

Praise for *The Great First Impression Book Proposal*

"... you can't go wrong in faithfully following Carolyn Howard-Johnson's advice in her *invaluable*, very short-page book proposal."

~ Frances Lynn, author of *Crushed*

"... concise yet informative instruction manual on how to write a book proposal, author Carolyn Howard-Johnson offers a long list of golden-nugget-TO-DOs and smart ideas which can help guide writers past the Gatekeepers."

~ Kathe Gogolewski, author and artist

"I just finished reading your *Great First Impression Book Proposal*. . . I like your style and encouragement. I was a bit intimidated about finishing my book proposal. I was thinking it had to be stiff and boring. I even have dialogue in mine. I thought I'd have to cut it out. Now, I'll probably leave it in." ~ Wanda Leftwich, author, blogger

"I love [your *Great First Impression Book Proposal*!]! My husband was amazed at all the info crammed into this short booklet. You could have charged a lot more. I just revamped my proposal to follow the guidelines in it for my latest book . . ."

~ Myrna Lou, palmist/psychic/author

"You are what I describe as an energy-giver. So many people today are energy-drainers."

~ Dorothea Helms, author and Dayton University workshop attendee

"Lists! We love bulleted lists. Anyone can follow steps and find their way to success—anyone who has a good list can anyway. And not all lists are created equal. Howard-Johnson's

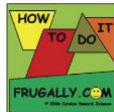
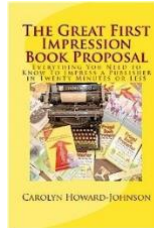
lists are created superior: Easy to understand, easy to implement, and even easier to read (She means it when she says 30 minutes or less). As helpful information goes, those three things are winners, but she gives us more: a list of other resources for book proposals. I will recommend this book to all of our authors and potential authors at LadybugPress."

~ Georgia Jones, Editor in Chief, Ladybug Press/ New Voices, Inc.

The Great First Impression Book Proposal

**Everything You Need to Know
About Selling Your Book to an Agent or
Publisher in Thirty Minutes or Less**

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson



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*Careers that are not fed die as readily as any living
organism given no sustenance.*

BEFORE WE GET STARTED

If I were smart, I'd skip this "Before We Get Started" section. Many people don't read forewords, prologues, and the like. Note that I didn't *call* it a prologue. I hope using a different title will encourage *you* to read it. You might try the same trick with the titles and subtitles of your proposal. Though you want your titles to clearly guide an agent or publisher through your proposal, there is no need to use dull ones like "Bio," and "Marketing."

These prologues are little hors d'oeuvres for books that have a function. There may be a use for one in your book proposal, too. Who knows. Every title is different. Every title deserves to have its proposal tailored to its own specific needs.

I'm indulging in this section because I think it's important that you know what you're getting into.

To give you a better idea, it may be easy to say what a book proposal is not:

It is not a synopsis of your book. Not exclusively.

It is not a paper or essay like the ones you were so carefully taught to write in high school.

It is not a business letter, but it *is* about business.

It is not merely an idea for a book. It is an idea coupled with a plan.

It *is* a marketing tool. You are selling a book and its potential. Not just any book, but *your* book. You are making a convincing case that this book idea of yours will sell well. For a proposal to do that, it must be well researched. It must

also be readable. That is, it must be in a format (the proposal design or the way it is laid out) that makes it easy for agents or publishers to find what they need. Thus, it may require skills some writers have never used.

Don't let all this keep you from tackling a proposal on your own, but if you need help, this is not the time to overindulge your frugal streak. Get help where needed. You'll know if you need help after you've written the first draft using this little guide. If you decide you do need a consultant, an editor, or a class in how to more effectively use your word-processing program, the draft will not be a lost effort; it will be easier for an editor, proposal writer, or formatter to polish it than to start anew. That means less work for him or her. Thus, their services should cost you less.

This is also the place for me to admit my guilty secret: I prefer the process most fiction writers go through to get their books published; that is, they write a query letter and submit the number of chapters requested by the publisher or agent they're contacting. Their books must be finished before they start to send out their queries because interested gatekeepers want to see a whole book and won't be happy if the author must suggest a six-month wait. At least, with this query-letter-and-book-only process, an author need only write one book. That's what I hate about proposals. They are nearly like writing a book including the formatting of the thing, something writers would usually prefer to avoid.

Hint: No matter what the future holds for this particular book, keep this proposal filed away in your computer. It will become your template for future book proposals. Because it carries proposal fundamentals and formatting, you won't need to start again from scratch.

The sad thing is, I don't get to choose. Neither do you. So get started on your own Great First Impression Book Proposal and simply *decide* to have fun writing it.

The good part of the proposal method is that—when you are through—you are likely to write a better, more thought out and organized book than you would have if you had not been required to write a proposal.

Note: I changed the title of this booklet to "Thirty Minutes" instead of "Twenty Minutes" when I updated it. I wanted this to be a speedy process, but I decided that an extra chapter would help you find some of what you need more easily and wouldn't add that much time to the reading of it.

CONTENTS

Before We Get Started

- 1. Getting Past Our Own Arguments—and Past Gatekeepers' Resistance**
- 2. Getting Started: The Short Way to the Gate**
- 2. Your Overview: How To Make Jaded Gatekeepers Want More**
- 4. The Details: How To Make a Gatekeeper Open the Door for You**
- 5. Making It Easy: Quick Formatting and Editing Do's and Don'ts**
- 6. The Clincher: Keeping the Gate Wide Open**
- 7. Checklist: Is Your Great First Impression Proposal Ready for Its Closeup?**

Appendixes

Appendix I: Basic Query Letter Sample

Appendix II: Other Books by Howard-Johnson

Appendix III: SUGGESTED STUDY

Thank Yous

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ADVERTISING

1. GETTING PAST OUR OWN ARGUMENTS—AND PAST GATEKEEPERS' RESISTANCE

We are all familiar with the head gatekeeper, St. Peter himself guarding the pearly gates. The path to traditional publishing is only slightly less daunting; we may never pass if we don't know the rules and know when and how to break them.

