



# WRITING A WINNING NON-FICTION BOOK PROPOSAL

AN INSIDER'S SECRETS TO LANDING AN  
AGENT AND A BOOK CONTRACT

By *Michael Hyatt*



IF THERE'S ONE THING AGENTS HATE TO SEE, IT'S A MANUSCRIPT.

## Surprised? Most new authors are.

**The fact is that agents—and publishers—return most manuscripts to the author without ever having read them.** Agents simply do not have the time or staff to wade through the enormous number of manuscripts they receive from hopeful authors.

## WHAT AGENTS AND PUBLISHERS REALLY WANT IS A BOOK PROPOSAL.

Although you should include at least two sample chapters in your non-fiction proposal, you should not finish writing the entire manuscript until the publisher has accepted the project for publication.

Over the years, I have come to believe in the creative interaction between agent, editor, and author. The best non-fiction manuscripts come out of this process. You'll find that most other publishing professionals feel this way, too. Consequently, most want to give the author as much input as early in the writing process as possible. A book proposal gives those involved in the process that opportunity.

SO THEN,

HOW DO YOU PREPARE A GOOD BOOK PROPOSAL?

From my experience, a great book proposal needs to include five distinct elements (see [fig. 1, p. 4](#) for a complete outline):

1. QUERY LETTER
2. TITLE PAGE
3. PROPOSAL OVERVIEW
4. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SYNOPSIS
5. TWO SAMPLE CHAPTERS

**THIS KIND OF PROPOSAL WILL ACCOMPLISH TWO THINGS:**

- 1 It will help the agent or publisher better evaluate your book idea and decide whether or not he wants to pursue the project further.
- 2 Even if you have previously had a book published, you'll find tremendous value in preparing a formal book proposal. It will go a long way toward helping you clarify your own thinking about the subject before you get too involved in the actual writing process.

.....

In order to illustrate these principles, let's create a book proposal. Be sure to keep in mind, though, that this is only a hypothetical book proposal—an example. It is not an absolute formula to be followed blindly. (Also, if you want to write a fiction book proposal, please refer to my [Writing a Winning Fiction Query.](#))



**Figure 1:**  
Complete Book  
Proposal Outline

Query Letter

Title Page

Proposal Overview

- I. The Content
  - A. Premise
  - B. Unique Selling Proposition
  - C. Overview
  - D. Manuscript
    - 1. Manuscript Status
    - 2. Special Features
    - 3. Anticipated Manuscript Length
    - 4. Anticipated Manuscript Completion Date
- II. The Market
  - A. Demographic Description
  - B. Psychographic Description
  - C. Affinity Group
  - D. Competition
- III. The Author
  - A. Background
  - B. Previous Writing
  - C. Personal Marketing

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis

Sample Chapters





Though all good proposals mirror its basic form,  
each bears its own distinctive flavor as well.

Now with that in mind, let's get to work.

For the sake of illustration, let's assume that you are a financial planner. Through the years, you've observed that many of your clients' financial problems are the result of never having received adequate training in money management during childhood. You're convinced that if parents would do a better job of training in this area, it would spare them—and their children—a tremendous amount of grief later in life.

Because of your conviction, you've worked hard to train your own children. You've even developed a blog and a seminar around this theme. You've taught the seminar to a few parent groups and even a few churches. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Before long, several of your friends encourage you to write a book on the subject. Initially, you're flattered, and soon you begin to give the idea serious consideration. But where do you start? A book is such an enormous project! And how do you go about getting it published?

**THE ANSWER TO BOTH QUESTIONS IS  
A WRITTEN BOOK PROPOSAL.**

Before you actually begin writing a book, you have to decide two things:

## **What you want to say, and to whom you want to say it.**

In other words, you must determine the book's content and identify the book's audience. Once you've determined these things, it's time to go to work on the book's title. (We will actually create the query letter last, once we have the actual proposal done.)

