

Parts of a Book Proposal

- Overview
- About the Author
- Audience/Market
- Comparative Titles
- Publicity/Press
- Chapter Summaries
- Sample Chapters

Overview. In a few paragraphs, the Overview introduces the work by (a) including its narrative and thematic qualities, (b) demonstrating the arc of the book's material, (c) making a case for why and how this particular work will appeal to readers, and (d) articulating why and how this particular book is needed at this particular moment in time. (C and D are often closely linked and can be discussed in tandem.) Because the Overview is the first information a reader will encounter, it should put the book's best foot forward and act as an argument in favor of project. At the same time, the Overview should avoid inflated promises and grandiose statements. Instead, present your project on its own terms and make a case for why this book is needed now. At the end of the Overview, be sure to state what you anticipate to be the final word count of the completed manuscript.

About the Author. In one paragraph, offer a biography that tells who you are, where you live (and sometimes where you've lived in the past if it's germane to your project), what you've published, any significant honors or prizes, and any significant literary partnerships or roles you hold/have held (for example, if you're a reader or editor for a significant literary magazine, or a member of a prominent collective like Kundiman or Cave Canem). The bio should demonstrate that you're a writer who has the experience, knowledge, contacts, and background to write and market a successful book.

Audience/Market. The goal of this section to prove that your book has readers and will sell. First, contextualize your work within the larger publishing landscape. What national/important conversations is your book engaging with? Next, who are the readers who will be interested in your book? Be as specific as possible here and break down the different communities that your work appeals to. This will help the publisher see that many opportunities for sales and readership exist. It's often useful to take a 'funnel' approach here – start with why/how your book offers universal appeal, and then offer a discussion of the progressively more targeted interest groups that will be interested in your work.

Comparative Titles. The goal of this section is to demonstrate that your book hasn't been written before and is filling an empty niche in the market. Offer about 5 titles that you feel are comparable to yours (include title, author, publisher, and date of publication) so that publishers can get a sense of (a) works that demonstrate there is indeed readership in the areas you're working in, and that (b) your approach is innovative, necessary, and an intervention into what already exists. When discussing each comparable title, make sure to discuss both how your work is similar to and different from that book.

Publicity/Press (also sometimes called Platform). The goal of this section is to prove that you have the contacts and resources to help market and sell your book. Gone are the days of huge publicity budgets for authors; instead, author effort, particularly via social media and preestablished media contacts, helps drive a great deal of publicity in the online, kind-of-post-covid world. Plus, your publisher's

publicity department can leverage your preestablished network to improve your book's national book coverage. This is therefore the section in which to not be shy. How will you leverage your resources? Name the writers/poets/novelists, editors, journals, bookstores, and other outlets that you can contact to review your work and perhaps rerun previously published work. If you have experience writing op-eds or contacts with local, regional, and/or national newspapers, say so. List any other networks you can tap into for promotional appearances, panels, talks, radio shows, podcasts, etc. Outline what you're able to do for the book. For example, do you have the resources to travel for book promotion (if not, don't say so – it's not nearly as important as your social media presence)? Do you have a large Twitter, Facebook, and/or Instagram following? If so, how many followers do you have? Do you have a blog or newsletter? If so, how many readers/subscribers do you have? Can you promote your book at specific festivals or conferences? If so, which ones, and what how many attendees do those events tend to attract? And don't forget the importance of the local. Sometimes geography has a huge impact on how well a book performs, and many communities love to support their local writers. What local resources do you have, and how can you use them?

Chapter/Essay Summaries. This is pretty self-explanatory, but its goal is to provide a short synopsis of each chapter/essay—usually one paragraph each—in the book. The summaries should appear in the order in which you envision the chapters/essays. Include the main narrative points, as well as the thematic content. Each summary should be engaging and clearly connected to the points you made in the Overview.

Sample Chapters/Essays. Also pretty self-explanatory. The material here should comprise several chapters (some books are sold on the basis of just a few essays/chapters, while others, particularly essay collections and memoir, do better with more, or even the entire manuscript). The sample chapters should be the opening and early chapters of a narrative-driven work, while essay collections have a bit more leeway in the chronological order of what's presented. The general rule is to present your strongest work and show the range of skill and topics that your project will contain. It goes without saying that the sample chapters/essays (and the whole proposal) should be impeccably written and proofread. Include page numbers. Use a standard font and font size for all the chapters/essays.