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RISING WOMAN

# Book Proposal Guide & Template

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*A complete companion for shaping a proposal that  
agents and publishers want to champion — from  
positioning and platform to chapter summaries and  
sample material.*

AUTHOR WORKSHOP · 2026

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GETTING STARTED

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PART ONE

# Getting *Started*

*There are more than two million books published every year. A strong proposal helps agents and editors quickly understand not only what your book is, but why it is fresh, necessary, marketable, and worth investing in.*

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## SECTION ONE

# What Agents and Publishers *Look for* in a Proposal

If you've decided traditional publishing is the right path for you, then you will likely need to find an agent. Most major publishers do not accept unsolicited proposals, and a good agent knows which publishers and editors are the right fit for your book. They also help you shape the pitch, negotiate the deal, and advocate for you throughout the publishing process.

To get an agent, you will first need a fantastic book proposal and query letter! Agents are looking for what publishers want in a book, because ultimately, they share the same goal: **to sell your book.**

There are more than 2 million books published every year, and while that may sound like a lot, even more books are pitched to agents and publishers. That means they have to be highly selective. A strong proposal helps them quickly understand not only what your book is, but why it is fresh, necessary, marketable, and worth investing in.

## So what exactly are publishers *looking for*?

Editors review hundreds of proposals each year, but usually only acquire 10-16 titles annually. If an editor connects with your proposal, they will bring it to an internal publishing meeting and share it with their editorial director, editorial team, marketing and publicity team, publisher, and sales team.

Together, these teams are asking the big questions we've included in our Concept Development Studio and help you answer here: *Can we sell this book? Where will it sit on the shelf? Who is the reader? Why does it matter now? Can the author help promote it?* They are also considering which markets the book might reach, from independent bookstores to major retailers like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, and Bookshop.org.

A great proposal gives your agent and editor the language, evidence, and confidence they need to champion the book in-house. It helps them make the case that this book is not only worth publishing, but has a real chance to sell, reach readers, and earn back the publisher's investment in a big way. **The stronger the potential your book has to sell, the bigger your advance.**

So here are a few of the big things they are looking for when they review your proposal:

- 01 A highly marketable concept and strong positioning
- 02 A solid platform, strong promotional ability, and built-in audience
- 03 A fresh angle in the category
- 04 A need for this book *now* and/or a book that meets a trend
- 05 A clear mass audience
- 06 Strong competitive and comparable books
- 07 An author who is an authority on the subject
- 08 A marketable table of contents and clear, accessible structure
- 09 Compelling and commercial or literary writing (not just in the sample material)

*We will go into more depth on each of the elements within the template.*

## Let's address the *elephant* in the room: platform.

If you attend a workshop or writers conference, one of the first things they will probably tell you is that publishers are only buying books with a platform.

It's mostly true. When evaluating proposals, one of the very first things my business partner and Associate Director of Marketing, Jenn Jensen and I looked for while working at HarperCollins and Chronicle Books after strong positioning was platform—a built-in audience. This could be social media followers, newsletter subscribers, speaking engagements, potential for course adoption, media coverage, and more.

While selling your book to a traditional publisher can be an uphill battle, it's not impossible. We have worked with a number of authors who found success without a large platform. One had a proprietary program, uniquely funny voice, and Ivy League credentials to support her framework. While at HarperCollins, we acquired numerous books based on a viral article, a popular commencement speech, solid self-publishing sales, a bestselling course, or even a profound interview. While at Chronicle Books, we also bought platformless books that had highly trendy, giftable, beautifully designed packages or an existing fanbase (for example, books written by unknown authors but tied to popular franchises like *Game of Thrones* or classics like *The Little Prince*.)

Getting a household name or widely recognizable figure to write a foreword, provide an early endorsement, or help promote the book can also strengthen your proposal, especially when platform is not one of your selling points.

In other words, there have been deals made for authors with smaller platforms when the concept, credentials, timing, and execution were strong enough. So we don't share this to discourage you, but to be transparent: **platform matters, but it is not the only thing publishers consider—and platform alone can't sell a book, either.**

Category also matters. Two of the toughest types of books to sell are *memoir* and highly designed books.

For memoir, if it's not written by a celebrity or household name, the writing has to be transcendent and offer a relatable but extreme or unique story—like *Educated*, *Glass Castle*, *H is for Hawk*, *Wild*, *When Breath Becomes Air*, *What My Bones Know*, and *Unbroken*. We don't think of readers as selfish, but they are self-centered. When deciding whether or not to purchase a book for \$17–\$30, they need to know *what's in it for them*. Each of these bestsellers not only had beautiful writing, but also told a rare story that shared universal truths, inspired, and entertained. For example, Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk* is a grief memoir that follows the author as she mourns her father's death by training a goshawk, blending falconry, nature writing, and recovery. It succeeded because it took a universal emotional experience, grief, and expressed it through a highly specific, surprising, and metaphorically rich world. Grief is a familiar memoir subject. Training a goshawk? Not so much.

Another great example of a story that is inspiring, unique, and relatable is *Wild*, Cheryl Strayed's memoir about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail as she searches for healing, strength, and a way back to herself. The book resonated so deeply that it helped inspire a wave of readers, especially women, to take on their own version of that journey: stepping into the wilderness, testing themselves, and discovering who they might become on the other side. Needless to say, many hiking boots were lost along the way.

For designed books, the biggest obstacle is that the production costs to print in color are high, which has historically meant printing overseas in Asia. Now, with changing tariff policies, publishers need to be even more selective about which designed books they take on. It helps to have a popular artist or an artist with a social following attached to your project, or ideally your own built-in audience—but this category is one that doesn't always rely as heavily on platform.

So, what else are they looking for? Most publishers are seeking highly commercial or unique art and design, paired with a fresh concept that is either part of a current trend or starting one. For example, while at Chronicle Books, we acquired *Island Wisdom: Hawaiian Traditions and Practices for a Meaningful Life* because it was both a wonderful concept and a clear response to a gap in the marketplace. At the time, cultural lifestyle books like *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living* and *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life* were highly sought-after, but there was no cohesive, illustrated gift book centered on Hawaiian teachings.

## You can even start a trend with a *unique format*.

We published *The Wild Unknown Tarot* deck and *The Wild Unknown Animal Spirit* deck by Kim Krans at a time when decks were not a widely published format, and they took off. Krans' first tarot deck was one of the very few decks to hit the *New York Times* bestsellers list! The same thing happened with the coloring-book craze, or the high-demand for puzzles during the pandemic.

There was also the witchy and new age boom. We began working on designed crystal, yoga, astrology, and mystical books at HarperElixir, an imprint of HarperCollins, back before those topics were widely popular. We also worked on Ruby Warrington's *Sober Curious* book before the sober movement began.

Whether text-driven nonfiction or a designed gift book, one of the keys to your proposal's success will be paying attention to trends and sorting out how your book can meet them. You should also ask yourself whether you are jumping on the bandwagon at the end of the trend or at the forefront. **Timing matters just as much to publishers as your topic.**

Lastly, on a very human level, editors are really looking for proposals that engage them. Because of the massive stack of reading they do each week, the best advice we can give beyond strong positioning is to make your proposal entertaining and polished—captivating and voice-driven, well-paced, easy to follow, copyedited and clean. A proposal is essentially a business plan, but it is also a 40–75 page sample of your writing.

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*One of the most important first impressions you can make with your proposal is the title and subtitle, so let's talk about that next!*

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## SECTION TWO

# Create a Strong Concept, *Title*, and Subtitle

What do these three *New York Times* bestselling titles have in common?

- Brianna Wiest's *The Mountain Is You: Transforming Self-Sabotage Into Self-Mastery*
- Maggie Smith's *You Could Make This Place Beautiful: A Memoir*
- Nedra Tawwab's *Drama Free: A Guide to Managing Unhealthy Family Relationships*

While one may be shelved in personal growth, another in memoir, and another in relationships, each is positioned/titled to give readers a specific, emotionally evocative promise. Some nonfiction titles speak directly to the reader's struggle, as *The Mountain Is You* does with self-sabotage. Others highlight the transformation a reader is seeking, such as *You Could Make This Place Beautiful*, which promises a story of rewriting one's life and reclaiming the self after a devastating divorce. Books like *Drama Free* combine both approaches—naming the problem and the desired outcome: to finally become drama free in our family dynamics.

Ultimately, these approaches work because they create that “aha” moment we've all had when we see or pick up a book that *just gets us!*

Good positioning is not manipulative or salesy; it is understanding the needs and desires of the people you want to reach to welcome them into their own inner possibilities and feel seen.

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*Titling is one of the most important parts of positioning your book for success. A good title and subtitle pairing often includes the audience, the problem, the method or framework, and the desired outcome.*

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Yet, too often, authors choose titles that are overly vague or cryptic, relying on one-word titles that do not communicate enough or failing to research the market to see whether their positioning fills a gap. Most importantly, with good titling, readers should immediately be able to identify if a book is for them.

