Book Workshop
Crafting Your Book Proposal, Identifying a Publisher, and Navigating Peer Review

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During this workshop, you will learn strategies for:

1. Building your book proposal
2. Identifying and evaluating potential publishers
3. Submitting your proposal
4. Navigating peer review

This workshop is based on Writing and Publishing Your Book: A Guide for Experts in Every Field by Melody Herr (Greenwood, 2017)
Part 1: Building the Components

1. Argument
2. Title
3. Table of Contents
4. Description
5. Cover Letter

Method for Generating a Title

- Keywords
- Different Forms of Keywords
- Different Configurations of Keywords

Example: Aligning the Title and Table of Contents with the Argument

Argument: Over the past 60 years, nuclear plant accidents, the rise of the environmental movement, and the fortunes of the coal industry shaped perceptions of personal health and environmental risks, as illustrated by the story of the nuclear energy debate in Pennsylvania.

Title: The Nuclear Energy Debate: Changing Perceptions of Risk among the American Public

Table of Contents

Introduction: Debatable Risks

Chapter 1 Coal versus Nuclear Energy: The Devil You Know

Chapter 2 Three Mile Island: The Meltdown of Public Optimism

Chapter 3 After TMI: The Half-Life of an Accident

Chapter 4 Chernobyl: Those Reckless Russians

Chapter 5 Human and Environmental Health: Old King Coal on the Defensive

Chapter 6 Copiapó and Fukushima: Criminal Negligence or Acts of God?

Conclusion: The Relativity of Risk
Part 1: Building the Components

Secret Formula for a Seductive Book Description

• Attention-grabber
• Context and significance
• Argument
• Evidence and study’s distinctiveness
• Findings and ramifications

Questions the Cover Letter Must Address

• Who are you?
• What’s your argument?
• Why does it matter? To whom does it matter?
• What’s your book about?
• What’s special about your book?
Part 1: Building the Components

Example: Cover Letter

Dear NAME OF EDITOR:

Today, the search for alternatives to fossil fuels centers on solar and wind power. Nuclear energy rarely comes into the conversation; yet in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, its champions persuasively promoted it as an inexpensive, safe, clean energy source. When – and \textit{why} – did Americans strike nuclear energy from their list of options?

In the proposed book, I demonstrate that over the past 60 years, nuclear plant accidents, the spread of the environmental movement, and the fortunes of the coal industry influenced perceptions of the health and environmental risks of nuclear energy. Focusing on the Three Mile Island nuclear accident (1979), I examine the debate in Pennsylvania from the 1960s through the 2010s and draw comparisons with the debate in three other coal-producing states, Illinois, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

Do we need another book on the nuclear energy controversy? Engineers identified the technical causes of the TMI accident, political scientists traced the development of nuclear regulations, and cultural historians documented the fear and fascination surrounding nuclear science. Yet none of these studies offer a close-up view of the controversy’s chief actors as they responded to distant calamities as well as mishaps next door. Most important, none reveal how ordinary citizens evaluated the risks and benefits of nuclear energy in terms of the jobs they needed to pay the bills, the cost of the energy they used to heat their homes, the safety of the water their children drank, and the beauty of the mountains where they hiked.

This is the man-on-the-street perspective which I offer. Drawing on interviews with miners and local residents, nuclear plant employees and coal company executives, state legislators and city council members, I capture the range of personal experiences. By searching energy industry statistics, national news stories, state legislative archives, and US Nuclear Regulatory Commission records and reports, I place these personal experiences in the national and global context. Although I build on a sturdy historical framework and incorporate social science analyses, I construct a lively narrative with real characters engaged in conflicts with very high stakes.

Indeed, in Pennsylvania, one of the nation’s largest coal-producers and home to the nation’s worst nuclear accident, the stakes were clear. For this reason, Pennsylvania provides an ideal focal point. But the conclusions and implications of my study reach far beyond the state’s boundaries as the global debate over energy continues.

Along with this cover letter, I enclose my CV, a table of contents with a summary of each chapter, a draft introduction for the book, and one sample chapter. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this project with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE BLOCK
Part 2: Identifying and Evaluating Potential Publishers

Your Goals

What are your personal and professional goals?
What kind of publisher will best serve your goals? A trade house? A commercial scholarly publisher? A university press?

Where to Look for Potential Publishers

Your own bibliography or citation management system
Book review sections of prominent journals in your field
Exhibitors at the major conferences in your field

Questions to Investigate for Each Publisher

Books and Series

• Does the press publish books in your field? How many titles appeared in the past two years?
• Does the press publish series in your field? What credentials do the series editors have?
• Have recent books won major prizes in your field?
• Do the leading journals and websites in your field review books published by this press?

Submission and Review Process

• Does the press conduct peer review? If it is a university press, does it have an executive committee or a faculty advisory board which must approve the manuscript before publication?
Part 2: Identifying and Evaluating Potential Publishers

Design and Production Quality

- Are the book covers attractive?
- Does the interior design complement the style and quality of the contents?
- Does the press provide competent copyediting?

Marketing and Distribution

- Does the website look inviting? How easily can you find books in your field?
- What is the price range for books in your field?
- Does the press offer exam copies for instructors?
- How does the press market its books?

The Author’s Experience

- What do other authors have to say about their experiences with this publisher?
Part 3: Submitting Your Proposal

Components of Your Book Proposal

- Cover Letter
- CV – make sure that your qualifications for writing this book are clearly evident
- Table of Contents
- Book Description
- Publisher’s Submission Form

Proposal Checklist

- Understand the publisher’s exclusive/multiple submissions policy
- Check the editor’s name, the name of the press, and the title of the series
- Proofread all components of the proposal
- Use the correct submission form
Part 4: Navigating Peer Review

Reviewers’ Assessment

- Research and Analysis
- Argument and Evidence
- Organization and Presentation
- Comparison with Other Books on the Topic

Template for a Response Letter

1. Thank the reviewers.
2. Briefly mention the features of your project which the reviewers praised.
3. Discuss the reviewers’ chief criticisms, by category, and how you intend to address these them.
4. Explain reasons for rejecting a reviewer’s recommendation.
5. Declare your eagerness to work with your editor and the publishing team.
6. Thank the editor for collecting the reviews and championing your project.