

FlatWorld
Guidelines for Developing a Proposal and
Detailed Table of Contents
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These guidelines are general, and some details might not apply to your project. You should adapt them as appropriate, while still maintaining a logical topical flow and smooth transitions between sections.

The Proposal

A manuscript proposal is your formal request for a publisher's investment of scarce time and financial resources. Therefore, the proposal needs to impress and convince peer reviewers and the publisher by revealing your strengths in all respects. The document must be free of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Furthermore, your proposal must demonstrate that you can:

- Describe and support a sufficiently robust market need for your product.
- Explain why your book's approach, content coverage, pedagogical features, supplements, and distinctive elements will drive sales performance.
- Logically organize and present content.
- Express yourself clearly.
- Introduce both known and unfamiliar concepts effectively and in an engaging manner.
- Convey a distinctive voice or sense of personality.
- Use appropriate and current research to substantiate a narrative.

Your proposal should start with an introductory section, or "Product Overview."

Product Overview

This section must be concise (two or three paragraphs at most), grab the reader's interest, and sell the project. The overview usually contains a core statement that incorporates the working title and employs active, key words that define the project's vision, mission, and rationale. Examples of core statements might be the following:

- *Social Work* is an introductory text for entry-level courses in programs leading to licensure in social work. It integrates theory and practice using a problem-solving casebook approach that prepares readers to appropriately address real-world client challenges.
- *Introduction to Technical Writing* surveys all aspects of professional practice in technical writing and features authentic models of excellent exposition in both technical and nontechnical fields.
- *Biology and the Life Sciences: An Introduction* is a survey text for instruction of undergraduate biology majors. Genomic research, its applications, and its implications are the unifying, central theme of the book. In an exciting innovation that reflects a widespread restructuring of how the course is taught, a whole chapter is devoted to the implications of recombinant DNA for reproductive technologies and gene therapies in the treatment of disease.

The "Product Overview" previews the proposal's most compelling elements and highlights the main points. Think of it as an abstract but one that's oriented toward selling your project to reviewers and the publisher. In addition to the core statement, you should include:

- Typical course title(s) in which the proposed book would be used.
- How adopters and learners will benefit from using your product. For example, imagine you're in an elevator at an academic conference with a colleague who is a potential adopter of your book. How would you explain its value in the few seconds you have before the elevator reaches your floor?

Be specific about potential customers, key value propositions (the core benefits that customers derive from your product), and what makes your book a useful and compelling teaching resource. Remember, the “Product Overview” is just a teaser, so don’t get into details. You’ll cover all the same topics in greater depth later on. End the section with a sentence or two of transition to the next section, “Market Environment.”

Market Environment

In this section, you describe faculty and student customers, define their priorities, and foreshadow how your book will meet the market’s needs.

Begin with an introductory paragraph before moving to the first subsection, “Primary Market.”

- *Primary Market.* Repeat here the appropriate higher education course titles(s) for which this product could be used, and confirm the following points:
 - Is your book appropriate for higher education courses taught primarily in four-year schools? Two-year schools? Nonprofit colleges and universities? For-profit schools? Other?
 - Is your project intended for majors? Nonmajors? What is the likely grade level of the learner: first year/sophomore? Advanced undergraduate? Graduate?
 - Is this an assigned, core resource for the course? Or would it typically be a recommended or optional student purchase?
 - Is it a narrative text? Or is it a reader or anthology?
 - Is this a single-authored text or will multiple authors participate? Will it be an edited text (i.e., written by many contributors)? If coauthored, which author will serve as the primary publisher contact?
- *Primary Market Size.* In this subsection, you estimate the annual enrollment for the target course. Provide information that helps narrow down the estimate to just the addressable market segment based on the approach you’re taking.
- *Secondary Markets.* Are there any sizable sales opportunities outside of the core, addressable, domestic market described in the preceding section (e.g., Advanced Placement, high school, corporate development, international)? If so, indicate them here and provide rough estimates of enrollments or customer populations if known.
- *Market Trends.* How is/are the target course(s) evolving or changing, and how do those factors impact your proposed project? Reiterate any significant market needs you noted in the “Product Overview,” and cover them in more detail here.

