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Lesson # 11

Make The Reader Turn Pages

By

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Foreword

As you complete each lesson, I hope your excitement is growing. Each part is a critical building block in the process of writing a complete book proposal and submission. You should celebrate that the end is near and you will be ready to get your proposal out to the right agent or editor. As you succeed, please write and tell me about your success. It is always encouraging to hear your results and then I can celebrate with you.

While I know firsthand it is hard work to create a good personal marketing plan, I also know when I write down my plans it increases my confidence about how my book idea can succeed in the marketplace. Also, I hope you made some action steps to increase your visibility in the marketplace over the coming months in the area of your proposal. You do not have to wait until you locate a book publisher. In fact, the more you do now, the better positioned you will be when you do locate your publisher. In addition, understand the fluid nature of these marketing plans. They are constantly evolving and changing. As you have new ideas and thoughts about possible markets, return to your plan and expand it. The on-going nature of marketing is something that every author has to continually grow and learn. Despite my years in publishing, I continue to grow and improve in this area and I encourage you to take similar steps.

This lesson is the next to last lesson of the course and as in the previous two lessons I want to extend my offer to be your first reader. I will give you a detailed critique of your proposal. I've read thousands of book proposals over the years and I'm surprised at the small yet significant mistakes that writers make with their submissions. You can avoid some of these traps from my critique. This critique is a one-time critique. You will not be able to revise it and return it to me. It is a first-come, first serve basis. First, you have to pay the one-time fee of \$199. You can purchase [the service at this link](#). Second, when your proposal is complete and in the best possible shape you can make it, e-mail your proposal. I will acknowledge your e-mail and give you an estimated timeframe about when I will review it and return it to you with my critique. The ability to get my feedback will give your proposal and pitch an edge or advantage over other writers. I look forward to helping you with your book proposal and pitch. I'm eager for you to be successful in the publishing process.

In this 11th Lesson, I will be teaching you about the sample chapter or chapters that you submit with your proposal. There are some common mistakes you can avoid after studying this lesson. Then the final or 12th Lesson will give you a series

of areas you can explore to rejection-proof your proposal. If you take action and include several of these areas, the editor can reject other proposals that don't have these areas yet will keep your proposal active in the consideration process. Finally, after the 12th Lesson, I will be sending you a special graduation gift for your completion of the course.

That's it for now. I'm sure you are anxious to begin this important lesson about how to get the reader to turn the pages of your sample chapter. Let's get started.

Note: Download links for previous lessons will be at the close of each PDF file in case you missed or misplaced an earlier edition.

Introduction

It is impossible to predict how a proposal or submission will be read. You expect the agent or editor to read the first page of your proposal then turn and read your sample chapters. Will they approach it in order or skip ahead to your sample chapters?

I never thought about how editors read proposals until I was an acquisitions editor. In the publication board meetings, I listened to the various members and how they responded to the different proposals that I presented. As the acquisitions editor, my role was to champion appropriate proposals to the committee. The committee was comprised of the President, Chief Operating Officer, the Vice President of Marketing, the Vice President of Sales and the Vice President of Editorial along with several additional sales representatives. These members received the proposals and sample chapters two weeks before the actual meeting. They needed this time to read and process the proposals to prepare comments and questions along with their opinions before the meeting.

One of the Vice Presidents told me, "I always read the sample first, and then if it is well-written and something that is in the range of the type of books that we publish, I will read the proposal to learn more about the author, competition and marketing plans."

Is your sample chapter excellent? Will it stand up under the examination and evaluation from an agent or editor? Many novelists (particularly unpublished) will not start their action immediately but have several chapters of background information before their plot takes off. Here's the unfortunate reality: many agents or editors may not make it to that moving scene.

I've read thousands of submissions from writers either through e-mail or mail or when I attend a writers' conference. Many unpublished writers will include what they consider their best chapters with total disregard for the sequence of those chapters. Non-sequential chapters are almost instantly rejected. In the first chapters of a novel, the writer sets the plot, reveals a few characters and their distinguishing characteristics. The agent or editor misses a large amount of information if you send later chapters without this important foundational material.