*Here are 8 strategies to help you think like a publisher when it comes to your own title and subtitle.*

## STRATEGY ONE

# Name and Meet Readers *in Their Struggles*

—  
CRYING IN  
H MART

*A Memoir*

A great title helps readers feel seen. It meets them exactly where they are in their struggle and often names something—almost on the tip of their tongue—that they didn't know how to express or admit. For example, Michelle Zauner's bestselling memoir *Crying in H Mart* captures a specific kind of grief that may make readers think, “Yes, I've been there too,” especially if they have ever found themselves also crying unexpectedly in a public place during a painful period in their lives.

Jennette McCurdy's mega-bestseller *I'm Glad My Mom Died* and Logan Ury's *How Not to Die Alone* use shock and taboo to voice a feeling many readers may struggle to admit. Megan Devine's *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand* provides a permission slip to grieving readers who feel alienated by a culture that wants them to heal too quickly.

Sometimes, simply naming the problem and pairing it with a subtitle that explains the “how” can be just as powerful. Melody Beattie's *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself*, for example, works because the title directly names the struggle and the desire, while the subtitle offers an empowering path forward.

—  
I'M GLAD  
MY MOM  
DIED

JENNETTE MCCURDY

—  
HOW NOT TO  
DIE ALONE

LOGAN URY

—  
IT'S OK THAT  
YOU'RE NOT  
OK

*Meeting grief in a  
culture that doesn't  
understand*

MEGAN DEVINE

—  
CODEPENDENT  
NO MORE

*How to stop  
controlling others &  
start caring for  
yourself*

MELODY BEATTIE

## STRATEGY TWO

# Offer a Promise for the Life *Your Readers Desire*

—  
YOU  
DESERVE  
GOOD  
GELATO

*Reasons to travel  
the world, embrace  
failure, and do the  
sh\*t that scares you*

Is your title giving readers something they *should* do, or are you offering something they crave? Think about the reader's perspective and whether your title feels like another chore or something they truly desire—but for one reason or another have deemed a luxury, out of reach, or not in the cards for them. Is it comfort, empowerment, inspiration, or permission you are providing?

Take Kaci Rose's instant bestseller, *You Deserve Good Gelato: Reasons to Travel the World, Embrace Failure, and Do the Sh\*t That Scares You*. This title is encouraging readers to not only eat the gelato but also travel to Italy to get the good stuff! Readers have enough inner dialogue and societal pressures telling them what they *should* do or who they can't be. Instead, your title can name an aspiration or thing the reader might not have even known they desired. You don't just want to promise an okay life, but a great one in a specific way.

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*When your book offers readers inspiration or empowerment into a life they've been denying themselves or wishing for, you not only give a powerful promise, you ignite the ache to act on potential.*

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Maybe your reader wants to feel complete freedom, to be an incredible parent, to be highly productive, or to feel exuberant joy! Here are a few bestselling examples that name some of these big desires in their title/subtitle:

- *Year of Yes: How to Dance It Out, Stand in the Sun, and Be Your Own Person*
- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*
- *The Untethered Soul: A Journey Beyond Yourself*
- *The Conscious Parent: Transforming Ourselves, Empowering Our Children*

## STRATEGY THREE

# Bring the Framework or Methodology *into the Title* or Subtitle

## — THE FOUR AGREEMENTS

*A practical guide to  
personal freedom*

Another effective strategy is to make the book's framework, method, or steps clear in the title or subtitle. Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* and Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson's *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* both give readers an immediate sense of structure.

Before they even open the book, readers know there is a set of principles or step-by-step path that will help them reach the promised outcome.

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*This kind of specificity can also create trust with your reader, making it clear that “this author has a plan!”*

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## — THE WHOLE- BRAIN CHILD

*12 revolutionary strategies*

SIEGEL & BRYSON

## — THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

STEPHEN COVEY

## — THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES

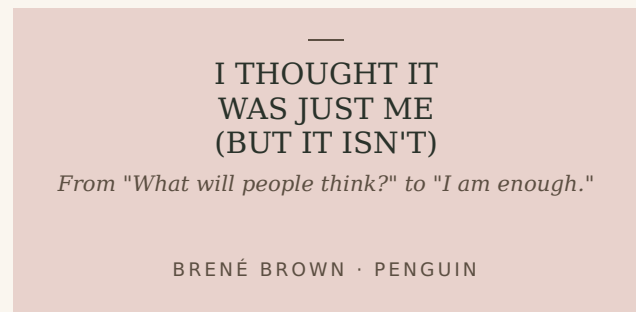
*The secret to love that lasts*

GARY CHAPMAN

## STRATEGY FOUR

# Bring the Reader in by Using *Their Own Words*

To speak to readers, think about the words they themselves use. Brené Brown is a generation-defining author in personal growth, but I can't say her first self-published book had the most enticing title, *Women and Shame: Reaching Out, Speaking Truth, and Building Connection*. Later, Penguin bought this same book and republished it as *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't): Making the Journey from "What Will People Think?" to "I Am Enough."*



Which book would you be more likely to pick up if given the choice between the two? The first title didn't reflect the warm and accessible personality Brown is known for, but it also didn't welcome the reader into a prickly topic.

The second title uses the reader's own inner dialogue to communicate shame and overthinking *without ever saying those words*. It also promises to help us find a path to worthiness using our inner language, "I am enough."

Other bestselling examples are Dr. Julie Smith's *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?* or *Don't Believe Everything You Think* by Joseph Nguyen.

## STRATEGY FIVE

# Let Tone *Set You Apart*

—  
BUY  
YOURSELF  
THE  
F\*CKING  
LILIES

*And other rituals to  
fix your life*

Sometimes, there are already a handful of books on the market speaking to the same topic, and your differentiator is tone.

Tara Schuster's bestseller *Buy Yourself the F\*cking Lilies: And Other Rituals to Fix Your Life, from Someone Who's Been There* could have been simply titled *How to Love Yourself*. But which one is more memorable?

Her title immediately signals the book's voice: candid, funny, irreverent, and emotionally honest. It tells readers they are not getting a polished, distant self-help manual; they are getting guidance from someone who has been there and will take them on a fun, irreverent, and raw journey.

## STRATEGY SIX

# Create a Timely Spin on *a Timeless Need*

Because publishers depend on perennial bestsellers, a strong title can speak to the current moment while also naming an evergreen need. Nedra Glover Tawwab's *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself* became a bestseller during the pandemic, when many people were working from home and the lines between work and personal life were blurred. The title spoke directly to that immediate need while also addressing a timeless one: we will always need help setting boundaries.



Another strong example is *How to Do the Work: Recognize Your Patterns, Heal from Your Past, and Create Your Self*. The pandemic helped bring trauma, relational patterns, and healing language into the mainstream, and this title tapped into that cultural moment while still offering a promise that remains relevant today.

You can also create a sub-niche or unique theme within a timeless topic. Take Harriet Lerner's *The Dance of Anger*, which has sold over 3 million copies since publishing over a decade ago and continues to sell. Harriet offers a new angle on anger that hadn't yet been addressed in the market, speaking directly to women about their complex relationship to anger, and how they learn to silence it, vent it, or to deny it entirely. She also offers a metaphor that helps us see anger in relationships in a new way—as a circular dance, where no one person is to blame.

## STRATEGY SEVEN

# Create Urgency or Make It *an* “Us” Problem

One mistake we've seen time and again is a title that is too personal, too tied to the author's own problems, which might make your reader wonder, *How does this book apply to me?* This is a title that hasn't been translated into a universal truth.

—  
THE  
ANXIOUS  
GENERATION

*How the great  
rewiring of  
childhood is  
causing an  
epidemic of mental  
illness*

Jonathan Haidt's #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* brilliantly positions the book as an “us” problem. Not just his kids, but your readers' kids *and* all of the kids of this generation. It also creates urgency by naming this mass issue and its troubling effects on a national scale.

Selling nearly half a million copies, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* uses a title that demands attention and even carries a warning. Sometimes, this kind of urgency is necessary to grab readers' attention, especially when the subject has been overlooked, minimized, or not taken seriously.

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*As you brainstorm your own title, ask yourself: Could a reader pick this up and immediately understand what is at stake? Will they be compelled to read it now, rather than putting it off?*

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## STRATEGY EIGHT

# Make the Subtitle *Do the Heavy Lifting*

Sometimes, the title is the main event—the primary cue that tells readers what the book is and why it matters, often so clearly that they may not even need to read the subtitle. Louise Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life*, Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air*, Yung Pueblo's *How to Love Better*, and Pema Chodron's *When Things Fall Apart* all have titles that are doing the heavy lifting. Each one immediately signals the book's tone, promise, or central question.