If you currently assign the manuscript in your classes, report your students’ responses, and summarize their performance results here. If you’ve done any formal market research, refer to your findings here, but place lengthy research summaries in an appendix. The “Market Environment” section must demonstrate your understanding of customers and the requirements of the course you’re targeting. The market trends and evolving customer needs you outline in this section are the basis for the “Product Description” section that comes later, and the information must align with descriptions of how your book meets the market’s needs.

Competitors

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate you fully understand what it will take to seize market share from existing, successful titles. Start with a brief overview of what adopters and students like and don’t like about the products currently being assigned for this course. How does your book specifically address gaps in leading competitors’ approaches, coverage, or learning strategies? Why would an instructor adopt your book instead of one of the existing titles? Why would students spend money to buy your book, rather than go without it?

Next, evaluate three to five of the top-selling competitors that target the same customer segment or take the same approach as your proposed book. In a separate paragraph or two for each competitor, describe what the competitor does well and provide insights into its deficiencies. Highlight the competitor's gaps or poor execution that relate to what your book will do well. Conclude each competitor's analysis with a statement of how your project will be different and better. End the section with a smooth transition to the next section: "Product Description."

Product Description

The "Product Description" is the heart of your proposal. Begin with an introductory paragraph to set up the remainder of this section. To start, you should re-state the rationale for the project and why it is both a credible and marketable addition to the choices available to adopters. Be sure the product description is consistent with the market needs you've already detailed. Describe how your project addresses customers' requirements and why, therefore, a publisher should be interested in it.

In the following sections you'll describe the physical and narrative structures of the work, including support for its rationale, key learning strategies, and features and benefits. To be clear, a feature is an element of your product as you define or describe it. The benefit is what the customer finds useful in it. For example, if you indicate that every chapter opens with a brief case study, that's a feature. When you explain how these openers activate the learner's prior knowledge or reinforce conceptual understanding and model excellent practices, then you've identified the benefits. Explanations of both features and benefits are crucial to making your product description useful and persuasive. If you describe only features, you can't be sure reviewers or the publisher will understand why they're being included, thereby losing the chance to emphasize why your project is worth investment.

Rationale

What is the proposed book's overall teaching strategy? Why is it better or easier for explaining or learning about the content? Why are you excited about your book, and why should publishers, potential adopters, and learners also be enthusiastic? What is special or distinctive about your approach? How is it better than or different from currently available products? Specifically: Why should instructors who are reasonably happy with available offerings want to adopt yours instead?

Be sure to provide explicit support for the value propositions you've been building throughout the preceding sections. This is where you provide an explanation of how the product is composed, designed, and works—always linking these explanations to how its features and benefits support value for the customer.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

What are your content goals and how do they align with typical teaching and learning objectives and outcomes? Explain the following if not already noted above:

- What teaching and learning challenges will the product address or resolve?
- What key competencies or learning outcomes will this product help learners develop? Define and describe them.
- Are these competencies keyed or geared to any professionally mandated outcomes, such as objectives or goals endorsed by a professional or academic organization related to your discipline?
- How are the competencies expressed in learning objectives or other pedagogy? How do those learning objectives shape the structure and content of the narrative?
- How are objectives integrated into the learning solution itself? How are they assessed?

Format

Publishers immediately start envisioning a product and its budget needs when evaluating a proposal. You can support this process by providing basic information about how the final product might look. Review the targeted competitors to ensure you're in the same ballpark regarding length, the number and type of visuals, and other physical elements. Include estimates of:

- Final word count.
- Number and type of illustrations, tables, figures, and visual teaching elements per chapter or module, or for the book as a whole.
- The number and type of photos (if any).
- The likelihood of significant fees for use of third-party materials (known as permissions)? Items requiring permission include third-party photos, illustrations being picked up or adapted from other works, and text excerpts that are under the copyright ownership of a third party.
- Any other special elements about which the publisher should know.