A similar challenge is true with the sample chapters of nonfiction books. Normally the first chapter of a nonfiction book will establish the reason for the book such as explaining the problem and how the following chapters will address that problem.

Or it will introduce the problem and foreshadow how the subsequent chapters will resolve the problem. When the author submits a series of random chapters, it leaves the agent or editor wondering what was skipped and the reasoning behind the random chapters. Often there is no explanation and the form rejection letter does not specify the reason. The writer continues to submit random chapters.

Another common submission mistake is the general format for a sample chapter. Agents and editors read volumes of material. You want your submission to be attractive and easy to read. I suggest you double-space your sample writing and that you use a serif font such as Georgia, Garamond or New Times Roman. Why? Fonts with serifs are easier to read for printed materials and the most common font in published books. Unfortunately the default font for many word processing programs is a san serif font like Arial and unless the writer learns this small but important detail, they continue to submit their sample chapters in Arial.

General Guidelines for Your Sample Chapters

Your sample chapters should be:

- the first chapters of your nonfiction book or novel.
- sequential (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).
- a substantial length (for example, 15-20 pages).
- Double-spaced and in a serif font (like Georgia, Garamond or New Times Roman since it is easier to read).
- riveting reading with page-turning storytelling.
- overall show information and not tell it ([follow this link](#) for more info).
- tested with readers ahead of time to make sure it is good.
- read aloud to yourself since the ear is less forgiving than the eye.

Within the publishing community there is no universal standard about how much material should be contained in your sample chapter. I've written proposals with only one sample chapter. As an agent and acquisitions editor, I've contracted proposals with only one sample chapter. Publishers will want to see a substantial portion of your writing that shows your storytelling abilities. Often it takes at least two chapters and can be three chapters for your sample.

Your sample chapters need to show the agent and editor your command of the subject and your writing talent. The chapters are going to represent how you will complete the novel or nonfiction book and you want them to be your absolute

best. The chapters need to show that you write clearly and leave the reader ready to read more of your work.

Improve the Agent or Editor's Reaction to Your Writing

Many unpublished writers are reluctant to show their idea or writing to an editor or agent. I've had many writers tell me at a conference they have never shown their writing to anyone. Or they have only shown their writing to relatives who refuse to give them honest feedback about their writing. The challenge for every author is to get honest feedback before you submit your writing sample to an agent or editor. The best way to get this feedback is to join another group of writers in a critique group.

During my early days as a published writer, my critique group formed a critical sounding board for my writing. It also increased my learning about the craft of storytelling and how to show the story in my writing instead of tell about an incident. A group can be formed in a local setting or you can connect with others in a private online group. There are many variations and possibilities for connecting with other writers on a regular basis to improve your writing.

The format for my critique was simple. We had four members in the group and agreed to send a certain volume of writing a week before our scheduled meeting (something like five to eight pages of writing or 1,000 to 1,500 words). Before the meeting, I wrote suggestions (critiqued) and read the material for the other three members of the group. Once a month we met for breakfast at a local restaurant. Quickly we ordered and began the meeting and focused on one of the members. We discussed their writing for 15 minutes, and then moved to the next person. Within about an hour, the group completed the four critiques and scheduled the next month's meeting.

In general, a critique group is a small group of writers who encourage each other and provide regular help to each other. Joining a group is not something to be taken lightly. It means a commitment to write something each month, polish the writing and then share it with the group. Also, it's a commitment to carefully critique the other members' manuscripts and come prepared to help others.

"Sounds wonderful," you think. "Where do I find one?"

First, see if your local writers' group has critique groups. For example, the Society of Children's Book Writers has critique groups scattered across the country. If you write children's material, this is one possibility to locate an existing group. You should determine your area of specialization such as fiction, children's writing,

articles, scripts, poetry, etc. If there is not a group in your specialty or area, why not begin one? "Oh, no," you wail, "I'm a beginning writer. I need someone to teach me."

Each of us begins somewhere and the key is to be willing and available. You can learn lots through the critique group. You simply set the time and place then announce it in your local newspaper or some other public manner. Be creative in your networking and be available to begin a group.

You need to determine where will you meet and what time? Decide on the maximum number of participants and how often the group will meet. The larger the group, the more time will be needed for each person and his manuscript. So a small number like four persons in a group is better.