Those who haven't learned to write a book proposal are haunted by that gap in their knowledge. It lingers much like the first horror story your counselor told you as you roasted s'mores over a campfire at summer camp, and it becomes more frightening every time the prospect of a new book looms.

Requiring book proposals is not something that is going away anytime soon. In fact, they are becoming omnipresent. Once only writers of nonfiction needed to write proposals to get their ideas past gatekeepers—the editors, agents, and publishers in the publishing industry. Now some publishers of fiction ask their novelists to write them. The book-proposal process is especially prevalent for fiction writers under contract for more than one novel, genre novels, and novels that are part of a series. And more and more agents are asking the fiction authors they represent to write marketing proposals to submit to their literary contacts with the usual query letter and sample chapters.

Further, many writers are put off by books that explain how to write book proposals.

"It takes a whole book to learn to write one?" they say. "First we have to *read* a whole book on how to write a proposal, then we have to write a proposal—which is practically like *writing* a whole book—and then we have to write the darn book?"

They're right. It all seems like too much.

And it may be too much. There are lots of books out there on how to write a book proposal. I recommend a few at the end of this booklet. But it is easy enough to learn the essentials in a proverbial nutshell and that's what this booklet will do for you.

It's easy to make short stuff of the subject of writing book proposals simply because there is no one way to write a proposal. You need to know the basics, but each proposal should vary with the project, depending on the author's style, the genre he or she is writing in, and the way he or she visualizes the book.

In this booklet, I give you a detailed map for a proposal for a nonfiction book, one that works because it makes it easy on the agent or publisher to find what he or she needs to get his interest up and then learn more at will. Obviously, those writing proposals for fiction (and keep it mind it is rarely required that the writers of fiction books use proposals) will need to adapt these guidelines.

So, what are proposals all about and why are we so uncomfortable with them?

A book proposal is a marketing tool, a tell-and-sell document. Writers tend to be artistic or academic or reclusive and probably never pictured themselves hawking any kind of product, much less something that they're so invested in.

That doesn't mean they won't have to, and it doesn't mean they can't learn to write a real kick-butt proposal. In fact, most already have the instincts for it; they just think that they must switch from real writing to the brazen or boring. And they need to know that once past the query letter, if the proposal doesn't impress a gatekeeper, all is lost.

Speaking of query letters, writing them is another skill we must learn. I've included a sample letter in the Appendix of this booklet for you to use as a template, but because the subject is so important, I included an entire chapter on the subject in the second edition of *The Frugal Editor: From your query letters to final manuscript to the marketing of your new bestseller*. (<http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>). I interviewed more than a hundred agents to see what annoys them about query letters, and I quote about twenty of the ones who were the most helpful (or the most straight up about what ticks them off!). I hope you'll take the time to read it *before* you begin sending your proposal out. The editing tips in it will help make your manuscript shine, too!

So, happy proposal writing. We might as well make this quick, painless, and fun.

2. GETTING STARTED: THE SHORT WAY TO THE GATE

In math, we learn the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Not so for selling a book. The shortest distance is to reduce the required stuff down to what's fun or super-helpful and present it as a hook or a pitch.

Think of a proposal as a cross between an outline, a résumé, and a media kit. Like each of those, the proposal should be designed to grab the attention of its intended audience. It should let them find what they want to know fast and keep them wanting to read till the last paragraph has whispered its last syllable.

See, that's what writers do! Even fiction writers. In fact, they may know those concepts better than other writers. We hook the reader; what follows keeps her or him turning the page.

To get these readers (in the case of a proposal, the people who tend the gates to a published book) to turn those pages—nay *want* to turn those pages—your proposal must not be a dry old rag. Like your other writing, a proposal should reflect your voice and the character of whatever kind of book you're proposing.

So, before you start, discard the idea that you'll write it like the most snooze-inducing text you ever read. Think about an editor with a desk spilling over with dozens of proposals. Think of how to make yours a standout right from the start.

Think friendly. Think a bit colloquial. Think a bit (or more) of humor. Think condensed. Think little allusions or

foreshadowing of what is to come. Think about using anecdote, yes, even dialogue. Do *not* think yawn!

The proposal approach I'm giving you is not the only way to write a proposal. I call my method "The Great First Impression Proposal" because it uses a summary or introduction (the overview) to let the agent, producer, or publisher see its brilliance early on, without digging. We'll call that the enticement. Write it so he or she will want to delve into the details.

The Great First Impression Proposal has obvious advantages. It begins with a digest or overview—call it the best of the best. After this overview, you expand some of the points you made in it (and in your cover or query letter) in the body of the proposal.

Some books call out for every single one of the segments in the template I am about to give you, but *your* title may not need all of them. Some elements, like short synopses of each chapter, are essential. About a line *per page* is suggested by many, but that can vary. Some might choose to use the titles of each chapter and a quick one-sentence summary of the whole chapter for their synopsis. They may choose to treat the subtitles the same way. I saw one that used the Table of Contents (preferably called just Contents) with an added zinger or hook after each heading. Because they combined the two elements, they called it "Contents and Short Synopsis".

If using a shorter version makes the presentation sing and still gives the gatekeeper everything he or she needs, that's a good thing. If it means that you leave out some of the most precious nuggets in your book, write the tradition one-line-per-page synopsis.

Whichever approach to a synopsis you choose, work to achieve some pizzazz with sharp chapter titles, maybe even titles that use puns.

Don't forget to include a table of the contents of your proposed book somewhere in your proposal (probably under a title like "About the Proposed Book"). Be sure it doesn't look like the synopsis. The formatting and layout must be very different and, of course, the synopsis will contain additional information.

Note: Most books of fiction do not have contents sections. Unless there is a very special reason to include one, they tend to indicate that the author or publisher knows little about publishing traditions.

2. YOUR OVERVIEW: HOW TO MAKE JADED GATEKEEPERS WANT MORE

Pity the poor agent or publisher. Think of the stacks of proposals on his or her cluttered desk. There are jewels among them; an agent's livelihood depends on finding them. But your proposal will fare better if a pickax isn't required to find your sapphires.

