

Book Proposal Masterclass JUNE 2020
Questions for Caroline and Therese

ON REPRESENTATION

- Caroline, I am intrigued by what you are interested in specifically when you say you are interested in science books. What might be an example of a book that you would point to for what you are looking for? I do have a platform in the scientific domain, but not in the genre I am writing in so I'd really love to hear what the general public would find of interest – Ann Daugherty

Have a look at my bio and client list on our website:

<http://www.hardmanswainson.com/agents/caroline-hardman/> – eg, Daniel M Davis's *The Beautiful Cure*, and forthcoming *Infection* by John Tregoning and *This Mortal Coil* by Andrew Doig. In general, there's a very wide range of popular science books published in all fields / disciplines of science – it's about making science appealing and accessible to a wide audience and telling the stories behind the discoveries and the people involved. Others I'd love to represent include *I Contain Multitudes* by Ed Yong, *the Emperor of All Maladies* by Siddhartha Mukherji, *It's All In Your Head* by Suzanne O'Sullivan, *The Gendered Brain* by Gina Rippon. There are many!

- Caroline you mentioned that very visual books are more expensive to publish and that having a decent following is important for a publisher to know that there is a good chance the book will sell well. I don't have a following - a few hundred - and my book is a foodie book, so very visual with photographs (although also a decent amount of text). And I am not famous or an expert in my field. All I have is photographic and storytelling ability and a LOT of passion about my subject. Is there any chance an agent would take a gamble on an unknown author with a potentially expensive book to publish and not much of a following or would it be an automatic no because it would probably be a hard sell to a publisher? – Lynne Kennedy

There are exceptions – the idea itself would have to be really unique and have great commercial appeal. The 'Roasting Tin' series of cookbooks by Rukmini Iyer are an example of the publisher taking on an unknown author on the strength of the concept. They've gone on to be bestsellers. They have a clear hook, they're simple, well done, and fill a gap in the market.

- My proposed book is about my experiences of living in the Kruger National Park and contains personal stories about living in the staff village, working in a medical practice in the bushveld, discovering nature, wildlife, silent places in the park and high quality colour photography to illustrate my stories. Stories : Photographs = 60 : 40. I have spent some time searching for an agent in South Africa (Namibia is just too small) as my book is set in the Kruger National Park in South Africa. I think I have found one possible agent and it seems that most Publishers in S.A. don't require entry through an agent. So I'm wondering how one would go about any other avenues like foreign rights etc (not sure if my book falls in that category). Would it

be better to look for an agent in the UK perhaps? I am attempting to find stats on UK visitors to KNP, but the only accessible one so far is 2001 when the UK accounted for 20% of annual visitors and was clearly on the increase. Annabelle Venter

I think as this is a specialist book a local or specialist nature publisher would be best and they would handle translation rights. With photographic books, publishers often acquire world rights. Without going into too much detail, it's better in those cases.

- Would an Agency in the UK be at all open to representing African travel/photography/biography type writing? Is there a market for this type of book or should I rather just go with approaching a local publisher directly?
Annabelle Venter

Travel – especially illustrated – is often difficult. I think I'd try to go direct to travel publishers for this, or else agents that have a particular travel focus.

- If I manage to get a publisher in S.A. is it then theoretically possible to get an agent in the UK after it is published? Annabelle Venter

If you mean for the same project, there'd be no point for you or the agent? If you're thinking about future projects, then you could do so but you'd need to have new material to submit for them to consider.

- If you query an agent, and get no response, is it acceptable to re-work the proposal and re-submit your idea to the same agent or agency? – Kerrie More
Some agents might say no, but why not – best to acknowledge you've sent it before and reworked it.
- Is it poor form to query more than one agent in an agency? And if I am interested in a particular agency, is it risky to query a more "senior" agent with a long-list of writers already, or would it be strategically more advantageous to reach out to a newer member of the team who may be building their list? – Kerrie More
It depends on the agency's policies. We prefer that you target your submission to one of us, rather than all of us. We do sometimes share stuff between us if we feel something might be more suited to a colleague. RE: experience versus space – tough call! I would go for the agent who sounds more suited to the work. It can be advantageous to go for an agent with more space on their list, but experienced agents do still like to find new work! I don't think there's one right answer there.
- I looked at the submission requirements for an agency that interests me that said: 'For nonfiction, send a query letter including a brief bio, a synopsis/proposal and the first 25 pages of your manuscript.' Could I safely assume that this request for a "synopsis/proposal" is for exactly what we have been creating in this course with Beth? Is the term "proposal" fairly universal in its expectations? – Kerrie More
Yes! I think any agent would be very pleased to get a proposal on submission of the calibre that's created on Beth's course.
- In the early-stages of landing an agent or book deal, I would anticipate a serious discussion about how long it would take the publisher to receive the final

manuscript. As an agent, is there a general time-frame that pleases the industry? If you are working out a deal with a publisher for a 60,000 word non-fiction book, would 12 months be typical? 18 months? I know it probably varies, but I want to be realistic and prepared. I have looked at Beth's timelines that she shared with the class, but I get the feeling that her word-counts are a bit shorter than what I am projecting. – Kerrie More