## **CREATE THE TITLE PAGE**

The purpose of the working title is to focus your thinking as you develop the book idea. The working title should clearly encapsulate the book's premise. It might state the promise to the reader if he reads the book. It might even state the consequences if he doesn't. Sometimes the title will also include a subtitle.

Let's consider the hypothetical book we introduced previously.

*After a little work, you come up with the following working title:*

### **Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible**

*After a little more thought, you add the following subtitle:*

### **What Every Parent Should Know**

This title clearly encapsulates the book's premise and communicates the promise to the reader.

*I can't overemphasize the importance of developing a strong, catchy title. If the agent or the editor isn't "hooked" by the title, he will never open your proposal to see what is inside.*

Once you've come up with a title you need to remember that a working title is just that: a working title. **It's tentative.** You may decide to revise it later. Often the agent or the publisher will want to revise it. In any event,

**its purpose now** is simply to focus the development of your book idea and to **clearly—and quickly—**communicate your book's basic idea.

Type the title neatly centered on one page. You should enter the subtitle on a separate line, directly under the title. Also, type the date you are submitting the proposal. Finally, type your name, address, and phone numbers, and an e-mail address (see [fig 2, p. 8](#)).

## WRITE A PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

The proposal overview consists of three distinct sections:

1. **THE CONTENT** (What is the book about?)
2. **THE MARKET** (Who will buy this book?)
3. **THE AUTHOR** (Why are you the best possible author for this book?)

It should be no more than three to five single-spaced pages in length.



**Figure 2:**  
Sample Title Page

*A Book Proposal for*

# HELPING YOUR CHILDREN BECOME FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

*What Every Parent Should Know*

*Submitted by*

Frank B. Salyer  
2021 Old Hickory Place  
Nashville, TN 37012

Office: (615) 242-1901  
Home: (615) 791-2213

frank.salyer@gmail.com

*Presented on*

November 16, 2009

## 1. THE CONTENT

Once an agent or editor flips past the title page, he then wants to know what the book is about. You can best communicate this by stating the book's premise, setting forth a few other details about your book.

**Premise.** The premise is a two- or three-sentence statement of the book's basic concept or thesis. Usually, it identifies the need and then proposes a solution.

Let's return to the hypothetical book. What's the need you're trying to address? Isn't it the lack of training in money management that children are receiving from their parents? Or, to turn it around a bit, isn't it the failure of parents to teach their children how to become financially responsible that concerns you? After a little work, you come up with the following premise:

**Most children will leave their homes upon graduation from high school with little—if any—training in money management. As a result, they are likely to experience many years of struggle and frustration. The purpose of this book is to equip parents to teach their children the attitudes, principles and skills they need in order to enjoy a life free of financial hassle and heartache.**

Not bad. You've identified the problem, and you've said exactly what the book will do to solve it. And you've done it in three sentences!

Developing a good premise is one of the most difficult challenges of good writing. It is, however, absolutely vital.

**WITHOUT IT**, your writing will lack clarity and focus.

**WITH IT**, your writing is more likely to be strong and forceful.

It is well worth investing the time necessary to write a strong premise.

## UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

Now that you have a premise, you need to focus on how the reader will benefit from reading your book. This is what publishers often refer to as the book's "take away" value—what the reader can expect to "take away" after reading the book. It is sometimes referred to as the book's *unique selling proposition*, or **USP**.

This proposition clearly identifies what the reader will gain by reading the book (i.e., the book's benefits) and how the book will deliver it (i.e., the book's features).



The simplest way to arrive at a solid USP is to complete this sentence (fill in the information between the brackets):

If consumers in the target market purchase and read **[name of book]**, then they will **[list the book's benefits]**, because the book will **[list the book's features]**.

Now let's turn to our hypothetical book project, and create a compelling USP:

**If consumers in the target market purchase and read *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*, then they will:**

- ▶ Understand what's at stake in the financial training of their children.
- ▶ Be able to pass on the most important attitudes, principles, and skills children must acquire before they can gain mastery over the money.
- ▶ Learn effective ways of communicating to children about money—with examples and metaphors children can understand.