The most important part of your book proposal is your Great First Impression Overview. In it you may include anything that was in your query letter or in your introduction in greater depth, but here is what you want to be sure is in it:

~Your **nonfiction title** must tell what your book is about and help sell it. To do that, the title must suggest a benefit your book offers its readers. Put another way, it should reveal or suggest a solution to a problem. Your fiction title will, perhaps more subtly, do the same. I always liked titles like *Murder in Times Square*. The reader immediately knows it is a mystery and where the book is set. Run your title ideas by some experts. Let them weigh in. Don't shy away from long **subtitles** for nonfiction; the keywords found in them will let your book be more easily found in online bookstores.

~Make **the lead** of your book proposal overview memorable. You might start . . .

a~with an anecdote about why your book idea exists. As an example, tell how you tried everything (but be specific) and it

didn't work. How you are writing a book about solving that problem.

b~with a joke that relates to the subject of your book.

c~with a quote that captures the essence of your book.

~Be sure whatever you use is **written well** and in a way that entertains. Even texts are sometimes written with a lighter touch these days and they still manage not to lose necessary content.

~The **pitch** or handle comes after your lead. This is like a logline of a movie (think about those little one- or two-sentence pitches you see in movie ads or posters). Short, sweet, entertaining. The pitch encapsulates what the book is about. This is also sometimes known as your elevator pitch except that an elevator speech is memorized so you can recite it on a moment's notice. Every pitch is different. Briefly, try something like this: "When so and so does this . . . then something happens." This works well for fiction but it can also be adapted to nonfiction like this:

"If you have trouble with XX, then you'll want to do XX."

Learn more about benefits and pitches in marketing books like the new edition of my *The Frugal Book Promoter: How to get nearly free publicity on your own or by partnering with your publisher.* (<http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>) or other marketing books listed in the Appendix of this booklet.

Note: When you read on the Web (or in old editions of how-to books) that you should use phrases like "This book is James Michener meets Godzilla," don't believe it. This technique has become clichéd and usually doesn't tell the agent or publisher much anyway.

~List other **special features** your book will include. Sidebars. Exercises. Illustrations. What will go in the backmatter like appendixes, templates, checklists, and the index. You'll find more information on these aspects for your proposed book in my *The Frugal Editor: From your query letters to final manuscript to the marketing of your new bestseller*. (<http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>).

~Try to get a celebrity **endorsement**. Yes, now! Before you send out the proposal. Here's why:

a~If your endorsement or blurb is strong and comes from someone well known in his or her field, it will add credibility to your proposal. Put it in your overview.

b~One of these celebrities might write the foreword for you.

c~She or he might be willing to link to your book's sales page from his Web site or help you promote it in other ways once it is published.

d~When it becomes part of your query letter, it may entice a gatekeeper to keep reading.

If your plan for a blurb (endorsement) isn't finalized, the marketing section of your proposal should make it clear you are working on a great one—in fact several.

~Outline your marketing plan using bullets for the **major promotions**. Put them in descending order of importance. You can be more specific in that later section. If you need marketing ideas, get your copy of *The Frugal Book Promoter* (<http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>). There are hundreds of ideas in it.

~List major **spinoffs**, like sequels, toys, or other products that might add exceptional value to your project. Make the idea clear. This is not the place to get secretive for fear of being ripped off. List only *major* ones, (like sequels of your book). If your list is longer, mention that the complete list of spinoffs may be found in the marketing section of your proposal. (We'll discuss more about this section later).

~If there are foreseeable **legal questions**, cover them here. If you have the contact information for your legal advisor, include it. Remember the old TV advertisement reminding us it isn't nice to fool Mother Nature? Well, gatekeepers don't like surprises, either.

~For a nonfiction book, list a *couple* **competitors** and complementary books that are now in print. Be brief. Title, author, and how your book complements and/or competes. Or better, how your book adds

something essential to the existing conversation. Please avoid saying this is the only book of its kind—ever. We all know better than that. If you have other comparisons to make, save them for the body of your proposal and mention that more can be found in the section on marketing. (Remember how we talked a bit about foreshadowing what is to come?) And the idea is to elucidate, not to get windy.

~Agent Michael Larsen suggests letting your targeted reader know the amount of **money** you will need to complete the book. This is a little like asking for a grant; it is about the size of the advance you'd need. Do you need dollars for travel? For research? The editors or agents you are approaching need to know what kind of an advance (at a minimum) they are looking at.

Note: This last bullet usually applies to nonfiction books, but there are exceptions to every rule. I *suspect* the publisher may have financed on-site research for Lisa See's novels set in China.

4. THE DETAILS: HOW TO MAKE A GATEKEEPER OPEN THE DOOR FOR YOU

Your ability to put yourself in the shoes of an agent or publisher may be the single most important skill you possess in selling your book to a gatekeeper.

Now comes the part of your proposal that you know about, the part that you don't want to think about. It's about your biography, book synopsis, marketing plan, etc.—all those things that make a book proposal seem so dreary. It comes after your enticing overview. But you're going to make even this part make a gatekeeper happy to keep reading.

They say, "Pretty is as pretty does." In the case of book proposals, organization and formatting are pretty because they're what make it easy for gatekeepers to find what they need. Each category in this section must be clearly defined. Format this section so that a power reader will not need to slow down. Use plenty of open space, bullets, and a simple font. The look should not vary much from the one you used in your overview. Serifed fonts like Times New Roman (used in this booklet), Garamond, or Century are easily read. Each of those fonts is available in most word processing programs. There is more on formatting your proposal and related details in Chapter Five.

If an agent needs to know more about any specific part of your proposal as they are reading the overview, that information should be easy to locate. A Contents page at the beginning of your proposal will help them do that.

Note: We're not talking about the contents or the outline of the book you are proposing here! This Contents page outlines the proposal itself and is located in the frontmatter of your proposal, much like those you see in any nonfiction book you read.

I don't understand why few other books about book proposals suggest a Contents page. The job of the proposal is to help an agent or publisher find what they need fast. A proposal is very like a nonfiction book and *they* have tables of contents!

