

Nonfiction Proposal Quick-Reference Checklist

Companion to the *Editor's Eavesdrop* panel summary

editorialdepartment.com/editors-eavesdrop-what-agents-and-acquisitions-editors-really-want-in-a-nonfiction-book-proposal/

IS THIS THE RIGHT PATH?

BIG FIVE / MAJOR TRADE

- Broad public or cultural appeal — not niche or academic
- Fresh angle with clear commercial potential
- For memoir: public profile, strong platform, or highly distinctive hook

UNIVERSITY PRESS

- Research-based, scholarly, or credentialed
- Can withstand peer review
- Not a mainstream memoir or general-market title

If neither fits → consider small press or self-publishing.

YOUR CORE PROPOSAL

WHY THIS BOOK?

- Timely, necessary, addresses a clear reader need
- Feels essential, not optional

WHY YOU?

- Credentials, lived expertise, and authority are evident
- Voice carries weight — professional or personal

WHY NOW?

- Connected to current cultural or market interest
- Not already oversaturated

PLATFORM — IT'S ABOUT REACH, NOT FOLLOWER COUNT

- Engaged email newsletter or mailing list
- Speaking gigs, workshops, or courses (with future opportunities)
- Podcast hosting or frequent guest appearances
- Presence in a niche field or defined community

Key insight: 2,000 loyal readers often outweigh 20,000 passive followers.

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE — WHAT EACH READER FOCUSES ON

- Overview (250–300 words): hook, market position, urgency
Hussain reads this first — her reaction often determines whether she continues.
- Author Bio: demonstrates authority and direct connection to subject matter
Hussain reads this second.
- Query Letter: strong vision and clear author authority
Chun's primary entry point.
- Comparative Titles: recent, relevant, shows market awareness
Curry's focus — shows you understand your book's place in the market.
- Chapter Summaries + Sample Chapters: logical progression, no repetition, sustained voice
Coleman reads cover to cover; each section should build momentum into the next.

MEMOIR — THE EXTRA BAR TO CLEAR

- Answers 'why should a stranger care?'
- Universal themes embedded in personal experience
- Distinct or unusual perspective — not just a compelling life story
- Professional-level writing that stands out in a crowded genre

Common failure: interesting life, no clear market frame.

FINAL READINESS CHECK

- Can you describe this book in one compelling paragraph?
- Is your audience specific and clearly defined?
- Does each section build — not repeat — the same selling point?
- Does your concept clearly justify the length of a full book?
- Would an editor immediately understand where it sits in the market?

If not, keep refining before you submit.