blurb on the back of the book or the jacket copy.
- **Length:** The synopsis should be under one page and about 500 words.

The book synopsis should include:

- **Title** of the book
- Your “**selling handle**” – Basically, a tagline that says “[Title] is the first book to...” or “[Title] is [comparable book] meets [comparable book].” However, when comparing your book to others, don’t simply say yours is “the next [hugely popular book]”; instead, say yours “has the [insert quality such as lyrical prose of; magical realism of; strong female point of view of] of [comparable book].”
- The **narrative arc** of your book – What the book is about, the conflict, the change that occurs, and how it ends.
- **Length** of your book – A manuscript page is 250-words double spaced; also include if your book features illustrations, etc.

If applicable, include:

- That the book is an **expansion** of one of your well-received publications – For example, if you wrote an article called “The Power of Walking to Unleash Creativity” that went viral, and this is a book about how walking makes people more creative, say that
- That the book is a **companion** to a previous book you wrote – For example, if you wrote a book called *Walking Your Way to Creativity* that became a best seller and now are proposing a journal related to it, explain that
- That the book is part of a **series** – For example, if you wrote a book called *Walking Your Way to Creativity* and are now proposing *Sleeping Your Way to Creativity*, mention the correlation
- The name of a **well-known authority** who has already agreed to write the book’s foreword
- Any **experts** consulted and interviewed in the book (this more usually applies to nonfiction)
- Any “**extras**” your book features – for example, exercises, checklists, graphs, illustrations, etc.

→ Write your synopsis!

- “[Title] is the first book to...”
- “[Title] is [comparable book] meets [comparable book].”
- “[Title] has the [insert quality such as lyrical prose of; magical realism of; strong female point of view of] of [comparable book].”
- The **narrative arc** of your book – What the book is about, the conflict, the change that occurs, and how it ends.

Target audience

- If every book were meant for every person, bookstores and libraries would just be alphabetized by author name instead of put into categories and genres such as “Cooking,” “Mysteries,” and “Young Adult – Fantasy.” You need to identify the specifics of who your audience is to reach them.

These may not all be applicable to your book, but consider the following:

- **age group**
- **gender**
- **genre** – For example, don’t just say “fiction” say “literary fiction with strong female protagonists”; don’t just say “poetry” say “lamentations with a political bent”
- **interests** – For example, if you wrote a novel called *The Painter Who Walked into the Canvas*, your audience may be interested in literary fiction, fitness, healthy lifestyles, art, museums, creativity, etc.
- **religion**
- **sexual orientation**

Competitive titles

You *want* competition! It shows that people are interested in your subject. However, want *your* book to be the one to stand out because of your expertise and angle.

You will want to list:

- **Title and Subtitle**
 - **Author(s)**
 - **Publisher**
 - **Year of publication** – try to keep these current (within 5 years)
 - **Page count**
 - **Format** (hardcover, paperback, etc.) and trim size
 - **ISBN** (a 13-digit number you can find on the copyright page)
 - **Retail price**
-
- For each title, write one to two sentences summarizing the competitive title and telling **why yours is unique**—without disparaging the other title.

Marketing and promotion

- You the author know your book best so it's up to you to actively promote the book and to guide your publisher in marketing it.
- Publishers don't have huge budgets for splashy ads and book tours. How will you get the word out about your book and sell it?

Blurbs – Are there any “famous” people you can get to contribute a blurb for your book—and can you get them to commit now before the manuscript is complete? By famous, this could be an actual celebrity but it could also be a well-known author, a well-known critic, a well-respected authority related to your field, etc.

Publications

- Which magazines or newspapers do your target audience read?
- How can you tie in your book with current events to make it relevant and newsworthy?
- Which sections of your book are particularly well suited as standalone pieces for publication?

Social media

- How do you intend to use your own social media to promote your book? What is your **strategy** and plan of action?
- What **bloggers/vloggers** could you contact for guest opportunities on their site?

Media appearances

- What **topics** related to your book could you speak on?
- How can you tie in your book with **current events** to make it relevant and **newsworthy**?
- What **connections** do you have to any local or national media that you could leverage? Consider tv, radio, magazines, newspapers, etc.

Speaking engagements

- What **topics** related to your book could you speak on?
- How can you tie in your book with **current events** to make it relevant and newsworthy?
- What types of **organizations** may be interested in having you speak? Consider:
 - **Colleges** and **universities**; **alumni** groups
 - **Local service clubs** – Rotary Clubs; Chamber of Commerce; Lions Club
 - **Professional associations** related to your topic
 - **Networking groups** – Local Business Network (LBN), Business Networking International (BNI)
- What types of **conferences** and **fairs** may be interested in having you speak?

Example!

Let's saying you're writing a thriller about a woman in the healthcare industry....