Note: Even this small book has a Contents page. The print version has page numbers and the e-book version has links. Because readers change the size of the font on their e-reader screens, e-book page numbers toggle back and forward and become meaningless.

As you put the rest of your proposal together, keep your voice consistent with the overview. If you are bored, your reader may be bored. Keep the juice up. And if you have a brilliant idea entirely apart from suggestions made in books (or booklets or articles), use it. Even if it's just an idea that makes it easier for an editor to understand (and love!) your idea. Getting their attention, by the way, will not involve tricks like stuffing your proposal envelope with glitter or sending gifts. Keep your proposal honest, smart, a reflection of you. Some agent somewhere will be impressed by both your personality and your professionalism.

The essentials for the rest of your proposal include all the pieces of your proposal that an agent or publisher will want to know once you've roped him or her in with the overview. Your extended proposal includes:

~Your **About the Author section** is a more extensive bio than the two or three sentences you put

in your query letter or overview. Ideally, you will have been building a platform that includes several sturdy platform planks. Here are some planks you could include (or begin to build).

a~**Your profession** if it relates to your book. Think about this. It may relate in unforeseen ways.

b~**A Web site**, preferably one that meets the needs of the intended audience of your book. In other words, it should be more than a sales page. Find more on Web sites for authors in *The Frugal Book Promoter* (<http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>).

c~A mention of your **e-zine or newsletter**. It would be nice if it had more than 1,000 subscribers, though this guideline varies from genre to genre. Writers of fiction may impress with fewer subscribers than writers of nonfiction.

d~At least one **blog** that complements your book.

e~Where your contact can find a **media kit**. It should be available as a download on your Web site. You'll find several focused kits to use as guides on my Web site, <http://howtodoitfrugally.com>. Click on the Media Room tab.

f~Any other **publishing** or work you have done in the media. That includes journals, anthologies, etc.—online or in print.

g~Your **public speaking or appearance** history. Give specifics. Include things like employee training you've done at your place of business and your teaching experience. Both definitely require speaking skills. The idea is to let gatekeepers know you can do it, even like to do it.

h~The extent of your personal, professional, and media **contact lists**. That includes all kinds of organizations—professional, schools, charities—as well as your holiday lists and maybe your mother's bridge club list. It is not too early to assemble these lists or clean and coordinate the ones you have. Building contact lists is important to the marketing of a book and is covered thoroughly in *The Frugal Book Promoter* (<http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>).

If any of the above suggestions are extensive, you may want to recategorize them—that is break them out into sections of their own in your proposal.

~**Table of Contents** (but, please call it only Contents, lest you make gatekeepers think you don't know much about publishing). This is the Contents you visualize for your proposed book. You could substitute an outline of your book for this Contents if you wish.

~Your **full synopsis** is a rundown of what happens or what you cover in each chapter. In any case, keep the description of each as brief as possible. Use present tense. Let your voice shine, even if you are writing a book for academia and the voice is

academic. Use strong active verbs like "clarify," "elaborate," "address," "identify," "illuminate," "debunk," "describe," "dramatize," etc. If you get stuck, use your thesaurus or find a list of suggestions in Michael Larson's *How To Write A book Proposal* (Writer's Digest Books), pp. 96-97 (<http://bit.ly/MichaelLarson>). Vary both your verbs and your nouns. When working on this section, don't neglect the power of subheads.

~If you plan to write **sequels**, this is the place to do brief synopses of them. Mention sequels in a subhead or bulleted list in your marketing plan, too, because one book may well propel sales of the next. You may choose to put information on how much money you will need to complete the project and foreseeable legal issues here instead of the overview.

~Include your **projected page number** or word count and length of time it will take you to write your book. You might group this with other short pieces of information that don't seem to call for a section of their own under a header called Planning Ahead.

~Give your gatekeepers a detailed promotion or **marketing plan** including everything you are willing and able to do for your own book, any leads or contacts you have, etc. If the editor of *Time* magazine is your sister-in-law and has promised you a spread of your own, this is where it goes! And please give me a personal introduction to her. We need to know one another.

Spinoffs are part of your full marketing plan. They may include but are not limited to:

E-books to sell or for promotion.

Audios.

Manuals.

Workbooks.

Radio or TV show ideas.

Coaching business plans.

Speaking.

Magazines (Oprah spun her magazine "O" from her TV program).

Seminars.

Teleseminars.

E-zines.

Newsletters.

Mentoring services.

Toys (possibilities abound here for children's authors). Videos (note the video that spun off from Rhonda Byrne's inspirational book *The Secret*, as an example, and you're familiar with meditation videos, exercise videos, etc.).

Books in a series or sequels.

Hint: Do not assume this section doesn't apply to fiction proposals.

The existence of sequels is proof that it does, and you may come up with others if you put your thinking cap (call it a marketing bonnet!) on.

~**Two sample chapters.** This must be your first chapter (do not deviate). The second one may be selected for its importance, creativity, or readability.

~**Anything else in your overview** that you need to expand upon because it is so beyond what might otherwise be expected.

~Include **important extras.** That could be anything that enhances the ability of the gatekeeper to understand what your book is about or to help them see how well it is thought out. Include a list or samples of:

Illustrations.

Charts.

Quotations.

Hint: You may want to group your Contents, Sample Chapters, and items like Illustrations into a special section or subhead called "About the Book."

5. MAKING IT EASY: QUICK FORMATTING AND EDITING DO'S AND DON'TS

Formatting has become so important it has moved into the realm of interior book design. You've heard "simplicity is beautiful." Simplicity is also professional.

Your formatting (layout) is important and it's also vital to avoid terms that make you look as if you are an amateur or at least not in tune with the needs of agents of publishers. You'll find some editing tips here, but first some formatting guidelines:

- ~Set your proposal up with an appealing page design, including useful headers

- ~Leave plenty of margin, header, and footer space. White space gives the gatekeeper a place to make notes. It also makes a document readable, and if you ever wanted a document to be readable, your proposal is the place.

- ~Single space.

- ~Use an easily read font. Studies have shown serif fonts like Times New Roman to be easier on the eyes than those without like Arial, which looks like this: Arial.