Learning Elements

What is the teaching framework or “pedagogical apparatus” of a typical chapter, learning module, or learning object? For example, do all chapters or modules start with learning objectives, an opening case example, and a graphic organizer? Will each chapter close with a summary or conclusion? List all of the planned in-chapter pedagogical features and their benefits to the learner. Remember that consistency is important, and any in-text features you plan should appear in each chapter.

Teaching and Learning Supplements

A standard supplements packages generally consists of an instructor's manual, test bank, and presentation slides. Other supplements may be appropriate given the course area and market expectations. If your planned supplements will possess distinguishing characteristics or advantages, explain their benefits. Indicate if you plan to write or closely supervise their development, too.

Summary

Briefly reiterate what makes your proposed book special or unique, harkening back to sections on “Market Environment” and “Competitors.” Bring together the details in the “Product Description” section by restating the project's core value proposition or why adopters would want to use your book instead of the successful titles currently available. Be sure to once again mention why a publisher should invest in your project and want to work with you. End on a high note; it's your job to “close the sale” with the proposal's summary.

Background, Curriculum Vita, and Contact Information

Do you have credibility in the discipline? How does your background provide competitive advantages in marketing the published book? For example, will potential adopters recognize your published research or presentations at academic conferences? Are you an expert teacher with prestigious teaching awards? Have you been granted tenure? A Ph.D. and record of publication in the subject area are basic expectations to write a textbook for most courses. Attach a detailed, current curriculum vita that reflects your full scholarly publishing record and links to your website, online courses, or other pertinent information.

In this one- or two-paragraph section of your proposal, briefly highlight the key elements of your academic background that qualify you to take on this project, including:

- Recently taught, pertinent courses
- A brief summary of degrees earned and where
- Other recent book-length publications

- Teaching and professional recognition awards
- Titles of one or two recent presentations at academic conferences (presumably, they'll relate to the topic of the proposed project)

Include a separate paragraph with your preferred contact information, including phone number and email address.

Appendix (optional)

You want the core proposal to read smoothly, so if there are extensive citations or research-based explanations for your approach, pedagogical strategy, or other elements, consider including them in a separate appendix.

Additional Tips

There are also some additional tips for writing a proposal worth keeping in mind.

- Employ two levels of headings (main heads and subheads). If a third level of headings is needed, use it logically and consistently throughout.
- Avoid stacked heads (i.e., headings with no text following them).
- Use bulleted or numbered lists and white space to break up text and make examples easier to read and remember.
- Keep the use of boldface, italics, and underlining to a minimum.
- Avoid the use of multiple fonts and point sizes.
- The entire document should not exceed ten to twelve pages (excluding references or appendices). Shorter is better, and you probably can cover what you need to discuss in six to eight pages.
- As noted above, the materials should be grammatically correct and free of errors.

Detailed Table of Contents

When submitting a proposal, you must include a detailed table of contents, preferably annotated with short descriptions that address questions about how content will be handled. If you can't compose a table of contents, then you're probably not yet ready to submit the proposal.

The most persuasive tables of contents are presented as detailed outlines with short explanatory overviews embedded at the beginning of each chapter or learning module heading. A detailed table of contents will make clear what you propose for the range of topics you plan to cover, in what order, and to what depth (i.e., the book's scope and sequence).

The table of contents should include all planned chapters. Immediately following each chapter's title, list the key learning objectives or expected learning outcomes and a brief (one or two paragraph) rationale for the topics covered. Then list all main headings and subheadings. Include the titles of any unique pedagogical features you plan to include, such as applications, case studies, interactive simulations, and so on. Finally, check to ensure that everything you include in a detailed table of contents is consistent with the claims you made in the "Product Description," clearly appeals to the target market, and supports how your book will be superior to the competition.

Best of luck as you begin to write!

Please send proposals to sean.wakely@flatworld.com

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