It depends how time sensitive the topic is or whether the publisher would like to publish for a certain date. If there isn't any particular time sensitivity, then 9-12 months is probably good to aim for (depending on your other commitments).

- What's the x factor in a submission that makes you think "I need to sign this person?" What proposal section does that a-ha usually come in for you? What did the people you've been most excited to sign put in their submission that made you so excited? – Kayte Ferris

For me, with non-fiction, it's probably the overall idea / pitch that would initially hook me in and excite me. If I think it's a strong, engaging and saleable idea, then I look for writing ability and platform / what makes that person the perfect person to write the book.

- I'm Italian, living in France, and writing in English. Where should I find an agent and publishing company? I know that this is quite unusual, but even though I'm Italian I prefer to write in English - Cristina Colli
If you're writing in English, you'll need an English language agent in the first instance. Most likely UK based, depending on what you're writing about. There are also some European agencies that take on writers in different languages (eg, Susanna Lea) so you could do your research there.

- As a native German (who also did and can write in English) is it better to propose a book in German or in English? I'd like to write for the English market as well. Is it smarter to start there directly? – Anka Hoerster

It depends what the book is about. If you can get a deal in an English speaking territory, it's probably easier to be published there and translated rather than starting with German, hoping to get English translations (which is rarer – unfortunately). But if you feel it would have stronger resonance with the German market, start there. If you want to get an agent, it depends on their primary market too.

- I envision using some of my photos in my book, to illustrate some chapters. Should I add a few samples of my photography to the book proposal? If I did that would I be receiving royalties for the photographs too, or only for the book? - Cristina Colli

For commercial reasons, think carefully before adding photos in the book (as it can increase publishing costs significantly). If they're your photos, the publisher would expect you to have the rights to them – you wouldn't get royalties for those, just for the book. If it's intended as a photographic book and you want to take the photos, then you need to include images in the proposal.

- My book is a creative almanac responding to the desire many people have to slow down and simplify by giving the reader the keys to reconnect with the seasons. You referred to a webinar in the "publishing now" video and I wondered if it was publicly available?

No, this was a private webinar by publishers for agents.

- If so, can I reference the info you shared on reader needs in my proposal? I ask because the needs for routine, self-sufficiency, the boom in home learning and the importance of the domestic sphere perfectly complement my proposal research. – Rosie Steer

I'm afraid not – I don't have the exact facts on this and it was second hand information. Worth searching online for similar webinars available to the public.

(Note from Beth: Also look to thebookseller.com / publishingweekly.com and at some of the interviews on <https://www.writingroutines.com/>)

- I'm based in Edinburgh and was wondering if, in your professional opinion, working with a local literary agent would be better from a practical point of view? If I did that, do you think I would be at a disadvantage not being based in London, and not having an agent based in London? – Rosie Steer

The UK is pretty small – either is fine. We're based in London, but we hail from all over the UK (and Belgium!) and we don't all live in London anyway. I represent authors from all over the country and abroad. It's definitely not a disadvantage! We want authors who aren't London-based and agencies who are outside London can do just as good a job. It is good to be able to meet your agent, if you can, but you could also do that by Zoom or similar if you can't make the trip (though be prepared to come to London to meet publishers if you can). Go for the agent you feel would best represent your work.

- I have an agent but in personality terms we're not a great 'fit'. I'd ideally like to get another agent. I haven't formally ended my association with her (and as per my contract, as is pretty standard I think, she will still handle affairs for my previous two books after I do). I don't want to upset anyone or even worse, make a bad impression on a new agent – but ending with her before even looking for another also feels like possibly too vulnerable a leap. How should I handle looking for a new agent? Do I need to leave my old agent first – or will new ones understand if I say I think it's time to try someone new? And if so, how should I phrase that? It's a tricky situation and I'd really appreciate your and view. - Sheila Chandler

In my opinion, it's fine to query other agents before you formally part ways with your current one. We get that it feels risky otherwise. You can phrase it as you've done here – that you feel it's time for a change and to find someone who feels a better fit (always be as positive as you can about the previous agent). Then if you find another agent, you can give notice to your previous agent. Keep everything polite and respectful (I am sure you would!).