- ~Start each section 1/3 way down the page. Tree-huggers (and I'm one of them) won't like this, but do it anyway.

~Decide on a style. Set each major topic in a section of its own. Give it a title and use the same font, font size, and font iteration for all the titles. Ditto for subheads in each of these sections. The simplest way to do this is to use the same font for the titles and subtitles you used for the body of your proposal, but differentiate them by putting the major titles in caps and the subtitles in bold.

Hint: We can borrow interior book design ideas from major publishers. Notice how they often begin each chapter of a novel with a few words set all in caps. They often reduce the size of the caps a bit so they don't overpower the rest of the copy.

~If you are mailing your proposal, don't use eye-blinding colored or very cheap paper.

~No cutsie stuff like confetti, either.

Note: Decide on a style for both heads and subheads and stick with your choice throughout the proposal.

You'll need to call on all your writing skills. Here are a few helps for nitty-gritty editing.

~Check your thesaurus often to strengthen your verbs.

~Because writing a proposal is a little like copywriting (you need powerful words that evoke passion in its intended audience), learn to use words effectively. I like Dr. Frank Luntz's book, *Words That Work!* (<http://.bit.ly/WordsthatWork>). Use it to

review strong copywriting techniques and for suggestions of proven words that make a difference.

~In proposal writing the word *awesome* is considered a four-letter word. Be positive but avoid adjectives and raves.

~Avoid business-ese. Down with all those formal words that sound oh, so intelligent like "purchase" instead of "buy" and "reside" instead of plain old "live."

~Don't say this book is a "cross between this title and another title." It's stale, artificial, and usually doesn't tell your reader much anyway.

~Don't use the word "entitled" when you mean "titled."

~Don't say "fictional novel." A novel by definition is fiction.

~Don't pretend that your book is a one-of-a-kind. There is nothing new in the world. Do try to come up with ways that your book offers something unique or useful. Your book might have an advantage over several books that are outdated. Your book may have a lighthearted voice that makes it more fun to read. Perhaps the information in your book comes from personal experience rather than research. Your book might discuss a new twist on an old idea. You get the idea.

You'll find more editing tips in the second edition of my *The Frugal Editor: From your query letters to final manuscript to the marketing of your new bestseller.*

(<http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>). It includes the results of dozens of interviews with top-flight agents who shared with me their pet query-letter and (by extension) book-proposal peeves.

6. THE CLINCHER: KEEPING THE GATE WIDE OPEN

We authors certainly never plan a book with a weak ending, but sometimes proposals wind down to a mere whine.

Now is not the time to let the energy you're projecting dwindle. End with something that sets your proposal apart from the mound of other proposals sitting on a publisher's desk. That might be:

~A great **quotation** from your book.

~An **anecdote** that illustrates your willingness to be a partner in the publishing process, or that highlights the originality of your concept.

~One of the most **convincing facts** you came up with in your research.

~An **endorsement** or recommendation from someone well known in your field.

~A combination of two or more of the above.

An agent told me that one author closed with a list of the **writing and publishing classes** he had taken from a credible institution. That impressed the agent enough to take a second look at the project.

You can see this Great Book Proposal business is yours to sculpt in ways that are most likely to convince. You know yourself and your project best.

Do what it takes to make your book shine in ways that count. If there is something important about your book that proposal guidelines (including this one!) don't mention, include it. You could even develop a whole section with a snappy title for that aspect of your book. Highlight it any way you can think of short of using florescent-colored paper or writing the whole section in capital letters. Good marketing is not gimmicky. It's honest. Your book is a product! We like to think of our books as art, but they must be sold like any gadget. In fact, that is what your book proposal is doing—selling.

7.CHECKLIST: IS YOUR GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION PROPSAL READY FOR ITS CLOSEUP?

We all know that it takes more than a great idea, talented director, and excellent actors to make an Academy Award-winning movie but people forget how important the marketing is.

Books are like movies. They must be marketed and your first step to great marketing is your book proposal. The last step for writing that great first-impression book proposal is to make sure you have all the essentials. You now know there is more than one way to dress up a book proposal, but you'll also want to double check to see that your presentation is organized and easy to read.

So, your proposal will consist of:

~Your **query letter** (See a sample in the Appendix and more in the second edition of *The Frugal Editor* (<http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>)).

~Your **overview**. (See Chapter Three).

~Your **extended proposal**, including sample chapters as outlined in this booklet. Use bullets when they will make it easier for the reader to follow your plan.

~Your parting shot or **clinch**er.

Now check your formatting. Your word-processing program can make life easy for you if you know how to use all its power. Do you know how to code headings so your program automatically puts your proposal's contents page together for you. If you can't, you may want to hire a formatter, do it by hand, or take a class so you can command your program to work harder for you. I promise you'll use the skills you learn many times in your writing career.

Look at the way books by major publishers are laid out and emulate them. Review Chapter Five in this book as you consider interior design. Simplicity is key. Simplicity is clarity. Proper heads and labeling add to simplicity rather than detract from it.

That brings me to your very last check. Look at the Contents page in the frontmatter of your proposal. It can reveal a lot about the way you have your book proposal organized *and* the way you might (in the agent's mind) organize the book you are proposing. Check the page numbers. Be sure all the headings are listed. What do you think of your header fonts?

Yes, it feels as if you've written a complete book. The advantage to having written a proposal is that you considered your project, researched its marketability, and advanced your platform as a credible author. That's a positive thing.

Nitty gritty details, I know. But that's publishing for you. Now you have your proposal wired, send it out! And *sell* that book!

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I: BASIC QUERY LETTER SAMPLE

Your cover letter may be friendly and, depending on your personal style, you may use a first name in the salutation if you know or have spoken to your gatekeeper. If this is a first contact, use the person's proper title (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.), but avoid stiff formality in the letter itself.

Today when one of the tip offs to spam is the very formal—almost Victorian—use of Mr., Miss, and Mrs., many use first names of people we don't know well or haven't met. When my husband first started writing, he used a first name in a query letter and was roundly disciplined by a New York agent for doing so. Remember, not every agent or publisher is in their 20s, and not everyone has taken to the more informal e-mail approach. The form you use can be a tricky bar to balance. When in doubt, it may be better to error on the side of formality, especially when the body of the letter sports a lighter tone and (I hope) is free of awkward grammar that indicates we can't write or have no voice.

