



## **Week 2 Audio Transcript**

### **Sally Collins Pitching To Publishers**

#### **How A Proposal Can Help You**

You'd be surprised how often a covering letter says something like, "Here is my novel. I hope you like it" and that's pretty much it. A letter like that makes me think that the author can't articulate what their book is about, they can't tell me who they are or what they want from (or offer in) their writing, and they certainly can't tell me why they approached my company. All the written communication from an author is an indication of how they write, from their cover letter to their emails and all points in between. Good writers refine their query letters several times.

Writing a proposal is about more than simply securing a publishing deal. It is also an incredibly useful exercise to focus your mind – for example, you might find by writing your outline that there's some fundamental flaw in the structure of your manuscript that you need to fix. The act of writing a proposal helps you to think about everything that needs to happen after your book is published – marketing and publicity ideas, and focusing on events that might make your book particularly relevant, interesting or provocative right now.

Think of your proposal as the DNA of your book. If you are successful and land a deal with a publisher, your proposal will be the basis of the company's understanding of your book. It will help the editor, the publicist, the sales force, and the cover designer to know what your book is, even before they read it (and some of those people will never

read the full text of your book). Your book will go through various incarnations and stages of production on the way to reaching the bookstore, but the DNA remains constant.

Think about the time ahead, when you have signed a contract with a publisher. You'll need to be able to talk about your book to the publisher, maybe you'll need to meet with the marketing team about ways to sell it. You might go to bookshops to do signings, so you need to be able to talk to potential readers about your book. You might do talks at your local library about how you wrote the book and the ideas that are in it. You might do media interviews when the book is released, so you need to be able to talk with journalists about your book. In all of those cases, you need to be ready to present your book in a clear and compelling way to people who have not yet read it. You want to get them excited enough to put their energies into selling it (in the case of your publishing team), or (in the case of readers) excited enough to buy it.

I wanted to mention a few things that you shouldn't include in your proposal. This is about being clear about your purpose and the purpose that an agent or publisher will have in mind.

- Never include reviews of your work by other people. No agent or publisher will be impressed if you tell them your friends or family enjoyed your story. Only one opinion matters, and that's the opinion of the professional reading your proposal. The exception is if you have an endorsement from an absolute authority or a household name: if Peter Carey says your writing is sublime, then do mention it. If your university lecturer says the same thing, do not include it.
- Don't request advice or comments. An agent or publisher will only give you feedback if they feel
- the urge to. They can't give feedback to every proposal they see. I find that once I offer feedback, I open the door to start a conversation that I don't want and don't have time for. For instance, an author might not like or agree with my feedback, and they might respond by arguing with me – which is just a waste of my time. My business as a publisher is not to provide a critique of your work.

- Don't send multiple stories per query. Even if your story is the first book in a series, you should only mention one novel per query. You are trying to sell the novel you have completed. If you have other stories you'd like to publish, send separate proposals for them or wait to talk about them until after you've signed with an agent or publisher. (If your novel is part of a series, you can mention that in your proposal, but don't get into the detail of the titles or plot points of other books.)

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