Once you've located the people, how do you begin? One essential requirement is that people be committed to writing as well as willing to critique other writers' materials. If people do not write and bring materials, the group degenerates into a chatting session rather than a work session.

Regarding the actual critique, there are two basic options. Some groups bring the manuscripts to the meeting, read them aloud and then critique them. Other groups send the manuscripts out ahead of time and do not read the manuscripts during the meeting. Instead, they talk about the content. I prefer the latter method since I find it difficult to catch the content from reading aloud. In my opinion, the manuscript receives a better critique when read in advance.

During the meeting, agree on the amount of time for each manuscript so that no one person or manuscript dominates the critique session. For example, a group of four may meet for one hour each month and spend 15 minutes on each manuscript.

Now you have someone else's work. What do you do with it? First, begin with praise. Find something that you like about the manuscript, possibly the format or the main character or the general theme or plot. In this way, we build up one another and give encouragement.

Critiques vary according to the type of material. I gave some basic questions for critiquing nonfiction or fiction on page 8 and 9 of Lesson 2. You should return to these questions and use these questions for your critique work.

When you used these questions, you will see whether non-fiction or fiction, it reveals the critiquer's commitment. It's a lot of work to carefully examine another person's work.

Finally, let's examine some of the advantages for being in a critique group. First, it provides you a writing deadline. Each month the group needs to keep writing and that means constantly producing new material. This deadline will push you to schedule time for writing and polishing your work.

Examination of a manuscript by other writers gives you an edge over other freelancers. Other writers can give you fresh insight, marketing ideas and help on the manuscript before an editor sees it. This extra polish makes your manuscript stand out from the others on the editor's desk.

The critique group provides an excellent atmosphere to exchange ideas with other writers. You receive the benefit of their input, experience and encouragement. Showing your manuscript to another person involves risk. What if they don't like it? Better to hear that from a fellow writer and polish it some more, than send the article all over the country, receive rejections slips, and never know why. Take the plunge and either begin a group or get in one.

After a critique session, I collect the input from my group. I don't always take their comments but I do follow most of them. Then I add this into my article and polish it before sending it out to the editor. The process works for me and has helped give my writing an edge over others who don't take advantage of help from other writers. It will help you avoid all those form rejections and get some publishing credits.

It is certainly not a requirement to belong to a writer's critique group or to process your writing with other writers. If you can regularly participate in such a group or have even another single writer that you trade critiques with, it will improve the quality of your sample chapters.

The submission process is filled with uncertainty. Most literary agents and editors use form rejections. It means you will often never know why your proposal and sample chapter was rejected. You will simply know that it was not right for that particular agency or publisher. One of the best ways to improve the way your material is received is to test that material with other writers and readers to know that it is good storytelling and clearly written. If your readers have questions, then revise your material to eliminate their questions and answer their concerns. While this process takes some time, it can give you the confidence that you need to continue looking for the right agent or editor to champion your project and get you a publishing contract.

This Week's Assignment

- 1) Write your sample chapters.** Follow the sample chapter guidelines on page 6 of this lesson. Let your sample chapters cool for a few days. That's where you do not work on them or read them.
- 2) Return to your sample chapters and read them aloud.** As I mentioned on the sample chapter guidelines, reading aloud helps you catch any missing words or unclear statements. When you read silently, your eye can skip over these missing words but the ear is much less forgiving and any errors, mistakes or awkward sentences are often evident.
- 3) Take action to start a critique group.** As a minimum, find another writer that you can exchange writing with deadlines to critique each others' writing and grow from the experience of working with another writer.

See you in 7 days.

Best Wishes,



W. Terry Whalin
Publisher, **WriteABookProposal**

Coming Up Next ...

Lesson #12 – "Rejection-Proof Your Proposal"

In this lesson, we'll be covering several ways to rejection-proof your proposal. You rejection-proof your proposal when you provide some element which is distinct from every other proposal on the agents' or editors' desks. You learn how to gain these distinctions in this final lesson.

Previous Lessons

Lesson #1 ... [Click Here](#) to access.

Lesson #2 ... [Click Here](#) to access.

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