- If you're in the U.K. is it best to use a U.K. publisher/agent or can you pitch to USA ones? – Claire Maguire

You can query anyone, but for the UK I think you're best served by an agent here, unless your book has a particularly US specific appeal

(And the opposite...)

- I reside in the US but would like to pitch to an agent in the UK, is that good business practice? Or should I only pitch to US agents? If I can pitch to a UK agent, what would be the best way to approach this? – Jane Stoudt

I would go for the US – best to have an agent in your home market unless there's a very good reason to go for a UK agent.

- My book is a Holocaust memoir, and a book I was reluctant to write in the first place due to its subject matter but the book also follows my personal journey from reluctance to falling in love with my little survivor friend Sam and becoming passionate about sharing his story. My ten months spent with him turned out to be the last ten months of his life, and so I have a flame to carry. Naturally my biggest audience for the book is the Jewish population. I was born Jewish but with a very irreligious upbringing, to that end I have very little affinity and connection with my book's audience. While I will do all it takes to get my book and Sam's story out there, the exercises over the last few days have made me realise there is a huge void between my writing, my book, indeed my passion and then the audience. For a biography/memoir like this, how much does the platform matter? Do I have a chance? – Rik Arron

There is a huge appetite for stories about the Holocaust, particularly from survivors. It doesn't matter about how religious your upbringing was and the market is way wider than just the Jewish population. The market is particularly big for anything Holocaust or WW2 related in the US, but also worldwide. Your platform would be irrelevant here. The quality of the writing and how you tell your story is far more important.

- If an agent or publisher rejects you, will they usually give you a reason? – Sally Jupe
Varies by agent, but mostly unlikely – we don't have the time. I give feedback occasionally if I feel something was more promising.
- Realistically how much could an advance from a publisher be? And what are publishers looking for when they decide to give an advance? – Ceri
How long is a piece of string! There are so many variables. Advances can be as tiny as a few hundred pounds/dollars, up to millions (incredibly rarely). All sorts of factors: idea, platform, commercial appeal, how much competition there is for the book, how timely it is, and how many copies they think they'll sell across formats and markets.
- How long does it usually take to get a decision from a publisher? – Ceri
Again it varies, but I tend to know within about 4 weeks whether something is going to fly. Often for non-fiction it can be quicker.
- When checking Amazon rankings for comparable books to the one that I am working on, most tend to be below 30,000 (I imagine this is because topic of poverty, society,

etc. is more niche). However these were still published by reputable publishers. Are lower rankings less of a concern for more niche subjects, or when aiming for more niche audiences? – Keetie Roelen

Rankings are affected by all sorts of things, such as when the book was published, how much advertising is behind it at that moment, and Amazon's algorithms. If the subject is niche, it's going to be less popular, and therefore have lower rankings generally.

- Do agents and publishers specialise in certain (niche) topics, such as popular science, society and politics and social justice? And if so, what is the best way of finding out about them? Any particular suggestions for agents and/ or publishers would be very welcome! – Keetie Roelen

Yes agents have different areas of interest. Agency websites, social media / online interviews, and other online resources such as the Writers and Artists' Yearbook are the best place to find out about agents' interests.

PROPOSAL CONTENT

- My book is a non-fiction narrative of my journey with pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). I am struggling with the "Why me / about the author" sections as my book will be based on my intense personal experience and research rather than any qualifications around this topic. In terms of my background, I have degree in psychology and sociology. I then went into the field of market research. Once I became a mum, I also started a side business of calligraphy and graphic design. After my second maternity leave, I did not return to market research, but have been juggling family and my business for nearly 2 years now. I'm not sure how to make any of this relevant towards my book in the proposal though so it would be good to hear your thoughts on what to do if the expertise comes from experience rather than academia. – Merrie Haig

Your book is more personal and less based on expertise, so you don't need to worry about qualifications per se, though your degree is relevant to mention. The quality of the writing will matter more in this instance.