**Because the book will:**

- ▶ Provide specific examples of parents who have succeeded.
- ▶ Outline a simple technique for money management.
- ▶ Build parents' confidence in their ability to teach their own children.

This kind of unique selling proposition clearly communicates to the agent or editor reviewing your proposal that you know what you want the reader to get out of the book (see [fig. 3, p. 12](#)).

**Figure 3:**

Sample Proposal Overview

**OVERVIEW**

*Once you have a solid premise and a clearly stated USP, you need to amplify them through the development of a general outline. At this point, you don't need a detailed, chapter-by-chapter synopsis (this will come later). You just need to be able to communicate the book's overall flow. Your goal is to give the agent or editor reviewing your proposal the "big picture."*

**BOOK PROPOSAL OVERVIEW**

**HELPING YOUR CHILDREN  
BECOME FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE**

*What Every Parent Should Know*

Frank B. Salyer

**I. THE CONTENT**

A. Premise:

Most children will leave their home upon graduation from high school with little—if any—training in money management. As a result, they are likely to experience many years of struggle and frustration. The purpose of this book is to equip parents to teach their children the attitudes, principles, and skills they need in order to enjoy a life free of financial hassle and heartache.

B. Unique Selling Proposition:

If consumers in the target market purchase and read *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*, then they will:

- ▶ Understand what's at stake in the financial training of their children.
- ▶ Be able to pass on the most important attitudes, principles, and skills children must acquire before they can gain mastery over money.
- ▶ Learn Effective ways of communicating to children about money—with examples and metaphors children can understand.

Because the book will:

- ▶ Provide specific examples of parents who have succeeded.
- ▶ Outline a simple but effective technique for money management.
- ▶ Build parents' confidence in their ability to teach their own children.

C. Overview:

The manuscript will be divided into five distinct parts:

As a general rule, a nonfiction book should include at least three sections:

1. **Description of the problem or need,**
2. **Presentation of the solution, and**
3. **Amplification of the solution through concrete applications.**

As you develop the proposal for *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*, you need to identify the major sections. After looking back through your seminar notes, you come up with five:

- Part I:** The Road to Frustration and Misery
- Part II:** Five Attitudes Your Children Must Acquire
- Part III:** Five Principles Your Children Must Learn
- Part IV:** Three Skills Your Children Must Master
- Part V:** The Envelope System of Cash Management

Of course you will also need an introduction and a conclusion. But the three basic parts are there: Part I will describe the problem or need, Parts II–IV will present the solution, and Part V will amplify the solution through a concrete application.

Now that you have the major sections, you need to add a brief annotation to each, explaining in general terms what you intend to cover (see [fig. 4, p. 14](#)).



**Figure 4:**

Sample Proposal Overview

Continued

1. **Part I: The Road to Frustration and Misery.** Many adults suffer significant financial problems and heartache. Much of the pain is the direct result of never having been taught the simple principles of money management. Parents have within their power the ability to alleviate this pain. To do so, they must teach their children the right attitudes, principals, and skills.
2. **Part II: Five Attitudes Your Children Must Acquire.** If children are to experience success in money management later in life, they must first acquire the proper attitudes. Five of these provide a solid foundation for lasting financial peace: diligence, thrift, faithfulness, patience, and generosity. A chapter will be devoted to each attitude.
3. **Part III: Five Principles Your Children Must Learn.** The principles of money management are quite simple. There are five.
  - ▶ God owns it all.
  - ▶ You are His steward, responsible to Him.
  - ▶ Spend less than you make.
  - ▶ Pay God first, yourself second, and everyone else last.
  - ▶ Debt is dumb.