On the other hand, your title can be poetic, provocative, or introduce a key concept that requires a subtitle to explain it. Here are a few bestselling examples:

- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*
- *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*
- *What My Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma*
- *The Desire Map: A Guide to Creating Goals with Soul*
- *The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance—What Women Should Know*
- *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia*

*Celebrity books and titles by already bestselling authors do not always have to play by the same rules. Keep this in mind when studying comparisons in the bookstore: A title that works for a household name may not work as well for a debut author who still needs the title and subtitle to do more of the positioning work.*

# Brainstorm Your Title *and* *Subtitle*

## *Step 1: Open it up.*

Write all your ideas for title and subtitle. You might include words and phrases someone might search when looking for a book like yours. Think about topics, pain points, desires, urgency. Choose a strategy to try, or a combo of a few.

Ask yourself:

- Struggle or aspiration — which does your title speak to first?
- Remember: How do you want your reader to feel the moment they see it?
- What tone fits: warm, bold, funny, provocative, poetic, practical?

*Set a timer for 10-15 minutes and write down every title idea that comes to mind:*

YOUR IDEAS

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## *Step 2:* Narrow it down to your top three.

After we brainstorm a title, our strategy is usually to narrow it down to our top three favorites and workshop those.

1.

2.

3.

Then, we ask questions like:

- Is the core concept clear?
- Is the audience clear?
- Is the payoff or journey the reader will take clear?
- Is it emotionally evocative?
- Does it name a desire or pain point?

*Run through these questions for your favorite picks. Next, do some research by searching Amazon to see if your title is taken or too similar to other competitive books. Often, if a book is self-published or isn't an obvious bestseller, it is alright to have a similar or the same title. You can't copyright a title. Allow yourself to sit with your top picks for a bit. See what key phrases come up as you write and work on your proposal. You'll also get ideas as you research the competition!*

PART TWO

# Book Proposal *Template*

*A working scaffold for every section of your proposal — what to include, why it matters, and examples of what “done well” looks like in the field.*

# Title & *Author* Information

*The very first page of your proposal — clean, confident, and complete.*

[Title]

*[Subtitle]*

BY

[Author Name]

*Author contact information:  
[email address; website.]*

*Use this page as a clean cover for your proposal. Include your full title, subtitle, byline, and direct contact information so an agent or editor can reach you in one step.*

# Positioning Statement & Overview

## Positioning *Statement*

This section is not normally in most proposals, but something we recommend for pitching agents specifically. A positioning statement is 1-2 sentences summing up the core statement and promise to the reader. This includes the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *why* of your book. If you wrote one in your Concept Development Studio, you can refer to it here.

## *Overview*

The overview is the heart of your book proposal. It should give agents and publishers a clear, compelling sense of what the book is, why it matters, why readers need it now, and why you are the right person to write it. We typically recommend keeping this to less than 4-5 pages and writing this section in first person.

Even though the overview is practical and descriptive, it should still be exciting to read! If the book is funny, sassy, poetic, intellectual, intimate, research-heavy, or spiritually grounded, this section should give agents and editors a taste of that tone and convey the reader's experience. Treat it basically as sample writing. Often when working with authors, we will recommend they write this almost like an introduction to the actual book (and not include the introduction in the sample chapters to avoid repetition).

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*A strong overview should not simply summarize the book.  
It should make the case for the book.*

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Focus on the book's most compelling ideas, *not every idea*. This is not the place to summarize every chapter, teaching, exercise, graph, or story. If you get too lost in the details, you risk losing agent and publisher interest. Instead, highlight the key message, signature framework, and the reader's transformation. You can include 1-2 sentences describing the kinds of stories, exercises, research, or tools readers will encounter, but keep the emphasis on the big picture.

Avoid sounding too salesy. Instead of making claims about the writing or outcome, such as “this deeply moving memoir is sure to be a *New York Times* bestseller,” let the strength of the concept, voice, audience, market need, and author platform make the case.

Most importantly, in this section, we recommend sharing a strong point of view or making a strong argument rather than hedging or qualifying everything you say. The goal is to establish credibility, authority, and trust, while positioning yourself as a reliable narrator and guide.

Show publishers that you understand where your reader is coming from, whether through your own lived experience, your research, or your work with people who share similar struggles and desires. *Selective vulnerability*, as Jenn calls it, can be very powerful, as long as what you share feels comfortable, relevant, and supportive of the book's larger promise.

*Keep it authentic, concise, entertaining, and purposeful.*

## OVERVIEW TEMPLATE

# [ The *Hook* ]

After including your positioning statement, open the overview with an engaging entry point that hits hard and clearly conveys your core argument, message, or central problem. This hook can be a few paragraphs or about 1-1.5 pages long. The goal is to capture the attention of agents and publishers, while still moving quickly toward the heart of the book.

Remember, you are writing for complete strangers. They do not yet know you, your work, your story, or why this book matters. **Context and brevity are key!**

Here are a few ways you might create a strong hook:

- A short story or client/customer anecdote
- A surprising statistic
- A counterintuitive argument
- A cultural observation
- A vivid imaginary or real-life scenario, e.g., “Imagine . . .” or “You know that moment when...?”
- A sharp question that immediately pulls readers in

#### EXAMPLE · CLIENT STORY HOOK

*Amanda did not walk into my office because of a catastrophic betrayal, a plate-smashing fight, or a dramatic “we need to talk” moment that belonged in the third act of a movie. She came to therapy because her husband kept forgetting to text when he was running late. Because he looked at his phone while she told a story. Because every time she asked for more help, he nodded, apologized, and became a new man for approximately three business days before returning to his regularly scheduled programming.*

#### EXAMPLE · COUNTERINTUITIVE ARGUMENT HOOK

*Many men are told there are only two options in dating: be the edgy, unavailable guy who creates attraction, or the dependable “nice guy” who eventually gets chosen. But what if both ideas miss what women actually want?*

# [ Core *Argument* ]

After the hook, you don't want to wait too long to state the core argument and the book's central promise. This is where you tell agents and publishers what the book is really arguing, teaching, or revealing.

## EXAMPLE

*Before the Breaking Point begins with a simple but powerful premise: couples do not have to wait until their relationship is in crisis to begin repairing it. They need a way to recognize the early signals of resentment, understand what those moments are really revealing, and respond before hurt becomes distance.*

Your core argument should answer:

- What is the big idea of this book?
- What common assumption does it challenge?
- What problem does it solve?
- What new lens, method, or framework does it offer?
- What does the reader understand differently because of this book?

This section should be clear, confident, and specific. Avoid vague promises like “this book will help readers transform their lives.” Instead, name the actual transformation.

# [ *About* You ]

Early in the overview, weave in a few sentences or paragraphs that show agents and publishers why *you* are the right person to write this book. This should establish your authority without reading like a full bio, which will come later in the “About the Author” section.

Instead, introduce your credibility naturally by showing how you came to know what you know: the work you've done over the years, the experiences that led to this book, or the “aha” moments that emerged through your research, practice, clients you've worked with, or lived experience. Focus on the parts of your background most relevant to the book's promise and marketability. This might include professional credentials, years of experience, the number of people you've worked with, a proven or signature method, major media coverage on your topic, a popular newsletter, or a meaningful social media platform, especially if it has 10k followers or more (which is what we consider a microinfluencer).

If writing narrative or memoir, focus on the highlights and the story *only you* can tell. For instance, if you're a therapist or psychiatrist, you can focus on the important insights you've made over the years and the missing piece to the puzzle that this book solves.

For example:

## EXAMPLE · ABOUT YOU

*As the couples therapist other couples therapists call when their relationships get complicated, I have spent decades sitting with people who love each other and also occasionally want to throttle each other over the recycling, the tone of a text message, or the fact that one person somehow believes “I’ll do it later” is a legally binding chore completion strategy. I also bring the hard-won wisdom of my own 20-year marriage, which means I am not writing *Before the Breaking Point* from some pristine mountaintop of relational enlightenment. I am writing from the trenches with a humble and deep respect for how hard it is to keep choosing each other.*

*Like with my popular TikTok with over 30,000 followers, my goal is not to help people become perfect partners. No one needs that pressure, and frankly, perfect people are exhausting. My goal is to help couples understand what the small hurts are really revealing and squash them before they turn into an avalanche of pain.*

# [ Introduce *Urgency* and Timeliness ]

Whether at the end of the overview, or perhaps after introducing your core argument, it's time to address the question: *Why do we need this book now?*

This argument can be a few sentences or 1-2 paragraphs long. The goal here is to create urgency and show that you understand the cultural, emotional, and commercial context for the book. For example, in a book about how native gardens can help the environment, you might highlight the rapid decline of birds, bees, and butterflies and point to a growing trend of articles on the topic of native plants.