- I thought my book was going to be a memoir, but now I'm leaning toward self-help. I would love your opinion on what women in middle age with self-worth issues would be most likely to read. My book is about understanding childhood emotional neglect as the underlying cause of chronic self-doubt and low self-worth so that real healing can occur. I have professional expertise on this topic as a pediatric nurse practitioner specializing in pediatric mental health. I also have a compelling personal story experiencing emotional neglect throughout my childhood and living with its effects throughout adulthood. Would it be best as a memoir with added professional analysis or self-help with added personal stories? – Andrea Pacquette

I would go with your instinct on this – hard to judge on the basis of just this information. Memoir is much more about the quality of the writing and sense of story. Self-help is more about what you can offer others to help them overcome their difficulties. You can blend personal anecdotes – yours and other people's – into

self-help. Perhaps read some relevant successful memoirs and self-help books to get a sense of how others do it and how you feel most comfortable writing it.

- My idea is a collection of tales, Amrutha Tales - short stories inspired by ordinary people doing extraordinary things, reflecting eternal these of courage, love and positivity. It is called Amrutha Tales as the name Amrutha means 'nectar of immortality' in Hindu, and is associated with the Goddess with the divine power to transform dreams into reality, and to illuminate the path to your goals. One of my tales is about a very special place called The Amrutha Lounge in London which inspired this. I have 2 further follow ups planned: Ilamula Tales, is a set of stories all from the grannies that live in a squatter camp outside Johannesburg, from a charity that we support and my third one, called Tullamore Tales, is a set of tales from my family who grew up in Tullamore, in rural Ireland, in the 50s. The common thing about all 3 pieces is the way I write them, and the short storytelling style. My question is - should I work on all 3 proposals at the same time, or really put all my focus into the first one - Amrutha Tales? – Emma Simpson

Do they really need to be 3 different projects? You should focus on making one proposal that's really strong.

- My second question is about the genre, and the place for this. Beth pointed me towards 'Chicken Soup for the Soul' earlier today, and although I am very aware of it as a concept I had never read the book. It sounds like a similar premise, and I am aware it was wildly successful and really is a whole industry in itself. My question is whether there is room for anything else in this kind of genre, considering how huge Chicken Soup is? And if there are any other obviously competitors that spring to mind? – Emma Simpson

Do you mean is there any room for more self-help? There seems to be endless room for more self-help, but inevitably some will be more successful than others! There's a whole world out there of books of this kind, so use Amazon, online resources and bookshops to have a look at what else is out there, what's worked well, and what you have to offer that you haven't seen.

- My book has 34 chapters, some of which are very small. What does this mean for me submitting 'a sample chapter' with my proposal? Is there a suggested number of pages instead? – Rik Arron

The sample needs to be a chunk of writing so we can get a flavour for it. There are no hard and fast rules. If your chapters are short, include 3.

IMAGES IN THE PROPOSAL

- My book is a lifestyle book full of photo stories and interviews with growers and florists as part of a celebration of British flowers. I am a photographer myself and would love to do the photography myself- in which case, would I submit a portfolio of images along with my book proposal? I was also wondering if I would need to self fund shoots further afield as part of the process? I imagine this would be covered by

the advance if I was successful but would love to hear more about the process for this type of heavily image based book. – Lisa Grigsby

If it's a photographic book and you want to take the photos, then you need to include images in the proposal. With funding, it does depend on the project. If they were to acquire cookbook author, they would arrange for photos and pay for the shoot, if they felt it needed photos. But for this where the photos element is an essential part of the book you're proposing, I imagine publisher would be unlikely to fund shoots. Photographic books are already hugely expensive to produce, so also funding the shoots would be a stretch. I don't handle highly illustrated non-fiction though, and these things vary case-by-case.

- How do I approach the matter of photography being an integral part of my book, if it's non-fiction/part memoir/part biography? Is there a format for submitting images in the proposal or recommended number of samples one should add? - Annabelle Venter

Consider carefully the inclusion of photos. For a memoir, I think they'd want to publish B&W integrated photos rather than full colour. No hard and fast rules with the proposal: Just include a few photos that give a flavour and indicate in the proposal how many you envisage in the book. Make sure that the proposal file isn't too large when doing this – think about making it a low res PDF.

- Does it depend on the publisher's vision for my book or how much of a say do I have in the images and format? - Annabelle Venter

The publisher makes the decisions about design and format. They'll take an author's views into consideration, but it's always ultimately their call. Best to have these conversations before they acquire the book, so you know what they want and there's no crossed wires later on.

MANUSCRIPT LENGTH

- What is the recommended manuscript length for an illustrated (with photographs) non-fiction book? (I envisage some spreads with just writing, but about 40% of the book with an image on one side and story on the opposite page. A 20x22 cm book perhaps, soft firm cover) - Annabelle Venter

Really sorry but I can't answer this as illustrated books vary hugely.