- Get involved in the literary community. Specifically genre associations.
- Develop relationships with book bloggers/vloggers who can review your book.
- Solicit blurbs from other thriller authors.
- Submit for publication a scene from your novel to a lit mag.
- Pitch a nonfiction articles to healthcare magazines: trends in women in healthcare; buzz-worthy news about the particular healthcare industry your character works is; etc.
- Find timely stories related to the healthcare industry to pitch to a newspaper.
- Network at women in healthcare associations.
- Volunteer in the healthcare industry to build community.

List of chapters and their synopses

List out the chapters by number and, if applicable, their title.
Then, within each chapter:

- **Nonfiction:** Describe what each chapter is about. Note if any chapters/sections were previously published.
- **Fiction:** Describe the narrative arc in each chapter. Note if any chapters/sections were previously published.
- **Poetry:** Describe the poem's inspiration and tell if it's been previously published.

What makes for engaging chapter synopses?

- *Strong story arc*
- *Publication history*



Sample chapter

- Submit the first chapter of your book. The agent will let you know if they want to see the full manuscript.
- **Hook** the reader from the start! – An agent will only read until they get bored:
- The subject matter and/or characters should be **compelling**. – This doesn't have to mean likeable.
- The **conflict** that drives the story should be evident.
- **Spelling** and **grammar** should be perfect. – Hire a freelance editor if need be.

Tip!

Avoid **clichés**:

- Avoid cliché phrases. (“Thick as thieves.”)
- Don’t open with the character waking up.
- Don’t open with the phone ringing.
- Don’t open with a knock at the door.
- Breakups – You can write about them but the bar is high so make it good!
- Circuses are common settings. Who knew?!

Build your brand. Sell your book.

By now you probably see that by writing your book proposal before you've even written your book, you can strategize how to build your platform so you can sell your book.

Social media

- Platforms: Blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

Quick tips:

- Videos are prioritized on Facebook.
- Post photos with your text for more likes.
- Research trending #hashtags
- Use SEO (Search Engine Optimization) (use relevant key words)
- Name your photos with relevant key words before uploading them

Ideas for posts

- **Author photos**
- **Behind-the-scenes** – Show us where you write, your notebook, your writing rituals, your writing group, the view from your desk, the library where you research, the music you listen to, etc.
- **Characters** – Whether your book is nonfiction, fiction, or poetry, there are likely to be individuals, real or imagined or obscured. You can post photos of them or what one might imagine they'd look like, (imagined) interviews with them, items one might associate with them, etc.
- **Setting** – Show us where your book is set, including the landscape, the buildings, the nature, etc.
- **Dates** – Significant dates, the time period, “on this day,” etc.
- **Lists** – Top 10: other books on [your subject/style], reasons to buy this book, celebrities who could play your heroine, articles related to [your subject], songs to listen to while reading this book, etc.
- **Quotes** – from your book, from critics, etc.

→ ***What are 3 ideas specific to you and your book that you have for your social media?***

Build community

- Attend **readings** in bookstores and libraries
- Get to know your **librarian** – He or she can help you with research material while you write and can help you arrange library readings once you've published
- Participate in **alumni** events and send notifications to your school magazine
- Be active on **social media**, not just creating your own posts but commenting on other people's posts, particularly if they write about similar topics as you. Offer to do a free guest post for relevant bloggers on their site. Interview relevant bloggers for your own site.
- Participate in **book clubs** – Join book clubs, start your own related to your subject matter, get to know other book clubs so that you can reach out to them to read your book and possibly host you (in person or via phone/Skype) as their guest
- Get involved in your **local literary community** – Literary venues, residencies, etc.
- Give **talks** and/or **teach** – At libraries, religious institutions, schools, special-interest groups, etc., you can talk/teach about your subject matter and/or writing
- Have **contact info** handy – Get business cards, postcards, bookmarks, etc. that feature your name, email address, website, and perhaps social media.

→ ***What are 3 specific steps you are going to take after this workshop to build your platform?***

Congrats on finishing your book proposal! *Now what?*

Find the “right” agent:

- Someone who works with your genre
- Someone with whom you can have a good working relationship – You’re going to be receiving criticism from and talking about money with them

Finding an agent:

- Look in the acknowledgements of your favorite books and books that are similar to the one you’re pitching
- PW.org
- PublishersMarketplace.com
- *Writer’s Market* – Published every year, but still verify online that you’re contacting the right agent

Contact the agent:

- Follow the directions on the agency's website.
- Contact **one** specific agent **by name** per agency.
- Submit a one-page query:
 - Your synopsis with a great hook (mention the genre).
 - Your author bio: highlight big accomplishments and what you can bring to the table. Sell yourself!
 - Why you want to work with them: other work they've agented that you admire.
 - Ask if they'd like to receive your book proposal.
 - Mention if you are doing simultaneous queries.

You Have a Unique Story to Tell!

I'm Rooting for You!

Let's be friends on social media!

Let me know your successes, big and small. I'd retweet and post about your interviews, readings, and publications.

