

Guidelines for Prospective Authors

Publishing involves establishing a concert of interests between author and publisher. All presses have particular strengths, styles, and niches. For both authors and publishers, success occurs when a book is matched with a publisher who has a strong reputation in the discipline.

Before submitting a book proposal to a scholarly publisher, do some preliminary research. Who published recent books in your field that you especially admire? Which publishers' websites describe books in your area that resemble the one you plan to write? Which publishers seem especially good at reaching the audience(s) you are aiming for? Create a short and focused list of possible publishers.

A proposal should give the acquisitions and marketing staff—most of whom will not be specialists in your area—a clear and detailed idea of what your book will be about. The proposal should tell the Press staff why you are writing this particular book at this particular time in your own career, and more importantly, its role in the development of your field.

- What problems are you setting out to solve?
- What confusions do you wish to clarify?
- What previously unknown or unfortunately neglected story are you planning to tell?
- How is your book different from all other books in this area?
- Why does your book matter and to whom?
- Is your book for specialists in your field?
- Or is it for some particular area of a larger field?
- Is it a book that students might use, and if so, students at what level?
- Is it a "trade" book—that is, one intended for general readers, those without specialized knowledge in your area?

Consider carefully the kind of approach, terminology, level of explanation, and scholarly apparatus that your book will need to make it most compelling for your ideal reader.

Include the following information and materials in your proposal:

- a narrative description of the proposed book's themes, arguments, goals, place in the literature, and expected audience; state your argument concisely and clearly
- a comparison of the proposed book to other books now available intended for the audience that you seek (if you are writing a specialized monograph, it is not helpful to compare it to a popularized treatment of the same subject)
- a summary of your own professional experience, past publications, and relevant research, aimed at explaining why you are the right author for the book you intend to write
- an annotated table of contents, with a brief description of the contents of each chapter
- an estimate of the probable length of the book, the illustrations (if any) that you wish to include, the time it will take you to write it, and any possible complicating factors.
- a sample chapter or introduction.

If the book is multi-authored, please:

- provide biographical information on each author (a one-paragraph summary is preferable to a full c.v. at this preliminary stage).
- make it clear which authors have committed themselves to contributing a chapter and which ones you are negotiating with. Indicate whether any chapters, or substantive sections of chapters, have been previously published.

As a general rule, the more an author can show to a publisher, the stronger his position will be. If some chapters of the manuscript are already written, say so in your cover letter; however, you need not send them with the initial proposal.

Do not send the entire manuscript unless you have been asked to do so.

Proposals should be addressed (with correct spelling of the name) to the appropriate acquisitions editor; check the Press web site or make a quick telephone call to the switchboard to determine which editor would be most suited to your work. Avoid grammatical errors in your proposal. Finally, provide the names and contact information of 4 or 5 qualified peer readers.

Bibliography

Germano, William. *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001 (212 pages, paperback, \$15.00)

Germano, William. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. (162 pages, paperback, \$16.00)

Harman, Eleanor, et al., eds. *The Thesis and the Book: A Guide for First-Time Academic Authors*. University of Toronto Press, 2003. (176 pages, paperback, \$17.95)

Luey, Beth, ed. *Revising Your Dissertation: Advice from Leading Editors*. University of California Press, 2004. (262 pages, paperback, \$17.95)

Rabiner, Susan and Alfred Fortunato. *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction--and Get It Published*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003 (288 pages, paperback, \$14.95)

Adapted from Harvard University Press's website (see http://www.hup.harvard.edu/authors/ms_guidelines.html)