To show “why now,” you might mention:

- A growing cultural conversation
- A timely trend
- A market gap
- A powerful statistic
- Changes in how people think, work, parent, date, heal, age, or live
- Why current books do not fully solve the problem your book addresses

For example:

## EXAMPLE

*We need this book now more than ever because resentment has become the background noise of modern love. Couples today are juggling careers, parenting, aging parents, money stress, mental health, housework, invisible labor, endless notifications, and the daily mystery of why one person can see the empty toilet paper roll while the other appears to be living in a toilet-paper-alternate-universe.*

Then you might ground the urgency with the bigger market need:

EXAMPLE · CONTINUED

*Too many couples wait until the house is already on fire before they ask for help. According to the Gottman Institute, couples wait an average of six years before seeking counseling, and by then, many have spent years normalizing distance, resentment, bad fights, emotional loneliness, or the quiet belief that this is just what long-term love becomes. Meanwhile, the United States continues to face a staggering divorce crisis, with nearly 747,000 divorces each year, a number that does not include the unmarried couples who quietly separate every day. Before the Breaking Point is my answer to that delay.*

Even though your reader is smart, you don't want to assume everyone already knows the problem. More importantly, you are showing agents and publishers that you have a compelling way of articulating it.

# [ The Reader *Journey* + Key Takeaways ]

After you establish the hook, core argument, and your authority, give agents and publishers a clear sense of the journey you will take readers on. Be sure to highlight the takeaways. This part of the overview should answer: *What will readers learn, experience, understand, or be able to do by the end of the book?*

For a prescriptive book, this may mean introducing your method, framework, exercises, or step-by-step transformation. For a memoir, it may mean showing the emotional, spiritual, psychological, or physical journey you will take readers on and the larger insight readers gain from your story.

For example, in *Before the Breaking Point*:

## EXAMPLE

*This book takes readers through the five places where resentment most often takes root: communication breakdowns, repeated conflict cycles, family-of-origin patterns, emotional distance, and the chaos or avoidance that keeps couples from finding peaceful ground.*

You can also briefly highlight key takeaways:

## EXAMPLE · KEY TAKEAWAYS

*By the end of the book, readers will learn how to recognize early signs of resentment, name what has gone unspoken, identify the deeper patterns beneath recurring conflict, repair before distance hardens, and create rituals that help love feel easier to return to after conflict.*

With prescriptive books, we often find it helpful to bullet out the key takeaways or steps/phases in the framework. For example, with *Before the Breaking Point*:

EXAMPLE · THE FIVE AREAS

*The book walks readers through the five areas where relationships most often get stuck:*

- **Communication habits** that leave both partners feeling unheard, misunderstood, and secretly convinced they are the only one speaking actual human language.
- **Repeated conflict cycles** that make couples feel trapped in the same argument, even when the topic changes from money to sex to who left the wet towel on the bed.
- **Family-of-origin patterns and attachment wounds** that quietly shape how we love, protect ourselves, pursue closeness, or run from it.
- **Emotional distance** that grows when partners stop reaching for each other because rejection, criticism, or disappointment have started to feel inevitable.
- **Chaos, resentment, and avoidance** that keep couples from finding peaceful ground, even when both people desperately want to feel close again.

# [ *Readership* + Bestselling Comps ]

Briefly identify in 1–3 sentences the book's core readership and name a few bestselling competitive titles to show where the book sits on the shelf. This is not the full “Audience” or “Competitive Titles” section. Here, you are simply giving agents and publishers a quick market signal: who the book is for, what readers already buy in this category, and how your book offers a fresh angle.

Here is a helpful way to frame this:

## HELPFUL FRAME

*This book is for [specific readers] who [specific problem or desire]. It builds on the demand for [category] books like [Comp 1], [Comp 2], and [Comp 3], but enters the conversation through [your fresh angle].*

For example:

## EXAMPLE

*This book is for couples who still love each other, but feel caught in the same fights, silent disappointments, and growing resentment they do not know how to repair. It builds on the demand for relationship books like *Attached*, *Getting the Love You Want*, and *Us*, but enters the conversation through a growing issue in modern love: resentment.*

# [ *Deliverables* ]

Finally, you can end the overview with a quick sentence noting the manuscript's estimated word count and when you expect to deliver the finished draft to the publisher.

- **Word Count:** Most text-driven nonfiction books are around 60,000–70,000 words, while highly designed books can vary and may be much shorter, often around 25,000–40,000 words.
- **Delivery of Finished Manuscript:** The delivery timeline is ultimately up to you. We typically recommend giving yourself about one year to write a full-length manuscript, though an ambitious but doable timeline may be 6–8 months. Having a completed manuscript can be a selling point if an editor needs a book to fill their list quickly, but it is more important to prioritize the creative process and give yourself enough time to write the strongest book possible.
- **Designed Books:** If you are proposing a highly designed book, we recommend adding a separate section that outlines the book's specifications. This may include the estimated word count, format ideas, number of photographs or illustrations, art needs, design considerations, and anticipated delivery timeline for the manuscript and visual materials. It's also okay if you don't know the answers to all of this; your agent and editor will help you shape the package.

A NONEXISTENT BOOK WE MADE UP

# Before the *Breaking Point*

*How to Catch Small Hurts Early, Repair What's Unspoken, and Stop Resentment Before It Grows*

## POSITIONING STATEMENT

**Taking readers behind the scenes with celebrity therapist Sabrina Hua, *Before the Breaking Point* reveals how resentment becomes the silent killer of love and how to stop it before it destroys your relationship. Drawing on her proven five-step method, Hua teaches couples how to catch small hurts early, name what has gone unspoken, and repair the patterns that quietly pull them apart.**

Amanda did not walk into my office because of a catastrophic betrayal, a plate-smashing fight, or a dramatic “we need to talk” moment that belongs in the third act of romantic comedy. She came to therapy because her husband kept forgetting to text when he was running late. Because he looked at his phone while she told a story. Because every time she asked for more help, he nodded, apologized, and became a new man for approximately three business days before returning to his regularly scheduled programming.

Sure, the trash would get taken out, but not the same day. The Christmas gifts for the kids would get bought, but only after multiple reminders, a shared spreadsheet, and the emotional labor of managing the entire North Pole. The dishwasher would be unloaded, but the lunch boxes, permission slips, birthday presents, doctor's appointments, and invisible mental load of family life still somehow landed on her.

None of it felt big enough to explain how angry Amanda had become. There was no affair to point to. No explosive fight that marked the beginning of the end. No single villainous act she could hold up in therapy and say, *See?*

Just years of small hurts. Missed bids for connection. Swallowed disappointments. The quiet loneliness of feeling like the only adult in the room, while also feeling guilty for being so mad at someone who was, technically, a good person.

By the time Amanda came to therapy, she could barely stand to be in the same room with the man she still loved.

This is how many relationships fall apart. Not all at once, but through tiny, ordinary moments that seem too small to make a big deal about, until they become the whole deal. At first, these moments feel like annoyances. Over time, they become evidence. And eventually, they become the story couples start telling themselves: *I can't count on you. You don't see me. I'm alone in this.*

**That story has a name: resentment.**

And resentment is one of the quietest, most destructive forces in long-term love.

*Before the Breaking Point* begins with a simple but powerful premise: couples do not have to wait until they are one slammed cabinet away from divorce to begin repairing their relationship. They need a way to recognize the early signals of resentment, understand what those moments are really revealing, and respond before hurt becomes distance.

As the couples therapist other couples therapists call when *their* relationships get complicated, I have spent decades sitting with people who love each other and also occasionally want to throttle each other over the recycling, the tone of a text message, or the fact that one person somehow believes “I’ll do it later” is a legally binding chore completion strategy. I also bring the hard-won wisdom of my own 20-year marriage, which means I am not writing this from some pristine mountaintop of relational enlightenment. I am writing from the trenches with a humble and deep respect for how hard it is *to keep choosing each other*.

I wrote *Before the Breaking Point* because I believe resentment is one of the most common and least understood threats to long-term love, yet it is also one of the most preventable. This book centers on my proven five-step method, a framework that helps couples move from silent hurt and repetitive conflict into honesty, repair, and renewed closeness. Like with my popular TikTok with over 30,000 followers, my goal is not to help people become perfect partners. No one needs that pressure, and frankly, perfect people are *exhausting*. My goal is to help couples understand what the small hurts are really revealing and squash them before they change into an avalanche.

We need this book now more than ever, because resentment has become the background noise of modern love. Couples today are juggling careers, parenting, aging parents, money stress, mental health, housework, invisible labor, endless notifications, and the daily mystery of why one person can see the empty toilet paper roll while the other appears to be living in a toilet-paper-alternate-universe. Seriously, where do they think the toilet paper comes from? A tiny household fairy with a Costco membership?

The problem is not that couples are lazy or doomed or secretly terrible people. It's that we are busy, overstimulated, under-rested, and emotionally maxed out in our modern world. The small moments that need care get skipped because no one has the time, energy, or capacity to turn it into a whole conversation. But those moments do not politely disappear. They accumulate. They set up camp. They start paying rent in the relationship.

