



10 Reasons to Write a Book Proposal BEFORE Writing the Book

by Elizabeth Rusch

Say you have an idea for a nonfiction book for children or adults. Or even creative nonfiction or a memoir. What is one way to greatly *decrease* your chances at getting it published? Write the book. It sounds counter intuitive, but if you want your book published, you should write a book proposal BEFORE writing the book. Here's why:

10. Your book will likely be better organized. Most proposals include an outline. The exercise of planning what you are going cover and how you are going to organize it will help your manuscript read more smoothly.
9. You can nail the voice. Most proposals include a sample chapter, giving you a chance to find and hone your voice before producing the whole book.
8. Your book will be more different from other books. Most proposals include a competitive analysis, where you identify and describe other books on the same subject matter and point out how your book will be different and better. The exercise will keep you from writing a book that has already been written and will help you make your book stand out from the rest.
7. You will know your audience better. Most proposals include a description of the target audience. The exercise of asking yourself who exactly your book is for and why they would be interested in your book will help keep your writing on target for the audience.
6. Proposals are meant to be discussed and fine-tuned. If you submit a whole manuscript and it's way off-base in length, tone, or focus, the publisher will likely say no. If the proposal is an interesting idea but is off-base in length, tone, or focus, an editor can talk to you about changes before you have invested in writing the full book.
5. You will be ready to write the book. The proposal is a road map for your writing – a clear, well-thought out road map that you and the editor agree on. This gives you a to-do list that can help you tackle the book step-by-step.
4. You can be paid to write the book. If you sell a book project based on a proposal, you will probably get half of your advance on signing. That is welcome money that can help support you or pay for research as you write.

3. Your editor will ask for fewer revisions. If you and editor agree on a proposal and you write what you said you would write, there should be fewer surprises when you turn in your manuscript and the editor asks for revisions.

2. It is the way the majority of nonfiction books are sold. Many publishers ask for proposals. Giving a publisher what they want shows you are knowledgeable about their business and a real professional.

1. You can get it done! Proposals are generally shorter than book manuscripts. It is something you can do quickly and relatively easily to get your idea out into the market.

*Elizabeth Rusch has sold ten of her twenty published books based on proposals, including her latest **You Call THIS Democracy? How to fix our government and deliver power to the people** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March 2020). Learn more about her work at www.elizabethrusch.com*