A chapter will be devoted to each principle.
4. **Part IV: Three Skills Your Children Must Master.** In addition to nurturing the proper attitudes and teaching the correct principles, a parent must also train children in three essential skills:
  - a) Developing a budget
  - b) Managing a checkbook
  - c) Making wise financial decisions

Again, a chapter will be devoted to each skill.
5. **Part V: The Envelope System of Cash Management.** One of the most simple, easy-to-administer financial tools is the envelope system of cash management. Parents will be encouraged to adopt this system in managing their own finances and they will then be given a scaled-down version of it for their own children.

A complete chapter-by-chapter synopsis is attached, giving a more detailed overview of the manuscript.

## Manuscript

Under this section, you need to cover the other details related to the manuscript. These would include the following:

### 1. Manuscript status:

Where does the manuscript stand? Have you begun writing? How many chapters are finished? How many words have you written?

### 2. Special features:

Are there charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs, etc.?

### 3. Anticipated number of manuscript words:

Generally speaking, each chapter should run between 4,000 and 7,500 words. In order to arrive at the approximate length of the manuscript, simply multiply the number of chapters by the average number of words per chapter. (Most all word processors have a word count feature that will automatically give you a total.)

### 4. Anticipated manuscript completion date:

When do you anticipate completing the manuscript? In other words, when will it be ready to submit to the publisher? You might want to set a goal of so many words per day, week, or month. Make sure you set a realistic date.

See [fig. 5, p. 16](#).

D. The Manuscript:

1. Manuscript status: Two chapters are completed (both are attached to this proposal as sample chapters).
2. Special Features: The manuscript will include various tables and charts, designed to graphically communicate important information in an easy-to-understand format. It will also include questions for discussion at the end of each chapter so the book can be used in small group study.
3. Anticipated length: 75,000 words.
4. Anticipated manuscript completion date: Approximately three months after receiving a commitment from a publisher.

II. THE MARKET

A. Characteristics:

The audience for this book will be middle- to upper-middle class Christian parents with at least a high school education who have children ages five through fifteen.

B. Motivations:

The audience for this book is made up of parents who have experienced frustration in their own lives as it relates to money management and, because they love their children, would like to spare them the same grief.

C. Affinity Groups:

1. Listeners of The Dave Ramsey radio and television show
2. Subscribers of *Money* magazine
3. Subscribers of *Parenting* magazine
4. Readers of financial books
5. People who have a professional relationship with a stockbroker
6. People who have a professional relationship with a financial planner
7. Financial counselors

D. Competition:

I have not found a single book on this topic.

**Figure 5:**

Sample Proposal Overview

Continued



## 2. THE MARKET

Once you've determined the book's content, it's time to identify the book's audience. To a large degree, you've already done this, especially in developing the premise. However, in this part of the proposal, you need to be more specific.

A good definition of the audience includes both its characteristics and its motivations.

### Characteristics

This is sometimes called the demographic description. **The term *demographics* refers to the external, objective characteristics of your audience.** It includes such things as gender, age, education-level, socioeconomic status, geographic location (if any), religious affiliations, and so forth.

Let's take another look at our hypothetical book, *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*. The first thing you'll want to consider is the kind of people who have already shown an interest in your message. (If you haven't delivered the message orally, you'll have to describe the kind of people you think would be interested.) After jotting a few ideas down on paper, you come up with the following demographic description:

**The audience for this book will be middle- to upper-middle-class parents with at least a high school education who have children ages five through fifteen.**

You must determine if the book is for men, women, or both. What is the reader's average age, income, political affiliation, and educational background? Try to describe the characteristics of the typical prospect.

**All you need now is a psychographic description to put “meat on the bones.” In other words, you need to make your description three-dimensional.**

## Motivations

This is sometimes called the psychographic description. The term *psychographics* refers to the study of the motivations that lead people to consider your product and ultimately purchase it. While demographics involve the external, objective characteristics of your audience, psychographics involve the internal, subjective characteristics of your audience.

DEMOGRAPHICS TELL YOU **WHO** AND PSYCHOGRAPHICS TELL YOU **WHY**.