Too many couples wait until the house is already on fire before they ask for help. According to the Gottman Institute, couples wait an average of six years before seeking counseling, and by then, many have spent years normalizing distance, resentment, bad fights, emotional loneliness, or the quiet belief that this is just what long-term love becomes. Meanwhile, the United States continues to face a staggering divorce crisis, with nearly 747,000 divorces each year, a number that does not include the unmarried couples who quietly separate every day. *Before the Breaking Point* is my answer to that delay.

At the same time, conversations about attachment, emotional labor, nervous-system regulation, relational trauma, and conflict styles have moved from the therapist's office to TikTok, podcasts, group chats, and Instagram. People have more language than ever for what hurts. What they often do not have is a clear, practical way to repair it.

*Before the Breaking Point* gives couples that path before resentment becomes the story of the relationship.

In a culture that often treats relationship trouble as either a private failure or proof that the partnership is doomed, *Before the Breaking Point* offers a more hopeful view. Love is not sustained by chemistry alone. Chemistry is lovely. Chemistry is what gets you flirting over appetizers. But long-term intimacy requires actual skills: communicating without escalating, identifying old wounds that keep sneaking into new arguments, tolerating closeness without self-protection, and creating rituals that keep goodwill alive when life gets unsexy.

This book builds on the enduring demand for smart, accessible relationship books like *Attached*, *Getting the Love You Want*, *Hold Me Tight*, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, and *Us*, but it enters the conversation through a more specific door: resentment. Many couples do not come apart because love disappears overnight. They come apart because small hurts turn into the story: *You don't see me. I can't count on you. I am alone in this. Before the Breaking Point* gives readers a way to interrupt that story.

Drawing from multiple models of psychotherapy, real-life clinical stories, personal reflections, and accessible exercises, I give readers the experience of sitting with a wise, candid therapist who is not judging them from across the room, but helping them see the pattern beneath the fight. This book does not ask couples to become flawless communicators, conflict-free partners, or emotionally enlightened monks who never snap about the dishwasher. Instead, it teaches them how to notice the moment they are slipping into what I call “the resentment loop.”

The book walks readers through the five areas where relationships most often get stuck:

- **Communication habits** that leave both partners feeling unheard, misunderstood, and secretly convinced they are the only one speaking actual human language.
- **Repeated conflict cycles** that make couples feel trapped in the same argument, even when the topic changes from money to sex to who left the wet towel on the bed.
- **Family-of-origin patterns and attachment wounds** that quietly shape how we love, protect ourselves, pursue closeness, or run from it.
- **Emotional distance** that grows when partners stop reaching for each other because rejection, criticism, or disappointment have started to feel inevitable.
- **Chaos, resentment, and avoidance** that keep couples from finding peaceful ground, even when both people desperately want to feel close again.

After helping readers identify and repair these common patterns, I turn toward the practices that make a relationship resilient over time. Readers learn how to create more goodwill, talk about grievances before they harden into emotional cement, prioritize joy, and treat their relationship as a living system that needs ongoing care. Not dramatic, emergency-level care. Regular care. The kind that keeps small cracks from becoming structural damage.

By the end of the book, readers will understand that closeness is not built by avoiding disagreement. It is built by learning how and when to speak up. They will discover how to create a shared language, recognize their own instincts to suppress their needs or face conflict, and respond with less reactivity. I also include a practical toolkit of exercises couples can return to when they are triggered, and need something more useful than “fine, whatever.”

With a healthy dose of humor and highly research-driven, *Before the Breaking Point* is a guide for anyone who wants to stop waiting until things are falling apart to care for their relationship. Couples will finally understand what is happening beneath the surface, repair for good, and build the kind of love that can keep growing long after the honeymoon phase, the baby phase, the exhausted phase, and the “why are your socks still on the floor?” phase.

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*I expect that the book will be approximately 60,000 words. I can deliver it within twelve months of contract.*

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# Write Your *Jacket Copy*

At writers retreat, something we have done to help authors better be able to describe their book is to ask them to pretend that their book is now being published and that they have been asked to draft the jacket copy that readers will review online and in person. Now, take the next 15–30 minutes to write your own jacket copy!

## Guidelines *for writing* your jacket copy:

- Write a one sentence headline (crib this from your positioning statement).
- Write in third person and directly to your reader.
- Keep it to about 250–350 words.
- Give yourself a byline and briefly mention who you are (don't assume readers will know).
- Include the reader's journey and key takeaways.
- Add a line or so about why we need this book now more than ever.
- Describe the reader and their pain points so they know this book is for them.

YOUR JACKET COPY — BEGIN HERE

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EXAMPLE

# The Four Seasons of *Heartbreak*

*How to Mend Your Spirit and Move Forward After a Breakup* · by Sheleana Aiyana

A DEEPLY PERSONAL AND COMPASSIONATE COMPANION FOR ANYONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED HEARTBREAK AND IS SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO HEAL

*Heartbreak is loss, and it brings on real grief. When we get caught in the rush to “move on,” we tend to resist the fluid process of grief, but if we look at nature, we see its incredible ability to self-heal on its own timeline. What if we attuned ourselves to these seasonal changes as a way of healing, preparing, and honoring what each season offers?*

*With an approach that is both gentle and wise, spiritual leader and visionary founder of the Rising Woman community Sheleana Aiyana shows readers how to do just that by guiding them through the four “seasons” of heartbreak:*

***Inner Autumn:*** a season to gather what we need and prepare to let go

***Inner Winter:*** a season where we allow ourselves to grieve and rest

***Inner Spring:*** a season of tentative, hopeful beginnings

***Inner Summer:*** a season when our hearts feel open to love and joy again

*By looking inward and honoring each season, we will find that heartbreak isn't just an ending, but also a beginning—a chance to rebuild, grow, and connect with ourselves more deeply.*

*The Four Seasons of Heartbreak offers us a soulful journey toward transformation and finding ourselves again after loss. For anyone who's been broken open by life, this book is here to help you gather the pieces and embrace the new version of yourself that's waiting to be born.*

# About the *Author*

In this section of the proposal, you will want to demonstrate how you are the right person to write about this topic and lead readers on this journey. This could be a place to explain your personal reasoning for writing this book if relevant to the proposal, and how you came to develop your unique methodology or concept. For example, if writing a book about insomnia, it would make sense to include a few sentences about your struggle with sleep and the high-level steps you took to overcome insomnia. Ultimately, this should read like a professional back of book cover bio or conference bio.

This is also where you want to include:

- Any credentials, degrees, and awards.
- Major media coverage or articles you've published.
- Bestselling courses.
- Previous publishing history, if applicable.

End the bio with the city and state where you live. This is helpful for publishers to share with their sales teams, as they will want to stock your books locally. Include a photo in this section if you have a hi-res professional photo (think back-of-the-book-cover professional).

This section can be about 300 words and written in third person, unless you are trying to position your book for its accessible and warm voice, then first person can also be a fit.

# An Example *Bio*

## EXAMPLE BIO

*Over the last 20 years, neuroscience-based wellness coach and lifestyle journalist Amanda Lombardi has helped thousands of people transform their relationship with fitness, pleasure, stress, and wellbeing through her training practice, wellness retreats, keynote speeches, and corporate workshops. Her popular weekly newsletter, Wellness Made Fun, has ranked among the top 10 wellness newsletters on Substack for the last two years.*

*Amanda is an original voice in the wellness space: a coach who stepped away from the mainstream fitness industry at a time when pain, deprivation, and punishment were often mistaken for discipline. After seeing both herself and her clients suffer under this model, she became convinced there had to be a more enjoyable, sustainable path to true wellbeing. That conviction led her to found Wellness Made Easy, a pleasure-based approach to transformation rooted in neuroscience, neuroplasticity, and stress management.*

*Through Wellness Made Easy, Amanda teaches an evidence-based curriculum of sustainable practices designed to help people free themselves from suffering and create lasting change without shame, rigidity, or self-punishment. Her work blends scientific insight with an accessible, joyful, and radically liberating philosophy: that wellbeing should not require us to suffer our way toward a better life.*

*Amanda has delivered speaking engagements for major brands including Lululemon, Nike, Athleta, and Puma, and has appeared on The Today Show, Good Morning America, and NPR. She has also been quoted in leading wellness and lifestyle media including Women's Health, SELF, and Shape. She lives in New York City with her husband and pug, Sunny.*

# Market and *Audience*

Write half a page to a page on the audience for the book. While you should have a primary audience and an ideal reader in mind—a clear picture of the perfect person your book is for—this section can break out several different groups. You are trying to convince the publisher that there are *a lot* of potential readers who will purchase copies.

Include demographics and age range, if relevant. Consider what problems and concerns the reader has and why this book meets a need for them. List where these people shop and what other books they read, e.g., “Readers of Glennon Doyle’s *Untamed* will come to this book.” Quantify the market by giving the reported size of specific populations likely to be interested in the book.