MARKETING

- Due to the nature of my work (I am a Clinical Psychologist), social media is actively discouraged and my regulating body advises that we have pseudonyms, meaning I don't really engage with social media and have false names for personal accounts. My plan is to generate a separate page/ social media account for the book itself once agreed and engage comms specialists to support that journey. My question is do I include that plan to show what I intend to do or stick to explaining what I do now? (For example I speak at a lot of large conferences every year so I have a wide and engaged reach and a very active LinkedIn profile, but not on any other social media). – Stephie Sunshine

Start by making more of what you do now – your wide engaged reach. Then you can explain that social media isn't an approved part of what you do, but you plan to build an audience around the book. I think that's fine – sounds like your expertise is your platform here (ie, platform isn't simply about social media).

FOR THERESE

- Do books ever get altered when they are translated for other countries or not translated but sold in other English-speaking countries? I ask because I think Beth's *Calm Christmas* is a different word length in the US than in the UK. I can also surmise that sometimes there may be a perceived need for some editing in some cultures when translated into another language. – Ann Daugherty
It's not unheard of, but it doesn't happen very often, and it is only ever done with the author's approval. An author might ask to write a foreword or additional chapter or two in order to make the book more relevant to a specific country. Occasionally something may be removed, if it goes against certain accepted teachings or views in certain countries (eg in China), but again, it would get run past the author before a deal is agreed.
- In your interview with Beth you mentioned having a pitch line that you use to hook international editors to see if they want more - is it a good idea to include this kind of pitch line, perhaps at the start of the overview, for agents and UK editors? Or is this something you would come up with yourself? – Kayte Ferris
If you have come up with a pitch line or can come up with one, definitely include it in your submission. It's a very useful exercise to do anyway, as you have to really boil your book down to its core, in a stand-out kind of way. As with the blurb though, we do always work with the author to sharpen it or come up with something snazzier for when we submit it to publishers ourselves.
- It seems like international rights are mostly done on a country-by-country basis, but how does it work when a country has multiple official languages (for example, Switzerland)? Would that require separate rights for each? Or will one publisher handle translations for multiple languages? Similarly, what about countries that tend to be grouped together culturally + linguistically (BeNeLux, the Nordics, etc.) - would this still be done on a country by country basis or does it vary? – Jitna Bhagani
This is a really good question! It's on the whole (though there are exceptions) more done on a language, rather than territory, basis. So for instance we will set global Dutch rights to a Dutch or Belgian publisher, who will then publish that book in both countries. Similarly, German, French and Italian publishers will be able to publish in Switzerland. For certain languages, the territories can, but don't have to be, separated. So we can sell global French rights to a French publisher, allowing them to publish in French in Canada, or sometimes we will be able to sell to a Canadian publisher separately. Similarly, we can sell global Spanish rights to a Spanish publisher, or we can stick to Spanish rights in Spain, and then find a publisher in Mexico. Same with Portugal and Brazil. In the Nordic territories, we do tend to stick to separate countries and languages for every contract.

- You mentioned (in your interview with Beth) that there's a big English language market for books in other countries and that local publishers want to avoid people turning to the UK exports, so does that mean they will also commission local English versions of books (in addition to translated copies) or is that something that would be handled by a UK publisher but sold abroad? – Jitna Bhagani

We only sell publishers abroad the right to translate and publish that translation in their country. The UK publisher will often be able to sell English-language copies of their edition in those countries, which is where that slight tension comes from. Publishers in Germany and the Netherlands especially will make an effort to publish their edition at roughly the same time as the UK publisher, so they can encourage their readers to buy their edition.

- I'm curious how it works if you have a particular market that your book is relevant for (for example, my future book being sold in India and other countries where there is a large Indian diaspora population). Does the author get to make this suggestion or is this influenced in any way? Or do you just leave this up to the agent + publisher to see where it is going to be sold? – Jitna Bhagani

We always talk our authors through our submissions strategy (both in the UK and abroad), so will discuss any territories here we or the author think the book has a particularly good chance. We do find that there are always surprises, and that some markets respond in unexpected ways. Somewhere you might think your book is particularly relevant, might come back saying that they already have books on that topic, or that they would only publish a book on said topic from a local author, so we can never guarantee that a book will sell particularly well or badly in a specific country. I would just try to remain open to anything, and not pin your hopes on one specific market, but obviously any thoughts can be discussed with the agent.