*Why would the reader want to buy your book? What are his frustrations? What motivates him? What does he expect to get out of the book?*

Again, let’s look at our hypothetical book. What needs and frustrations are characteristic of the target audience? You’ve already said that the child has a need to learn money management. But the child is not going to be the one buying the book; his parents are. What are their needs? After a little thought you come up with this:

**The audience for this book is made up of parents who have experienced frustration in their own lives as it relates to money management and, because they love their children, would like to spare them the same grief.**

Now by combining these two definitions—the demographic and the psychographic—you will give the agent and the publisher a concrete idea of the audience you have in mind. But just as important, it will be an immense help to you as you begin writing the book. Specifically, it will guide you in your selection of appropriate vocabulary and illustrations.

If you were writing a book on marriage, a natural affinity group would be people who attend one of the many marriage seminars available. If you were writing a book on starting a new business, a possible affinity group would be subscribers to *Income Opportunities* magazine.

## Affinity Groups

The term affinity refers to “a natural attraction or feeling of kinship.” **An affinity group is a body of people who will likely have some attraction to your book based on their behavioral history.** Generally, you will think of and list several affinity groups.

Now consider our hypothetical book. What groups of people will likely be attracted to your message?

After a little thought, you come up with the following:

1. Listeners of The Dave Ramsey radio or TV show.
2. Subscribers of *Money* magazine.
3. Subscribers of *Parenting* magazine.
4. Readers of financial books.
5. People who have a professional relationship with a stockbroker.
6. People who have a professional relationship with a financial planner.
7. Financial counselors.

Notice that each group listed is identified by *objective* behavior.

These are groups that **(a)** will be most likely to respond positively to your book’s message and **(b)** the publisher can get to via one marketing vehicle or another.

*As Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, used to say, "Don't do anything that others can do or will do when there is so much of importance to be done that others cannot or will not do."*

## Competition

Before you commit a great deal of time and energy to writing a book, you need to know what else is available.

## Why waste your time writing a book that has already been written?

You may need to go to a bookstore and simply browse the shelves for books that address your subject or are in some way similar to the one you are proposing. Or you may want to search on [Google](#) or [Amazon](#).

### The issue here is twofold:

1. Is there a proven market for this kind of book, and if so,
2. How does this book differ from other books like it?

**DIFFERENTIATING YOUR BOOK FROM OTHERS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT.**

Now that you've described the book and its audience, you need to take a little time and help the publisher get acquainted with you, the author.



### 3. THE AUTHOR

Assuming the agent or editor is interested in the content and believes that there might, in fact, be a market, the next thing he wants to know is...

...*why* you are qualified to write it and  
*what* you are willing to do to help promote it.

#### Background

Describe your background, particularly as it relates to the subject of your book. Explain why you feel you are qualified to write the book. You may want to include a brief resume. Your academic credentials may be important, but you may have other qualifications that are just as relevant. If so, be sure to mention them.

#### Previous Writing

Tell the publisher about your previous writing. Have you written a book or magazine article before? If so, what was it, who published it, and how did it do? Do you have a blog? What is it about? What kind of traffic do you get (as measured in both “unique visitors” and “page views” per month). Do you have a [Twitter](#) account? If so, how many followers do you have?

If you’ve never written before, that’s fine, too; there’s a first time for everyone. Just make sure you give specific reasons why you are the person to write the book.

## Personal Marketing

A publisher cannot possibly do everything necessary to make your book successful. And most won't even try. Increasingly, publishers want to know what *you* can do to help promote the book. Consider the following:

- ▶ What important contacts do you have that might be willing to endorse the book?
- ▶ Are you presently speaking on the subject matter contained in the book? Are you willing to speak more? How many times per year? In what types of venues (e.g., conferences, churches, corporate seminars, etc.)?
- ▶ Are you currently blogging on the subject matter? If not, would you be willing to start a blog or participate as a "guest blogger" on someone else's site.
- ▶ Are you planning to write magazine articles based on the book?
- ▶ Do you have any regular media opportunities? Television or radio appearances? Even a regular show?