I am including a sample letter in this Appendix. Notice that I don't experiment with letter styles (typefaces or fonts). Use Times New Roman. Single-space and keep your letter to one page.

This letter is an example of a query for nonfiction because rarely is a synopsis required for fiction.

LETTERHEAD:

Address

Phone: xxxxxx Fax: xxxxxxx. E-mail: HOJONEWS@aol.com

FREE Chapter of *This Is the Place* at
xxx@sendfree.com

Date

Other contact information

Dear Marilee,

It's been a while since we spoke about my book, *The Frugal Book Promoter* when we were both presenting at the San Diego Writers' Conference. At that time you suggested that when I had a synopsis of what was then only the shadow of an idea to let you know.

The Frugal Book Promoter is a how-to book that assembles what I learned when I attempted to promote my award-winning novel, a book of creative nonfiction, and a chapbook of poetry. It was not an easy task to promote those genres, as you can imagine. It also draws on my experience as a staff writer for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, an editorial assistant at *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, and as a publicist for the famous Eleanor Lambert Agency (fashion) in New York.

I have the expertise and contacts to partner with a publisher for the promotion of *The Frugal Book Promoter*. I have a newsletter, three related blogs, and an extensive contact list. I also have a Web site that some consider a portal for the resources it offers readers and writers. I teach for UCLA Extension and that has given me the background to grow a speaking career as well.

I am enclosing a proposal for second edition of *The Frugal Book Promoter*. I would be delighted if it became one of the many how-to books on writing that you have shepherded to success.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Howard-Johnson
Enc.

APPENDIX II: OTHER BOOKS BY HOWARD-JOHNSON

FICTION AND CREATIVE NONFICTION

This Is the Place, a novel. Eight awards including Sime-Gen's Critics' Choice, 2001. Published by AmErica House. <http://bit.ly/ThisIsThePlace>

Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered. Three awards including Word Thunder's Excellence in Writing, 2002. Published by AmErica House.
<http://bit.ly/TrueShortStories>

POETRY

Imperfect Echoes: Writing Truth and Justice with Capital Letters, lie and oppression with Small. Writer's Digest Honorable Mention in Poetry, USA Book News finalist | Dan Poynter's Global Ebook Award Bronze.

Tracings, a chapbook of poetry. Named "Ten Best Reads of 2005" by the Compulsive Reader. Received the Military Writers' Society of America's Award of Excellence. Published by Finishing Line Press.

<http://bit.ly/CarolynsTracings>

The Celebration Series of Chapbooks coauthored with Magdalena Ball:

Cherished Pulse: A Chapbook of Unconventional Love Poetry. USA Book News finalist. Artwork by Vicki Thomas.

<http://bit.ly/CherishedPulse>

Imagining the Future: Ruminations on Fathers and Other Masculine Apparitions.

<http://bit.ly/Imagining>

She Wore Emerald Then: Reflections on Motherhood. Named a USA Book News finalist and Top Ten Read by Jennifer Akers of Myshelf.com. Photography by May Lattanzio.

<http://bit.ly/MothersDayKind>

Blooming Red: Christmas Poems for the Rational. A USA Book News finalist.

<http://bit.ly/BloomingRed>

Deeper Into The Pond: A Celebration of Femininity. Artwork by Jacquie Schmall.

<http://bit.ly/DeeperPond>

Sublime Planet: Honoring Earth Day for the World and Universe (as featured in the Earth Day Issue of the *Pasadena Weekly*). USA Book News Finalist. Photography by Ann Howley.

Proceeds from *Sublime Planet* go to World Wildlife Fund

ANTHOLOGIES AND FOREWORDS: A SAMPLING

Forewords

Support Our Troops by Eric Dinyer, foreword by Carolyn Howard-Johnson. Published by Andrews-McMeel, 2005.

Effort and Surrender, by Eric Dinyer, foreword by Carolyn Howard-Johnson. Published by Andrews-McMeel, 2005.

Anthologies

Pass Fail: 32 Stories about Teaching, from Inspiring to Hilarious, edited by Professor Emeritus Rose A. O. Kleidon. Published by Red Sky Press, 2002.

Many other anthologies like *Pear Noir*, *Front Range* (published in association with the University of Missouri), *Voices* (published in Israel) and Best Writing of 2013, 2014, 2015 (published by Hopewell Publishing).

NONFICTION

The HowToDoItFrugally Series of books for writers

The Frugal Book Promoter: How to get nearly free publicity on your own or by partnering with your publisher. In its second edition. USA Book News Best Professional Book and winner Book Publicists

of Southern California's Irwin Award.
<http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>

The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success in its second edition. USA Book News Best Professional Book, Reader Views Award for business books, and finalist in the New Generation Award. The marketing campaign for this book also won New Generation's Award for Marketing. <http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>

Great Little Last-Minute Editing Tips for Writers: The Ultimate Frugal Booklet for Avoiding Word Trippers and Crafting Gatekeeper-Perfect Copy.
<http://bit.ly/Last-MinuteEditing>

The Survive and Thrive Series of books for retailers

A Retailer's Guide to Frugal In-Store Promotions: How To Increase Profits and Spit in the Eyes of Economic Downturns with Thrifty Events and Sales Techniques. Winner USA Book News business books award and Military Writers Society of America's gold medal.
<http://bit.ly/RetailersGuide>

Frugal and Focused Tweeting for Retailers: Tweaking Your Tweets and Other Tips for Integrating Your Social Media. Sponsored by Gift Shop magazine.
<http://bit.ly/RetailersTweet>

Your Blog, Your Business: The Frugal Retailer's Guide to Getting Customer Loyalty and Sales, Both In-Store and Online. Sponsored by Gift Shop magazine. <http://bit.ly/RetailersBlog>

APPENDIX III: SUGGESTED STUDY

The books listed below are my personal recommendations and, where possible, contain links to an online bookstore or to the author's Web site. In addition to content, I recommend books that are fun and easy to read. Learning more about writing needn't be drudgery!

