

# Researching and Writing a Book Proposal

## Book Publishing Is, First and Foremost, a Business

## Three Key Factors Behind a Winning Book Proposal

### The Writer

Expertise

Platform

### The Concept

Angle

Hook

### The Research

Market Demographics

Comparable Books

## Researching a Book Idea

### Resources for Sales Ranking Research

**ECPA Christian Bestsellers – Free Access – Top 50 Results Only**

[www.christianbestsellerlists.com](http://www.christianbestsellerlists.com)

**Amazon Rankings (Secular Source) – Free Access**

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Go to *Amazon*, select “Books” category, and click on “Advanced Search” tab near top left of page. If you know the title of a similar book, enter it in the “Title” field and look for more similar books under “Customer who bought this item also bought....”

For each book, you can find the ranking under “Product details”

For example, *The 5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman:

### Product details

- **Paperback:** 208 pages
- **Publisher:** Northfield Publishing; Reprint edition (January 1, 2015)
- **Language:** English
- **ISBN-10:** 080241270X
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0802412706
- **Product Dimensions:** 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.5 inches
- **Shipping Weight:** 7.2 ounces ([View shipping rates and policies](#))
- **Average Customer Review:** [4.8 out of 5 stars](#), [13,139 customer reviews](#)

- **Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #15 in Books** ([See Top 100 in Books](#))
  - #1 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Marriage](#)
  - #1 in [Books > Parenting & Relationships > Marriage & Adult Relationships](#)

You can also look up similar books using the following fields:

“Keywords” – As suggested, choose key words associated with the topic you’re researching

“Subject” – You can narrow your book search to the Christian Books & Bibles category

Note: Choose “Christian Books and Bibles” category (which includes 17 subcategories) rather than “Religion and Spirituality” category

“Format” – Select “Printed Books” at bottom to filter out a large number of irrelevant results

“Language” – Select “English” to further filter out irrelevant results

“Pub. Date. Month Year” – Start with current year and work back five years.

“Sort Results by” – Select “Bestselling”

[www.amazon.com/best-sellers-books-Amazon/zgbs/books](http://www.amazon.com/best-sellers-books-Amazon/zgbs/books)

*Amazon Best-Seller* lists include the top 100 in each category, subcategory, sub-subcategory, etc. Again, choose “Christian Books and Bibles” rather than “Religion and Spirituality”

#### **AMZ Scout Sales Estimator by Amazon Ranking (Secular Source) – Free Access**

<https://amzscout.net/sales-estimator>

On the *AMZ Scout Sales Estimator* site, choose Book category, enter sales ranking of selected book (without commas) from Amazon and click “Calculate Sales” to get *estimated* sales per month. Multiply that number by number of months since the book’s publication to get a ballpark number of books sold. This is just a *very rough* estimate based on a predictive algorithm, not on actual sales.

#### **Sales Rank Express – Amazon Tracking – (Secular Source) – Free Access**

[www.salesrankexpress.com](http://www.salesrankexpress.com)

On *Sales Rank Express*, click “Get Pairings” button to get suggested similar titles.

#### **NPD BookScan (formerly Nielsen Bookscan) - Publisher Use Only - \$4,000 / Yr.**

NPD BookScan sales data includes approximately 85% of all trade retail print book sales in the U.S., including most of Amazon print book sales. Subscription are only available to publishers, but the sky-high subscription price gives an idea of the value of this extremely in-depth information. This is where the acquisitions editor will get the sales number to plug into the P&L worksheet.

## **Writing a Book Proposal**

- Book proposal formats vary widely among publishers. Locate your desired publisher’s or agent’s specific guidelines and follow those instructions carefully.
- In the following article, well-known literary agent Chip MacGregor presents guidelines along with two examples: [www.macgregorandluedeke.com/resources/submission-guidelines](http://www.macgregorandluedeke.com/resources/submission-guidelines)

## Writing a Query Letter

- A query letter is a single-page letter written to pique the interest of the acquisitions editor or agent and asks for permission to send a full book proposal.
- Note that the query letter should be written after you have completed the book proposal because it is a sales tool that summarizes the work you've done in the book proposal.
- Don't send the book proposal unless it is requested. Be sure to have the proposal complete and ready to send immediately in case the editor or agent asks for it.
- The query letter must be clear, concise, and compelling.

Here's a great article on writing a query letter:

[www.janefriedman.com/the-complete-guide-to-query-letters-nonfiction](http://www.janefriedman.com/the-complete-guide-to-query-letters-nonfiction)

## Do I Need a Literary Agent?

- I recommend that you get one if you can. Because of increasing costs and financial risks, publishers have to be more selective than ever with book proposals. So that's why they generally rely on agents to sift through a mountain of proposals to find and pitch the best ones.
- Here's an article with advice on choosing an agent:

[www.macgregorandluedeke.com/resources/choosing-an-agent](http://www.macgregorandluedeke.com/resources/choosing-an-agent)

## Agent Fees

- Agents typically charge a 15% commission. This is well worth their help with preparing a sellable proposal, finding the right publisher, conducting contract negotiations, networking, providing advice for your long-term writing career, and more. But you need to do your homework and check out your potential agent carefully to make sure he or she has a good reputation and track record.
- If you're ready to submit a proposal and can get an agent to represent you, do so. But be aware that in reality you don't choose agents, they choose you. They want to every book they pitch to a publisher to be successful. If they pitch books that are rejected, their reputation and business will suffer, so they're very picky about the authors and books they're willing to represent.

