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GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING A BOOK PROPOSAL

Preparing a book proposal is an important first step toward outlining the direction and content of the book you wish to create. It provides you the opportunity to develop the blueprint for writing, researching, and preparing a book-length manuscript of lasting value. The book proposal will reflect the unique characteristics of your proposed book, providing a publisher with basic information it will need in order to consider a project's fit and value to its list.

Obviously, artists, scholars, and writers will need to adapt the suggested guidelines listed below to the specific needs of their book project. A book featuring fine-art photography is far different in its needs than a book of scholarship or creative non-fiction. George F. Thompson Publishing offers professional advice and counsel to prospective authors not only in developing a book proposal that has the greatest chance for success, but also in navigating the lengthy publishing process.

To make an appointment to speak with George Thompson about your book proposal, please contact helpdesk@gftbooks.com. In the meantime, we offer the following guidelines to assist you in developing your book.

1. The cover letter

Even as it is important to establish some form of positive contact and rapport with a publishing house (usually with an editor) in advance of submitting a book proposal, the cover letter will still summarize, in one or two pages, the history of a project, its current status, and your overall intent and goals for completion.

2. Book specifications

A publisher needs to know the book's likely specifications in terms of length (number of words for the text plus number of words for the notes and other textual material), the type and number of illustrations (if any), and other aspects of the project that help define the book you envision. For example, a publisher will need to know if your artwork will require special paper, or expensive duotone or four-color reproduction, or a trim size larger than the traditional 6.0 x 9.0 inches upright/portrait, as these upgrades not only increase a publisher's costs, but also affect a publisher's ability to consider and commit to your project without financial support (see #6, below).

3. Contents

A publisher needs to see a simplified and annotated table of contents. That is, in addition to presenting the traditional contents page, you need to present one-page summaries of the introduction, individual chapters, conclusion, and other elements of the book, such as suggested readings, a glossary, and notes on the photographs.

4. Materials

A publisher usually requests either a polished introduction or conclusion to the book (even if it is an abridged version) and, preferably, an additional chapter or two that, together, reflect the overall content, tone, and execution of your proposed book. Likewise, a publisher needs to see examples of the type of illustrations you plan to use. You should consult with the publisher in advance as to how much textual and illustrative materials to include with your proposal.

5. Schedule for completion

It is essential that you establish a realistic schedule for the completion of a polished draft of the manuscript (including text and illustrations) of such quality that a publisher deems it ready for external peer review. Most authors also teach; thus, a realistic goal is to complete one perfected chapter per academic semester (provided the book is your "number one" priority after teaching). If the summer is like a semester, then completing three chapters per year is a very solid achievement.

6. Financial support

Because of financial pressures, publishers increasingly look to authors and/or their institutions to provide some financial support (often called a "subvention") for books that are heavily illustrated, require special production needs (see #2, above), are long (in excess of 80,000 words), or are burdened by the costs of permissions or a limited academic market. Thus, authors who are able to provide some financial support are better positioned to secure a firm contract and the kind of commitment they seek in the way their book is developed, designed, produced, and marketed. The amount of subvention varies according to the needs of each project, but, for art books, it can be significant.

7. Credentials

You need to orient your resume or c.v. toward the publishing world in order to establish your credentials as an artist, scholar, or writer. Thus, in addition to listing your educational background and professional career, you should emphasize your publication record (including articles and books), your exhibitions and collections (if an artist), and any awards, honors, fellowships, and major grants you have received. Book reviews, paper presentations at meetings and conferences, and the courses you teach are less relevant to a publisher.

8. Peer review

If you were an external peer reviewer of your book proposal, would you be able to answer the following questions positively and without conditions?

- What is the author's argument, thesis, or goal? Is it clearly stated?
- Is the manuscript organized logically and effectively? Is it the right length?
- Are the illustrations appropriate, sequenced and integrated in the best way?
- Is the text well written? Are the primary and secondary sources in the notes appropriate and current or excessive and dated?
- Who will want to read, review, use, and buy the book?
- How original and significant is the manuscript? How does it compare with other important books already published?
- How might the manuscript be improved?
- Do you have confidence in the author's ability to create a book of lasting value?
- On balance, do you recommend that a publisher pursue or commit to this manuscript? If yes, are there conditions to your endorsement?

Hopefully, the above guidelines will provide you with the necessary information in order to create a book proposal worthy of a publisher's time and commitment. If you need additional help visit: www.gftbooks.com.