## A GRIEF MEMOIR

# Audience *Breakdown*

## THOSE WHO HAVE LOST SOMEONE CLOSE TO THEM

*There's a clear and growing market for grief-related books, fueled by cultural shifts and increased demand for emotional support. The grief counseling industry is expanding rapidly, with a projected 10.2% compound annual growth rate, reflecting broader public interest in mental health and bereavement support. Meanwhile, bereavement programs for children and families have seen significant surges in attendance in recent years, with some reporting increases of 50% or more year-over-year. Several national organizations have also expanded their reach, hosting camps and support experiences for thousands of children annually.*

*Culturally, we have also seen a departure from the tendency to avoid aspects of grief that are taboo or “too sad to talk about.” Books like *I’m Glad My Mom Died* and *What My Bones Know* have broken through as bestsellers, signaling a hunger for honest, unflinching narratives about loss and healing. These trends point to a market not only ready for more grief-centered literature but also eager to embrace it.*

## FOR THE READER TIRED OF BEING TOLD ABOUT GRIEF BY SCIENTISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS

*And is looking for an author who has been there. Written by a parent who has walked through profound personal loss, this book delivers an authentic, deeply personal perspective. It offers a voice of lived experience, resonating with readers who feel unseen or underserved by purely clinical approaches to grief.*

## READERS OF SIGNS, PROOF OF HEAVEN, MANY LIVES MANY MASTERS, JOURNEY OF SOULS

*This book taps into the same curiosity about the unseen world that has propelled these titles to bestseller status, weaving a narrative that bridges spirituality and personal transformation. There is a perennial audience for case studies and real-life stories about connecting with the other side, as demonstrated by the continued strong sales of these works. Readers will find fresh insights and a deeply emotional, relatable story that explores the continuity of life and invites personal connection with the unseen—without reliance on intermediaries.*

# Author Platform, Promotion, *and* Marketing

Forget the glitzy version of publishing you often see in the movies and on TV. The unfortunate truth is that marketing and publicity departments in the industry have relatively modest budgets and overworked, understaffed teams. As a result, the lion's share of their resources must be allocated to the titles most likely to sell the most copies, i.e., the ones written by big influencers and celebrities. This doesn't mean they don't care about your book; your success means success for them, too. However, what this *does* mean is that they are looking for authors who can bring their own marketing and/or publicity muscle to the table. Promoting the book will largely fall on your shoulders, and your proposal should clearly lay out how you plan to do that.

The good news? You don't have to be a rock star on every social media platform to get an agent and a book deal. **You just need to have one or two genuinely strong levers you can pull**—be it an email list, a social media following, a popular podcast, ties with the media, or a great network of influential people who would be willing to help promote the book on your behalf. **And then you need to make it clear what those levers are and how you plan to use them for book promotion.**

The editors and marketers who review proposals sift through huge stacks of them every week, so it's important to make the marketing information easily skimmable. Use the bulleted format below to create a succinct map of your platform. If a particular bullet doesn't apply to you, simply delete it. Also include an introductory paragraph that highlights your greatest strengths and any creative ideas you have for book promotion. For example, if you are an expert in your field, perhaps you can offer a bonus digital workbook or free consultations for people who pre-order a certain number of copies. If you have a strong email list or social media following, say you'll run a 2-3 month content campaign for the book. Are you a regular public speaker who can incorporate bulk sales into your event? Do you have the budget to hire your own marketing and/or publicity support? These are all worth highlighting at the top of this section.

## Platform *Bullet Format*

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### Website:

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**Traffic Stats:** If strong, include unique monthly visitors, page views, etc.

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### Email Subscribers:

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**Engagement Stats:** If strong, include open and click-through rates.

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**Social Media Accounts:** If the follower-counts for the individual platforms are low, you might consider leaving them out or just including a cumulative follower-count for all platforms at the top of this list.

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### Instagram (# of Followers):

### Facebook (# of Followers):

### TikTok (# of Followers):

### YouTube (# of Followers):

### X/Twitter (# of Followers):

### Blog/Podcast:

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**Audience Stats:** If strong, include the number of readers, views, downloads, etc.

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## Personal *Network*

**Influencers:** List any well-known/respected figures you may know whom you could ask for an endorsement and/or promotional help. Do they have large social media audiences? Include those numbers, too.

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**Media:** Any journalists or producers you know whom you could ask to review or cover the book.

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**Companies/Organizations:** Any you're tied to or have worked with in the past that you could approach for potential marketing partnerships, speaking events, and/or bulk purchases.

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# Competitive / Comparative *Titles*

This section should include four to five titles that demonstrate active market interest in this book's topic space. These can be competing or comparable books (“comps”) that would sit on the same shelf as your book or that would have crossover readerships. Maggie Langrick, one of our mentors and the founder of Wonderwell Press, used to say, “You want a book that stands out while fitting in.” And that is the question you want to answer for agents and publishers in this section: *How does your book stand out and fit in with each competitive book you will list?*

## What to *include* in this section:

- Choose successful titles published three years ago or less. (If you have trouble finding titles that are new, you can stretch this to five years, but the goal is to show that readers are currently buying books like yours.)
- Avoid mega-bestselling blockbusters. You are not Brené Brown (yet!)
- For each competitive or comparative title, list the title, author, on-sale date, publisher, format (hardcover vs. paperback), price, and ISBN.
- Provide a few sentences to a paragraph explaining how this book will meet a need or feature benefits that the comp title misses.
- Add a field for “author's previous books,” if applicable.

*Agents often use a sales tool called Circana Bookscan to find the sales numbers for a book, often aiming to choose comp titles that have sold 25k–50k+. Bookscan is an expensive tool, so you can wait until you get an agent to include that information. For the first draft of your proposal, you can rely more on the New York Times bestsellers lists or Amazon bestsellers in your category to fill out the comps section. Or, look up a bestselling book on Amazon and scroll down to the “Customers also bought or read” section. This can give you a quick snapshot of what else your target reader is likely reading.*

A BOOK ON THE BIOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

# The Myth of *Normal*

*Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture* · Dr. Gabor Maté, MD with Daniel Maté

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

*On Sale: Sept. 2022 · Avery · Hardcover · \$32.00 · 9780593083888*

### — THE MYTH OF NORMAL

*Trauma, illness &  
healing in a toxic  
culture*

*The Myth of Normal* by Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté examines how trauma, chronic stress, and the pressures of modern culture contribute to mental and physical illness. By challenging conventional assumptions about what makes people sick, the book reveals strong reader demand for health titles that move beyond reductive explanations and invite a more expansive understanding of wellbeing—one that looks beneath symptoms and questions the very idea of “normal.”

*The Biology of Happiness* shares this interest in widening the conversation around health and healing, but takes a more practical and prescriptive approach. Where *The Myth of Normal* operates on a broad cultural and philosophical level, this book is designed as an accessible how-to guide that walks readers through a 6-step program. Maté's work is brilliant and deeply researched, but at 576 pages, it is also dense and ambitious in scope. By contrast, *The Biology of Happiness* makes a clear, timely argument for rethinking medication, psychedelics, and lifestyle habits, while giving readers a down-to-earth framework they can understand, personalize, and put into practice.

# Table of *Contents*

Your table of contents is not just a way to organize your book; it is also a sales tool. Many readers decide whether to buy a book by reading the jacket description, scanning the first few pages, and glancing at the table of contents to understand what the book will offer—whether it be inspiration, education, or entertainment.

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*For many agents, editors, and readers, this is one of the first places they look to understand the book's promise, tone, structure, and reading experience.*

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While there are no hard and fast “rules” that you absolutely must follow in structuring your book, we do find that most nonfiction books fall into one of two broad structural approaches: **teaching books** and **story-driven books**. Some books blend both, but this distinction can help you decide on where to begin!

## Teaching *Books*

Self-help, health, relationships, psychology, spirituality, business, and some popular science books often fall into the category of “teaching books.” If the concept is built around a program, core principals, or prescriptive takeaways, your structure might move through steps, phases, rules, laws, or major life categories (family, love, work, money, etc.). With books that teach, each chapter title should offer a clear promise of what readers will learn. These part and chapter titles can be straightforward or clever and voice driven, but not cryptic or vague.

They should also **begin where the reader is at**. Like starting a fitness program, if you begin with 80-pound weights, you might hurt yourself and give up. Here too, you need to begin by easing in and helping the reader understand their problem in full. You want a structure that gradually takes readers on a step-by-step journey, with each step building on the last. People will get behind something that feels accessible but challenges them just the right amount.

## Story-Driven *Books*

If you are writing a memoir, narrative-driven nonfiction, travel book, biography, or essay collection, your chapter titles can be more poetic, literary, or curiosity-driven. Instead of promising a direct takeaway in every title, they may set the tone, create intrigue, or hint at the emotional journey ahead.

The goal is to give readers a sense of the experience they are about to have: the voice, atmosphere, emotional stakes, and movement of the story.

