

## Book Proposals for Memoirs

A proposal for a memoir has more similarities with than differences to the proposal for other nonfiction book ideas. You'll need all of these same sections:

- a title page done attractively, with special fonts, color, perhaps even with artwork or design elements
- a 150-200-word summary that encapsulates your book's subject, slant, story arc, uniqueness, relevance, and more, and creates a buzz of excitement (Concept Statement)
- a description of your intended book and why your experiences are timely and relevant and to whom (About the Book)
- your qualifications related to the themes of the memoir and related to writing and publishing (About the Author)
- a market plan for how you will sell tons of copies (About Promotion)
- paragraph summaries of comparable memoirs, followed by a description of how your memoir is similar and different (About the Competition)
- a profile of your intended audience, including an estimate of size of that market and special venues, such as book clubs and course adoption potential, for how to reach that market (About the Market)
- a list answering production questions, including the length of your memoir, when you can finish it, the inclusion of photos or artwork, a foreword and who you hope will write it, and so forth (Production Details)
- a table of contents as you envision it for your finished book (Table of Contents)
- a summary outline of every chapter (Chapter Summaries)
- sample chapters, the first three to begin with but knowing you may be asked to submit many more, perhaps even the entire memoir, prior to signing a contract (Sample Chapters)
- an appendix where you include recent published articles and essays by or about you and/or about the subject or theme of your memoir (Appendices)

Several important differences do exist between a proposal memoir and the information-based nonfiction book. First, the aspect of your life that you have selected for the memoir must have a compelling story of universal relevance. It can't just be your moment of catharsis or sharing your "snapshots" of a trip to a foreign country. You must develop an

underlying theme based on showing yourself and your quest to fulfill a yearning and resolve some problem from your near or distant past.

Second and of equal, perhaps greater importance, your writing must fly off the page with its excellence. If you are not a celebrity, why would someone want to read about your life? The answer is that your readers open to the first page and they are compelled to read on. The writing captures and holds them. That's why agents and editors may ask you to submit half or even the whole memoir, to make sure you have the skill to write well from beginning to end.

The competition section for the proposal is slightly different. You'll should seek books that have parallels to your own memoir-- in setting, theme, writer background or life experiences, and possibly in writing style. Your chapter summaries must outline the outer events of your life and the inner turmoil and describe your reflections relative to the theme. Keep each chapter summary to one page (single-spaced is okay but use double-spacing between paragraphs) per chapter.

Remember, all memoirs should demonstrate the inner conflict of the narrator, how one part of you is in conflict with another part of you. For instance, your conflict may be that you don't want to be like your mother yet you act just like her, or you want to let go of resentment yet are unable to forgive. The conflict with which you struggle should be the drama that plays out in the events of your memoir. This singular conflict defines the universal theme that captures your reader.

Finally, your chances of selling a memoir increase if you first write short memoir pieces and get them published. You'll gain practice and the credits will bump you up to professional status in the eyes of agents and editors.