**III. THE AUTHOR**

## A. Background:

I have a B.A. in accounting from Michigan State University (1978) and an M.B.A. from Vanderbilt in Nashville. When I graduated from Vanderbilt in 1980, I went to work for Arthur Anderson where I worked for ten years. In 1990 I started my own financial planning business. I presently have thirty-five employees and 250 clients.

## B. Previous Writing:

I have begun publishing a monthly newsletter as a result of interest expressed at my seminars (copies available upon request). I have also had one article published in *Parenting* magazine. I've never written a book, but I think I would work well with an editor.

## C. Personal Marketing:

I have developed a seminar with the same title as the proposed book. I have taught it in eleven churches and am willing to teach two seminars per month as a means of promoting the book.

I will aggressively promote the book on my blog. I am currently have about 10,000 readers a month. I also have more than 2,500 followers on Twitter.

In addition, the *Morning Show* on Channel 5 television here in Nashville did an interview with me and a feature on my seminar. I received numerous positive comments following my appearance and also received seventy-five letters.

**Figure 6:**

Sample Proposal Overview

Continued

## DEVELOP A CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The purpose of a chapter-by-chapter synopsis or annotated outline is to give you (and the agent or editor) an overview of the book's structure.

**It should include the following:**

- ▶ Section titles
- ▶ Chapter titles
- ▶ Two-or three-sentence description under each chapter title of what will be covered in that particular chapter

See [fig. 7, p. 25](#).

In addition, this will convince the agent and the editor that you know where you are going—and how you are going to get there.

**You should pay particular attention to chapter titles.** Like the book's overall title, each chapter title must be interesting and intriguing. In today's environment, the mass media have negatively affected the attention span of the reading public. People rarely read a book in one sitting. Every time they pick the book back up, the next chapter title has to convince them to keep reading. Therefore, it is extremely important that your chapter titles "pull" the reader back into the book.



**Figure 7:**

**Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis**

**CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

**HELPING YOUR CHILDREN  
BECOME FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE**

*What Every Parent Should Know*

Frank B. Salyer

**Introduction: The Missing Course**

As important as money is to our success and even happiness, you would think our society would do a better job educating our children on how to manage their money. But, unfortunately, it doesn't. It is the rare high school—or even college—that even provides such a course as an elective, let alone mandatory. If our children are going to successfully manage their finances, as parents, we must take responsibility for their education. This book will show you how.

**Part One: The Road to Frustration And Misery**

**Chapter 1: A Rude Awakening**

This chapter will open with the story of Bill, a recent college graduate who finds himself in deep trouble because of his inability to manage his own money. Bill is not alone. According to a recent USA Today poll, most Americans find themselves in the same boat. The inability to manage money leads to all kinds of suffering and frustration. In fact, most Americans are broke by age sixty-five and dependent on the generosity of their own families or the resources of the federal government.

**Chapter 2: Dropping the Baton**

This chapter will open with the true story of an Olympic relay race—the team would have won, but the baton was dropped in the pass to the last runner. God gives parents the responsibility to teach and train their children. This responsibility is comprehensive; parents are to equip their children for life (see Deut. 6:4-9 and Prov. 22:6) and this includes the management of money.

**Chapter 3: Back to the Drawing Board**

This chapter will open with the story of Don and Martha, two parents who did things right. They taught their own children how to manage their money. As a result, they spared their children years and years of pain and financial hardship. This didn't happen by accident. Don and Martha started early, when the children were still in elementary school.

*These chapters don't have to be the first two in the book; and they don't even have to be consecutive. But they must be good.*

*This is your audition for the agent or publishing company and everything must go without a hitch.*

## WRITE TWO SAMPLE CHAPTERS

If you've done your work well, the agent or editor is now genuinely interested in your proposal. There is only one question remaining: Can this author really write? The only way to demonstrate this is to include two sample chapters (see [fig. 8, p. 27](#)).