Where you begin depends on your book's core themes, universal message, and central thread, but memoir and narrative nonfiction often borrow from the tools of fiction—**it has to be a page-turner**. Rather than starting with a full life history, begin with an emotionally charged, story-driving moment that pulls readers in and reveals what is at stake.

## Check Out *the Competition*

Before creating your own structure, review the table of contents for your competitive books. Notice how they organize the reader journey, title their chapters, and balance clarity with intrigue. Think about how you might take inspiration from this and what ways you can structure your book to really set you apart.

*We will go over the 9 different table of contents templates in the next worksheet.*

STRUCTURE #1

# From *Before the Breaking Point*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Introduction: Before the Breaking Point*

PART ONE · HOW RESENTMENT BEGINS

Chapter 1: The Little Things Are Never Just Little Things

Chapter 2: The Stories We Tell Ourselves About Love

PART TWO · THE FIVE PLACES RESENTMENT TAKES ROOT

Chapter 3: Why You're Not Hearing Each Other

Chapter 4: The Fight Beneath the Fight

Chapter 5: The Ghosts in the Room

Chapter 6: When Distance Becomes the Default

Chapter 7: Addicted to the Chaos

PART THREE · REPAIR BEFORE IT HARDENS

Chapter 8: The Softening Switch

Chapter 9: Fighting Without Breaking Things or US

Chapter 11: The Relationship Comes First (Even Before Your Kids)

Chapter 12: Sex and Desire After Disappointment

*Conclusion: Love After the Loop*

THE BEFORE THE BREAKING POINT SOS KIT

*The Resentment Reset Check-In*

*The Five-Step Repair Conversation*

# Chapter *Summaries*

When we worked at traditional publishing houses, the proposals that excited us most were the ones that taught us something or offered mini “aha” moments throughout. These were the proposals where we could highlight compelling research, memorable takeaways, and sharp taglines to bring back to our editorial and marketing teams. Your chapter summaries and sample material are great places to introduce these moments. Done well, they give agents and editors language they can immediately understand, remember, and use to champion your book.

This section of the book proposal is designed to give agents and publishers a fuller sense of your book's content—and how your unique approach stands out or taps into the current cultural moment. It's also an important opportunity to show *your voice*.

These summaries should read like windows into the book and can essentially be seen as sample material. Many editors don't even get as far as the sample chapters if the summaries don't grab them, this is why they should be engaging—not dry reader's reports.

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*Chapter summaries should do more than explain what happens in the chapter. They should express a clear point of view, stay concise, and highlight the most compelling ideas, teachings, stories, or takeaways in an entertaining way.*

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A common mistake authors make in this section is trying to include too much teaching or offer too wide of a “window” into the chapter. As a result, the summary can become overly detailed and start to read like the chapter itself. We recommend striking a balance: give readers a quick, compelling window into the chapter, then pair it with a concise overview of the key teachings or chapter content.

If your book is prescriptive, you should showcase how your approach offers a fresh, unique, or counterintuitive way into the subject. You want to show publishers that you have a point of view, know how to establish a strong argument, and understand your reader's needs and desires. You might bullet out a few takeaways at the end of the summary or weave them into the description.

If your book is a memoir or narrative-driven, the summaries can be written to show the major scenes, important stories, and themes highlighted in the chapter, almost as if you are pitching a movie or play. Memoirs with a message should include the universal truth, wisdom, or offering for the reader.

## How to *Write* Summaries:

- Write in first person.
- Write a summary for each of your chapters, including the introduction and conclusion.
- If your book will include stories, weave in a peppering of short anecdotes to show what kinds of stories you might include.
- If applicable, reference tidbits of your most interesting research or science.
- Bring in elements like bulleted lists or brief sample exercises—whatever best reflects the book's actual content.
- Use negative space, which means don't be afraid to include a little dialogue or pull out a sentence onto a singular line for emphasis here and there.

## *Length:*

Keep this section 15–25 pages, or approximately 500–1,000 words each, depending on how many chapters you have:

- Ex. 12 chapters: write 1–3 pages total, covering key content and takeaways.
- Ex. 20 chapters: aim for about one page per chapter.
- Ex. More than 20 chapters: you can summarize by parts instead of chapter.

## Each summary *should include*:

- 01 **A Hook/Window** (A surprising way to open the chapter or argument.)
- 02 **A Core Teaching** (What does the chapter reveal, argue, or explain?)
- 03 **A Short Preview** (Stories, concepts, research, or practices.)
- 04 **Reader Takeaway** (What does the reader feel or understand by the end?)

## Writing a *Good Hook*

Start with the most interesting idea, dialogue that grabs the reader, a question, or story.

### INSTEAD OF

*“This chapter talks about female friendships and how complex and difficult they can be to navigate.”*

### A HOOK IS

*Imagine your best friend texts, “Can I talk to you about something?” For many women, that simple question can mean one of two things: a friend is reaching out for advice, or the nervous system immediately launches into a panic spiral:*

*I messed up.  
She's mad at me.  
This friendship is over.*

*Female friendships are deeply complex and nuanced, yet many women are never taught how to address conflict directly. As a result, a small annoyance or misunderstanding can turn into gossip, withdrawal, resentment, or even the quiet end of a friendship that might have been repaired with one honest conversation. In this chapter, I reframe the anxiety women often feel in friendship not as a personal flaw, but as a missing communication skill: the ability to name our needs, share disappointment, and move through conflict without assuming disconnection means abandonment.*

# Chapter 7: The *Softening Switch*

*What would happen if, in the middle of your next argument, you were the first one to soften?*

Not because you were wrong. Not because your partner “won.” Not because you suddenly became a conflict-resolution saint who floats above the kitchen counter in a linen robe. But because you recognized the split second when your relationship could go in one of two directions: toward another layer of resentment, or toward repair.

Every couple has this moment. The tone shifts. The jaw tightens. The internal lawyer starts gathering evidence. *Here we go again. I always do this. You never do that. Exhibit A: the trash. Exhibit B: the text message. Exhibit C: your mother!*

This chapter introduces **The Softening Switch**, the moment in conflict when one partner chooses to interrupt the resentment loop instead of feeding it. This does not mean surrendering, excusing bad behavior, or pretending you are not hurt. It means noticing the exact moment when you can either add another brick to the wall between you or create an opening for repair.

In this chapter, readers learn how to flip the Softening Switch by making one small, intentional move toward connection. They will explore how to:

- **Recognize the resentment loop:** Notice when old hurts are turning every new mistake into “proof” that nothing ever changes.
- **Pause before the pile-on:** Interrupt the urge to bring up every unresolved issue since 2017.
- **Make one repair move:** Apologize first, soften your tone, offer warmth, or name what you actually need.
- **Let the small stuff stay small:** Discern which issues need honest conversation and which ones can simply be released because not every irritation deserves a three-hour summit meeting.
- **Use humor, physical touch, or words of affirmation:** Bring lightness back into the relationship without dismissing what matters by incorporating humor, offering to give your partner a hug, or using words of affirmation.

By the end of the chapter, readers will understand that resentment does not only grow from what happens during conflict. It grows from what does *not* happen in the moments after: the apology that never comes, the softness no one offers, the attempt to rebuild connection that gets withheld because both people are still processing or waiting for the other to go first. Couples are then invited to create their own rituals of repair, small practices that make reconnection more natural, conflict less terrifying, and love easier to return to after a hard moment.

FROM A NARRATIVE-DRIVEN SLEEP BOOK

# Introduction: Surviving *Insomnia* 101

*There is a particular kind of loneliness that only happens at 3:17 a.m.*

The house is quiet. The world is asleep. Your phone is glowing in your hand even though every article you have ever read has told you this is the exact wrong thing to do. You have already tried deep breathing, the body scan, the lavender spray, the magnesium, the cooling pillow, and the bargain you make with the universe where you promise to become a better person if you can just fall asleep before 4:00.

And still, there you are. Awake.

For most of my adult life, this was my private nighttime world. During the day, I could pass as a normal, productive person. I worked, socialized, met deadlines, made plans, and answered the casual question “How are you?” with the socially acceptable lie: “Good!” But at night, everything changed. Sleep became a performance I could not stop failing.

For a long time, I did not even call it insomnia. That word felt too final, too clinical, too embarrassing. I preferred softer phrases, like “I’m just a bad sleeper” or “I’ve been having some sleep issues.” Somehow, “sleep issues” sounded manageable. *Insomnia* sounded like an incurable diagnosis stamped across my forehead.

I worried people would hear the word and make assumptions. That I was fragile. Anxious. Difficult. Not as capable as I seemed. I worried a boss would question whether I could handle pressure, a partner would decide I was too complicated, or a family member would tell me to just relax, as if relaxation were a button I had forgotten to press.

So I became very good at hiding it.

I hid the panic that started building before bedtime. I hid the medications and the routines and the quiet shame of needing help with something that seemed so basic. I said no to late dinners, spontaneous trips, nights out, and anything that might throw off the fragile sleep system I was desperately trying to protect.