ON BOOK PROPOSALS

If for some reason you still don't feel secure about your proposal, try one of these full-length books:

Book Proposals That Sell: 21 Secrets to Speed Your Success by Terry Whalin.

<http://www.webmarketingmagic.com/app/?af=615838>

How To Write a Book Proposal (Writer's Digest) by Michael Larsen. <http://bit.ly/MichaelLarsen>

ON EDITING

A true edit is not only about typos. It's about everything including structure, and it sometimes requires a rewrite. Sorry, but that's the way writing can be in its bluest moments. I look for books that give practical, easily understood help.

The second edition of *The Frugal Editor: From your query letters to final manuscript to the marketing of your new bestseller*.

<http://bit.ly/FrugalEditorKind>

Don't Murder Your Mystery by Chris Roerden.

<http://bit.ly/ChrisRoerden>

101 Slightly Unpredictable Tips for Novelists and Screenwriters by Larry Brooks.

<http://www.storyfix.com>

The Three Dimensions of Character: Going Deep and Wide to Develop Compelling Heroes and Villains by Larry Brooks.

<http://www.storyfix.com>

Writing Dialogue by Tom Chiarella. Published by Writer's Digest.

<http://bit.ly/Chiarella>

Great Little Last-Minute Editing Tips for Writers: The Ultimate Frugal Booklet for Avoiding Word Trippers and Crafting Gatekeeper-Perfect Copy by Carolyn Howard-Johnson.

<http://bit.ly/Last-MinuteEditing>

Also see "On Grammar" suggestions in the section below.

ON GRAMMAR

Notice I'm not recommending the usual sources for grammar like Strunk and White. That book has been confusing students and writers for so long that many don't know the difference between a grammar rule and a style choice. Besides, grammar needn't be dry. Truly.

Grammar Snobs Are Great Big Meanies: A Guide to Language for Fun and Spite by June Casagrande. Published by Penguin.

<http://bit.ly/GrammarSnobs>

It Was the Best of Sentences, It Was the Worst of Sentences: A Writer's Guide to Crafting Killer

Sentences by June Casagrande. Published by Ten Speed Press. <http://bit.ly/BestSentences>

Mortal Syntax: 101 Language Choices That Will Get You Clobbered by the Grammar Snobs—Even If You’re Right by June Casagrande. Published by Penguin. <http://bit.ly/MortalSyntax>

The Best Punctuation Book, Period. By June Casagrande. Published by Ten Speed Press. <http://bit.ly/PunctuationBook>

The Frugal, Smart, and Tuned-In Editor blog. <http://TheFrugalEditor.blogspot.com>

Great Little Last-Minute Editing Tips for Writers: The Ultimate Frugal Booklet for Avoiding Word Trippers and Crafting Gatekeeper-Perfect Copy. <http://bit.ly/Last-MinuteEditing>

FOR HARDCORE STYLE ADVICE

There is so much disagreement about style, you need only one resource. Using too many will only confuse and this is the definitive guide for publishing books as opposed to periodicals and online publications:

The Chicago Manual of Style from University of Chicago Press staff. <http://bit.ly/ChiStBK>

ON BOOK PROMOTION

For basics and dozens of ideas for your book promotion campaign:

The Frugal Book Promoter: Second Edition. It is the first in the multi award-winning HowToDoItFrugally series of books for writers. <http://bit.ly/FrugalBookPromo>

OTHER LISTS AND RESOURCES

Find a long list of recommended reading on everything from editing to publishing in the appendix of the second edition of *The Frugal Editor: From your query letters to final manuscript to the marketing of your new bestseller*. Also, find a list of agents who contributed to the chapter on agents' pet peeves.

Find books for writers in all categories in the Writers' Resources pages of my Web site.
<http://www.howtodoitfrugally.com>

Sharing with Writers newsletter is a free e-mail letter that is also a community. Share your ideas. Learn from theirs! Everything from the poetry corner to promotion to craft—all frugally. <http://www.howtodoitfrugally.com>

Sharing with Writers blog, on book promotion, publishing, and the art of writing.
<http://www.sharingwithwriters.blogspot.com>

ON PUBLISHING

I recommend authors read more than one book on promotion which is an integral part of publishing including those by John Kremer, Stephanie Chandler, my *The Frugal Book Promoter* and others in the HowToDoItFrugally Series as well as these:

For a quick overview:

Publishing Possibilities by Cheryl Pickett.

<http://bit.ly/PublishingPoss>

A classic to get you started:

The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing: Everything You Need to Know to Write, Publish, Promote, and Sell Your Own Book by Marilyn Ross and Sue Collier. <http://bit.ly/MarilynRoss>

THANK YOUS

Thank you to my fellow authors who led the way by publishing online shorts with the world's foremost online seller of books. They are, Judith Colombo, Kathe Gogolewski, Allyn Evans, Joyce Faulkner, and Chris Meeks. Special thanks to Dr. Richard Hulquist. Richard made it apparent that those for whom I edit manuscripts and help with the marketing of their books may need something much briefer than the book-length explanations of how this book proposal process works and something more reliable than the articles one finds on the Web.

Some Web material offers excellent advice, some offers excellent but incomplete advice, and others do authors a disservice by making it seem as if the proposal process is so inflexible that proposals must follow templates unsuited to the titles being proposed. Worse, some of them seem to encourage authors to forego originality or voice, and some offer blatantly bad and outdated advice.

By the time most authors get to the synopsis stage, they are on a mission. They often bypass learning how to write a proposal by hiring an editor or publicist to write one for them. That can be risky, especially if the author has no knowledge of proposal writing. How can the author know if his or her editor has done a good job? Wouldn't it be sad if the editor didn't capture the personality of the book the author hoped to write?

Ideally, an editor should do more than send the writer an edited copy of the proposal. She should explain her process

and her goals so that her client learns something from the experience.