### **I don't have space to tell you everything you need to know about writing, but here are a few quick pointers:**

- ▶ Each chapter should be **4,000 to 7,500 words**.
- ▶ **Begin each chapter with an attention-getting anecdote.** Readers love stories, and there is no better way to pull the reader into the content of your chapter than with one.
- ▶ **Break up the chapter using subheads.** A good rule of thumb is to use at least one subhead every two pages.
- ▶ If possible, also **include an anecdote or illustration somewhere under each subhead.**
- ▶ **Use active voice whenever possible.** If you don't know the difference between active and passive voice, get a good grammar book and spend some time studying it.
- ▶ **Carefully check the spelling and grammar of each chapter.** Your word processor will likely give you a good start. But if these areas aren't your strong suit, hire a copy editor who can do it for you. This will cost you a little money, but it will be well worth the investment.

**Figure 8:**  
Sample Chapters

## SAMPLE CHAPTERS

### Chapter One

#### A RUDE AWAKENING

“Money is only a tool. It will take you wherever you wish, but it will not replace you as the driver.”

—Ayn Rand

Bill dropped his head into his hands. He rubbed his eyes and stared back at his computer in disbelief. The numbers were still the same. His checkbook was overdrawn and he still had several bills overdue. How in the world had he gotten into this mess?

It has all begun so innocently. Bill grew up in a stable, middle-class home. His father sold life insurance and his mother had stayed home to raise Bill and his two sisters. His parents didn't talk about money much, except their frequent comments that there was never enough of it to go around. Nevertheless, he never seemed to be in serious want. He worked several odd jobs growing up but was always free to spend the money as he wished.

In his high school years, he spent most of it on his favorite hobby: restoring a 1955 Chevy to near-factory condition. Like most of his friends, Bill went immediately from high school to college. He learned many things while at the university, but no one ever taught him the fine art of financial management. Amazingly, since his dad had paid for college, he never seemed to miss it. Until now.

When Bill graduated, he was immediately offered a job as a civil engineer. Soon, without his even asking, preapproved credit cards began to appear in his mailbox. Visa, MasterCard, and even American Express all seemed to want his business. Somehow this made Bill feel important—like he had actually accomplished something. As he would soon discover, “not all that glitters is gold.”

## A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION

Remember, your proposal may be the only opportunity you will have to sell yourself and your concept to the agent or the publisher. **Therefore, take careful note of the following do's and don'ts:**

*Make every word count.*

*Make certain that you come across well.*

*First impressions make for lasting impressions.*

- ▶ **Do** be polite, respectful, and friendly; don't make demands or launch into diatribes.
- ▶ **Don't** claim your book is "certain to become a bestseller" or will land you an invitation to Oprah. This will only make you appear naive and unrealistic.
- ▶ **Do** make your proposal stylistically clear and direct. Keep it simple. Don't use big words or complex sentences.
- ▶ **Do** make certain that the proposal is neatly typed and systematically organized. Nearly everyone in the publishing world—agents and editors—uses Microsoft Word as the *de facto* standard. You will likely be emailing your proposal in this format or as a PDF document.
- ▶ **Do** make sure all your facts and figures, names and dates, people and places, are accurately noted; don't force the publisher to sift the wheat from the chaff.
- ▶ **Do** engage in a little market research, sending your proposal only to agents or publishers whose interests match the predisposition of your project; don't simply mail out a query to everyone listed in the latest edition of *Writer's Market*. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but be sure to note this in your cover letter (or email).