This made dating complicated.

There is no graceful way to explain to a new romantic partner that, yes, the humming machine is necessary, no, the room cannot be warmer than a very specific temperature, and yes, the white noise needs to be loud enough to drown out both the machine and any remaining illusion of seduction.

Nothing kills the mood quite like saying, “Hold on, I need to adjust my sleep apparatus.”

The most frustrating part was that I knew that no single gadget, ritual, or perfect bedroom condition could guarantee sleep. But insomnia has a way of making intelligent people superstitious. When you are terrified of another bad night, anything that once seemed to help becomes sacred. You do not question the ritual. You obey it.

Over time, my life got smaller. I blamed myself when I had a bad night and treated every sleepless hour as evidence that something was wrong with me.

Then I found Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia.

CBT-I did not work by promising me a perfect night of sleep. In fact, it gave me something much more useful: a new way to understand what was happening. I began to see that I was not broken. My sleep system was.

In this introduction, I share the story of how CBT-I changed my sleep and, just as importantly, changed the way I thought about myself. I stopped treating insomnia as a personal failure. I stopped organizing my life around avoiding a bad night. I began learning how to trust my body again.

Throughout this book, I combine personal stories, behavioral science, humor, and a practical 4-week method rooted in CBT-I to help readers build a new relationship with sleep. Because the goal is not just to sleep more. It is to stop fearing the night. It is to stop building your life around exhaustion. It is to reclaim the dinners, trips, intimacy, spontaneity, and joy that insomnia may have quietly taken from you.

*Welcome to the ultimate guide to Surviving Insomnia 101. Let's begin!*

# Sample *Chapters*

We recommend including 1–2 sample chapters. Each chapter should be about 4–5k words in length, depending on your chapter structure. Many people choose their introductions as sample material, but because your overview will include a lot of material that normally would be in an introduction, this could get repetitive.

Instead, when coaching authors on sample chapters to include in their proposal, we look for content that stands out—unique to the category—and suggest choosing chapters where you have something you passionately want to say. The more surprising or counterintuitive, the better. Choose a chapter where you are sharing a point of view or a strong argument. The chapters do not need to be in order.

Drama can help kick off an opening for sure, but the key is to also choose a scene or moment that contains the **emotional DNA** of the whole book. It should make readers feel the central tension right away and want to know: *Where will this go?*

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*If you'd like to learn more about how to write and create a chapter structure, we recommend Step 4: Navigating the Journey: How to Write Your Book.*

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# On the *Proposal* Itself

## *How long does writing a proposal take?*

Writing a strong book proposal can take anywhere from 3–6 months, depending on how developed your idea is and how much sample material you already have. The most time-consuming part is usually the sample chapters, since they need to be polished enough to show agents and publishers what the finished book could become.

## *How many pages should a proposal be?*

Most nonfiction book proposals are typically 40–75 pages, depending on the category. Sometimes, authors with millions of followers or massive platforms can get away with much shorter proposals, since they have less to prove in terms of their ability to market their book and sell to an existing audience.

## *What if I need a ghostwriter?*

Many authors work with ghostwriters or collaborators, especially if they have a powerful idea, platform, or expertise but need support shaping the concept, structure, voice, and manuscript. Or they bring in a ghostwriter, because they are crazy-busy. Your agent will have ghostwriter recommendations, but if you have not signed with an agent yet, Eva can help, or we have a few ghostwriting partners we highly recommend. We have also worked with Gotham Ghostwriters.

## *How should I write and edit my proposal?*

When Eva writes a first draft, it is intentionally rough and for her eyes only. This allows her to focus on the creative process without worrying about getting every sentence perfect right away. She doesn't always write in order, and she often leaves placeholders or highlights words, sections, or paragraphs she wants to return to later.

She recommends getting the draft down first, then stepping away for a night or even a few days before coming back to edit yourself. When you return with fresh eyes, you can fill in missing pieces, strengthen the flow, and see what is or isn't working more clearly.

Usually, the best writing and editing happens over multiple days, not in a single sitting. It also benefits from collaboration, so don't be afraid to take the draft as far as you can and then bring us in to help refine, shape, and strengthen it!

### *After writing my proposal, what are my next steps?*

Once your proposal is complete, the next step is usually to prepare your query letter and begin researching agents who are a strong fit for your book. From there, you can begin querying agents, tracking responses, and revising your materials as needed based on feedback. See our helpful “Cleared for Takeoff: The Agent Pitch Pack & Query Letter Template” PDF for more information.

### *Once I have an agent, then what?*

Your agent will likely have feedback and edits to help shape your proposal. Once everything is polished and ready to go, they will begin sending it out to their list of editors/publishers.

Most editors will first skim the pitch email your agent sends. If the concept, positioning, and platform catch their attention, they will usually review the proposal within a few days to a week, sometimes closer to two weeks. If an editor takes longer than that, chances are they are either very busy or they have not gotten around to sending a thoughtful pass to your agent. (Summer and Christmas are usually “slow periods” in the industry, where editors might take longer to circle back.)

Once an editor has the greenlight from their publishing team to make an offer on your book, they will either enter an auction if multiple publishers are interested, send their best offer if they are the main player, or maybe even pre-empt the book with a strong deal to avoid a bidding war at auction.

### *What will my advance look like?*

Advances vary widely depending on the strength of the concept, author platform, category, publisher interest, and market potential. Some advances are modest, while others can be significant if there is a strong hook and massive platform. Heavily designed books are typically known for receiving smaller advances because of the very high costs to produce these books. They can also be a tougher book to sell to publishers because of this challenge.

One way to get a sense of advance is to follow “Latest Deal” announcements on *Publisher's Marketplace*—either by searching in your particular sub-category or across the whole marketplace to get a better understanding of what's selling now.

You can either monitor the new deals page, or you can enroll for a regular newsletter package: *Publishers Lunch Deluxe* Monday through Friday; which compiles the previous week's deals on Monday mornings; and/or the *Daily Deals* email).

While not every publisher will announce the advance range, many of them will say something like “nice deal” or “good deal.” Here is what that deal language means:

“Nice Deal”	\$1—\$49,000
“Very Nice Deal”	\$50,000—\$99,000
“Good Deal”	\$100,000—\$250,000
“Significant Deal”	\$251,000—\$499,000
“Major Deal”	\$500,000 AND UP
“Major Deal for Seven Figures”	\$1,000,000 AND UP

*For more questions about how to utilize Publisher's Marketplace, you can consult their Writer's Guide.*

### *What format will my book be?*

Most new nonfiction books from traditional publishers launch as hardcovers. If sales are strong, the book may later be released as a paperback, often around a year after publication. If hardcover sales are exceptional, the publisher may keep the book in hardcover as long as they can. If sales do not meet expectations, there is also a possibility that a paperback edition could be delayed or canceled. Sometimes, if a publisher wants to take a chance on a debut author or launch the book at a more accessible price point, they might publish your book as a “paperback original”—which just means that the book will print first in paperback, rather than a standard hardcover.

### *How long until I have a signed contract and receive my advance?*

Publishing contracts often take 1–3 months to finalize, and you typically will not receive the first payment of your advance until the contract is fully signed.

It is also important to know that advances are usually split into several payments, often 3–4 installments, depending on the negotiation. A common structure is:

- **1/4 on signing** of the contract
- **1/4 on delivery and acceptance** of the manuscript (acceptance means the editing is complete and the book is moving into copyediting and production)
- **1/4 on publication** of the first edition, often hardcover
- **1/4 on paperback publication**, if that is part of the deal and the hardcover does well enough to be published in paperback.

Your agent will negotiate these terms and help you understand when payments are expected. In some cases, your agent might negotiate an “earnout bonus” into your contract. This is an additional payment you may receive if a book earns back its original advance within a set period of time. For example, an extra \$15,000 if the book earns back the full \$75,000 advance within the first 12 months after publication.

### *How long will it take before my book is published?*

Once you have delivered your final draft to your editor, you will likely spend the next 10–12 weeks revising and refining the manuscript. After your manuscript has been officially accepted, it is “transmitted” and enters the production stage, which includes copyediting, design, and proofreading. From transmittal to on-sale, the process often takes about 9 to 12 months, though 12 to 18 months is also common depending on the publisher, season, list positioning, and the complexity of the book. If you are publishing a full-color book and printing overseas, the timeline may be longer.

Publishers also often time a book's release around the strongest sales window. For example, a self-help book may be scheduled for a January release to align with the “new year, new you” mindset, while a gift book may be launched ahead of the holiday season. A book aimed at professionals or graduates might be published a few weeks before graduation season.



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# Begin *where you are.*

Your story is already taking shape. Your proposal is the bridge between what you know and the readers who need to hear it.

Take your time — and trust the work.

*With reverence for the path you are walking.*

RISING WOMAN · AUTHOR WORKSHOP