## Finding an Agent

- The following links provide lists of agents who represent Christian writers. They aren't necessarily Christians themselves, and they don't necessarily exclusively represent Christians, but they do represent Christian authors and books.

<https://michaelhyatt.com/literary-agents-who-represent-christian-authors>

[www.booklaunchmentor.com/christian-literary-agents](http://www.booklaunchmentor.com/christian-literary-agents)

<https://oregonchristianwriters.org/2018-literary-agents>

- Another way to find an agent is to visit libraries and bookstores to find books similar to yours. Then look for the names of agents mentioned in the Acknowledgments pages. This is a great way to find agents you know are working with books in your niche.

## **Christian Manuscript Submission**

- Having an agent personally represent you can help you get to the front of the line, but if you can't get an agent, there is another option available: Christian Manuscript Submission.

[www.christianmanuscriptsubmissions.com](http://www.christianmanuscriptsubmissions.com)

“ChristianManuscriptSubmissions.com (CMS) is the only manuscript service created by the top Christian publishers looking for unsolicited manuscript proposals in a traditional royalty-based relationship. It allows authors to submit their manuscript proposal in a secure, online format for review by editors from publishing houses that are members of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA).”

- One advantage of using CMS is that you can skip the query letter. Also, you'll only need to submit that one proposal, rather than creating a tailor-made proposal for each agent or publisher. That means you can invest more time in perfecting that one proposal.
- CMS book proposals are viewed by both publishers and agents. If an agent is interested in your book proposal, he may contact you and express interest in representing you. So you can still potentially get an agent, even if you use CMS.

### **Summary of Christian Manuscript Submissions Book Proposal Guidelines**

“Publishers prefer to review a book proposal instead of an entire book manuscript. Based on feedback from our publishers and book proposal experts, we have prepared an easy-to-use 12-question proposal form to help you create a professional book proposal in a format publishers prefer. The proposal will include your book's title, summary, pitch line, chapter headings, and writing sample. You will also identify your target market, comparable works, promotional goals, and genre.”

### **CMS Cost**

- CMS charges \$98 to submit a book proposal that will be viewable for six months to agents and editors who are members of the ECPA.
- CMS offers two optional upgraded services.
  - Silver upgrade (\$447) includes a written proposal critique and 30-minute phone consultation.
  - Gold upgrade (\$497) includes a written proposal critique, a 30-minute phone consultation, plus editing of your writing sample up to 3,000 words.

The following generic book proposal format is shown on the **Christian Manuscript Submissions** website on this page: <https://christianmanuscriptsubmissions.com/how-to/create-your-proposal>

Click on button labeled: "Preview the Actual Manuscript Proposal Form"

## Proposal Form

**Title**

**Category**

[Select]

**Pitch**

So you want a publisher to read your proposal? You get to pitch it to them. A one-liner. Create a single sentence that provides a memorable hook line to solicit interest of a publisher.

**Topic**

**Target Market**

Who is your audience? Think about who would be most interested in reading this book.

**Similar Books**

Listing books is important. It gives the editorial team that is reviewing your proposal some context. "If this new book is similar to that published one I recognize, I can get excited about this new title." So do some research on Amazon or at a bookstore, and list 3-7 competitive works with title, author, publisher, and release date.

**Promotion Ideas**

Publishers rely on their authors for creative ideas to market their book. Provide list of ideas for promotion from your sphere of influence; perhaps it is a reading, a book signing, and event or another creative choice.

**Manuscript Length (Word Count)**

General word-count being sought by trade publishers is 30,000 (unless it is a children's book; less does not generally constitute a book but a magazine article).

**Completion Date****Book Summary**

(Word Count 500)

**Table Of Contents**

(Chapter titles only)

**Writing Sample (Word Count 3000)**

Choose a favorite section of your book, usually 1-2 chapters, that give the reviewer the opportunity to see your writing style, character development, understanding of topic and writing skills.

**Self-Publishing Interest?**

Interested self-publisher or partner-publisher will provide editorial services and print your book for a fee.

Yes, Self Publishers May Contact Me

**Agents May Contact Me**

Interested agent would represent your book to a publisher and follow AAR guidelines to charge you nothing up front and share in a small percentage of the book proceeds after publication.

Yes, Agents May Contact Me

**How did you hear about us?**

[-Select-]

For more information about book proposals, writers groups, writers conferences, and more, visit

***Today's Christian Living's***  
**Christian Writers Resource Guide**  
<http://bit.ly/TCL-CWRG>