## WRITE YOUR QUERY LETTER

Now that we have the formal proposal done, it's time to write a query letter to go with it. This will serve as a cover letter to the proposal. Follow these seven steps (see [fig. 9, p. 30](#)):

1. **Do your homework.** Begin by identifying agents who represent books similar to the one you are proposing. Buy a copy of *Writer's Market* (be sure to get the current year, as some agencies close or change their preferences) and Jeff Herman's *Guide to Book Publishers, Editors, and Literary Agents*.
2. **Be personal.** Do not send a mass mailing with the salutation, "Dear Agent." This will guarantee an almost instant rejection, if not a one-way trip to the trash can. Instead, address the letter to a specific agent.
3. **State your intention.** Agents are busy. Therefore cut to the chase. Start by saying, "I am presently looking for a literary agent."
4. **Customize the letter.** Try to reference books the agent has represented that are similar to yours. In no case, should you send a mass mailing or emailing.
5. **Provide your premise.** You can lift this directly out of your proposal. This is the single most important item in your query. The agent will make a decision about reading further based on this.
6. **Give a brief bio.** Again, you can lift this straight out of our book proposal.
7. **Thank the agent.** The agent doesn't owe you a review. If he is any good, I has more opportunities than time. Be sure to thank him for taking time to review your proposal.
8. **Be open to feedback.** Agents are professional salespeople. They generally know what it is going to take to sell a publisher. State your willingness to listen to their feedback.

**Figure 9:**  
Sample Query Letter

Do not oversell your proposal.

Specifically, do not say:

- ▶ “I am sure this book will be a bestseller.”
- ▶ “I am confident Oprah will want me on her show.”
- ▶ “God told me to write this book.”

Any of these will guarantee your proposal will be rejected out-of-hand.

**FRANK B. SALYER**  
2021 Old Hickory Place  
Nashville, TN 37012

November 16, 2009

Mr. John W. Lazard  
The Lazard Agency  
2020 Broadway  
New York, NY 10020

Dear Mr. Lazard:

I am presently looking for a literary agent. After reading some of the books you represent—particularly *Poor Dad, Rich Dad* by Robert T. Kiyosaki and *The Millionaire Next Door* by Thomas J. Stanley—I feel that my financial book for parents, *Helping Your Children Become Financially Responsible*, would fit your interests.

My premise is this: Most children will leave their home upon graduation from high school with little—if any—training in money management. As a result, they are likely to experience many years of struggle and frustration. The purpose of this book is to equip parents to teach their children the attitudes, principles, and skills they need in order to enjoy a life free of financial hassle and heartache.

I have a B.A. in accounting from Michigan State University (1978) and an M.B.A. from Vanderbilt in Nashville. When I graduated from Vanderbilt in 1980, I went to work for Arthur Anderson where I worked for ten years. In 1990 I started my own financial planning business. I presently have thirty-five employees and 250 clients.

I have enclosed a complete proposal for your review, along with two sample chapters. This is my first book.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. I am also open to feedback and would be grateful for the opportunity to explore how we might work together to find an appropriate publisher.

Sincerely,

*Frank B. Salyer*  
Frank B. Salyer

## CONCLUSION

Preparing a book proposal like the one outlined here will require a considerable investment of time and thought on your part. However, this kind of investment will pay substantial dividends later when you begin the actual process of writing. More important, perhaps, it will go a long way toward actually improving your chances of getting published. Who knows? The next book you read may be your own!

.....

**Michael Hyatt** is the Chief Executive Officer of Thomas Nelson Publishers. He has been involved in the publishing industry for nearly thirty years. Prior to becoming the CEO of Thomas Nelson, he served in a variety of roles within the publishing industry, primarily in editorial and marketing. He also served as a literary agent for several years.

He has also written four books, one of which landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list where it stayed for seven months. His most recent book, *The How of Wow*, is scheduled for publication in the fall of 2010.

He and his wife, Gail, have been married for more than thirty-one years and have five daughters.



## CONTACT

You can connect with Michael here. Just click on the button or the link below:



Blog: <http://michaelhyatt.com>



Twitter: <http://twitter.com/michaelhyatt>



Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/michaelhyatt>



Speaking: <http://michaelhyatt.com/speaking>



Email: [michael@michaelhyatt.com](mailto:michael@michaelhyatt.com)

## COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 1998–2009 by Michael Hyatt. All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means—except for brief quotations in published reviews—without the prior written permission of the author.