This brief instructional booklet began as my attempt to let my client take a book-proposal shortcut. He did not want to read a whole book; I did not want to usurp his voice. We became partners. He wrote. I made suggestions and then edited. His proposal immediately snagged a publisher who has released it in paperback and as an e-book, so I thought I'd pass the process on.

Thanks also to the authors of the many books I've read on the subjects of proposals, voice, and shopping manuscripts, and the instructors of the many classes I've taken (mostly from my fellow UCLA Extension Writers' Program instructors). Eventually that knowledge congeals and it's impossible to know where specifics came from. Just know that I am grateful for what I learned from all of you.

Dedicated to the thousands of readers who make writing a pleasure for me, to writing (which fills my life with joy), and to my clients from whom I am always learning something new.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Carolyn Howard-Johnson's several careers prepared her for promoting her own and others' books. She was the youngest person ever hired as a staff writer for the *Salt Lake Tribune*—"A Great Pulitzer Prize Winning Newspaper." Writing features for the society page and a column under the name of Debra Paige gave her insight into the needs of editors, the very people authors must work with to get free ink. Being familiar with the way news is handled helps her see how different books fit into different news cycles.

Later, in New York, she was an editorial assistant at *Good Housekeeping Magazine*. She also handled accounts for fashion publicist Eleanor Lambert who instituted the first Ten Best Dressed List. There she wrote media releases (then called press releases) for celebrity designers of the day, including Christian Dior, and produced photo shoots for Lambert's clients.

She also worked as columnist, reviewer, and staff writer for *The Pasadena Star-News*, *Home Décor Buyer*, *The Glendale News-Press* (An Affiliate of *The La Times*), Myshelf.com where she has written a "Back to Literature" column for more than two decades and others. She learned marketing skills both in college (University of Utah, Arizona State University, and University of Southern California) and as founder and operator of a chain of retail stores including the signature gift shop at Santa Anita Racetrack. That shaped

her understanding of how authors might best partner with retailers to affect both of their bottom lines.

Carolyn's experience in journalism and as a poet and author of fiction and nonfiction helped the multi award-winning author understand how different genres can be marketed more effectively. She was an instructor for UCLA Extension's renowned Writers' Program for nearly a decade and earned a certificate from that same school's Instructor Development Program. She also studied writing at Cambridge University, United Kingdom; Herzen University in St. Petersburg, Russia; and Charles University in Prague.

She turned her knowledge toward helping other writers with her multi award-winning *HowToDoItFrugally Series* of books for writers, including her flagship book *The Frugal Book Promoter* and her favorite, *How to Get Great Book Reviews Frugally and Ethically*. Her marketing campaign for the second book in that series, *The Frugal Editor* won the Next Generation Indie Best Book Award. She also has a multi award-winning series of HowToDoItFrugally books for retailers.

Howard-Johnson was honored as Woman of the Year in Arts and Entertainment by California Legislature members Carol Liu, Dario Frommer, and Jack Scott. She received her community's Character and Ethics award for her work promoting tolerance with her writing and the Diamond Award in Arts and Culture from her community's Library and Arts and Culture Commission. She was named to *Pasadena Weekley's* list of fourteen women of "San Gabriel Valley women who make life happen" and Delta Gamma, a national fraternity of women, honored her with their Oxford Award.

Carolyn is a popular presenter at tradeshows (retail and writing) and writers' conferences and has lost count of her

radio show guest spots. She is an actor and has appeared in TV commercials for the likes of Time-Life CDs, Chinnet, Blue Shield, Apple, and Disney Cruise Lines (Japan).

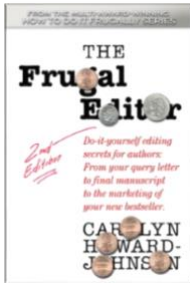
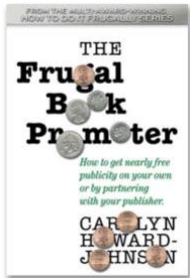
Born and raised in Utah, Howard-Johnson raised her own family in sunny Southern California.

Author Photo by Uriah Carr

*Careers that are not fed die as readily as any
living organism given no sustenance.*

ADVERTISING

Impress Agents and Publishers



Learn to Build Your Platform*

Now and in the future with
with Carolyn's multi award-
winning HowToDoItFrugally
Series of books for writers!

* A Platform is a structure made of the many planks you've used to build your writing career, the two-by-fours of your personal, professional, and education history including the marketing skills you've developed that can be put to use selling your book to an agent or publisher or, later, to readers. Let [The Frugal Book Promoter](#) help you construct your platform and help you steer your own book to stardom.

"I have a 5X7 yellow note pad half full of notes from your first two e-books and plan to finish reading [Great Book Reviews](#) before starting a new review campaign. I'm learning a lot of nifty tips along the way . . ."
~Lois W. Stern, editor
Tales2Inspire Series

ADVERTISING

**Promote Your Book
With Social Media Marketing**

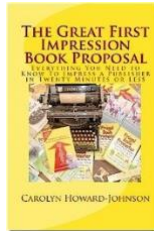
Get Miller Mosaic's FREE Report

Twitter, Facebook, and Your Web Site:
A Beginning Blueprint
For Harnessing the Power of Three
www.millermosaicpowerof3.com



Powered by the social media marketing of
Phyllis Zimble Miller and Yael K. Miller

Get marketing tips from Miller Mosaic at
www.twitter.com/ZimbleMiller and
www.twitter.com/MillerMosaicLLC



Publisher/Corporate Discounts

Publishers and others in the publishing industry who would like to give this booklet to clients and other associates as gifts or buy it to resell may order it in quantity at a discount. *The Great First Impression Book Proposal: Everything You Need To Know To Impress a Publisher in 30 Minutes or Less* can also be personalized or branded for any group or business. Contact Carolyn Howard-Johnson at HoJoNews@aol.com for details and quotes.

Individual paperback copies of this booklet may be ordered at most bookstores and online bookstores like Amazon

<http://bit.ly/BookProposals>.

Advertise in future HowToDoltFrugally books including a series for retailers, one for authors, and other books, too. Contact Carolyn at HoJoNews@aol.com.

Careers that are not fed die as readily as any living
organism given no sustenance.