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## Writing a book proposal

Many people feel that they “have a book in them”. That is, for many people, it is a bucket list item that “One day, I’ll write a book.”

There are, of course, many different types of book. While you may have always wondered if you could write a work of fiction, a crime story, a romance novel, a book of poetry, etc, this article is about writing an academic book. There are, similarly, different types of academic books. Most of what follows applies equally, regardless of the type.

All books, whether hardcopy or e-books, need a publisher. The publisher takes care of practical considerations such as editing, layout, printing, pricing, advertising, selling, and so

on. There are three main types of publisher:

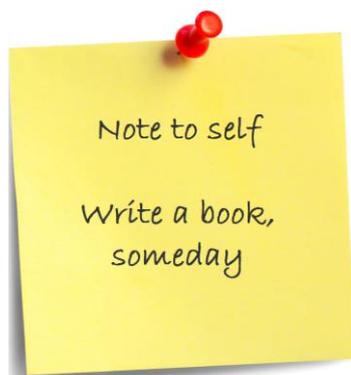
- self-publishing
- predatory, parasitic publishers
- proper academic publishers

The third category is the only one that carries any reputation in academic circles. In the first two, there is no review process, and no independent editing and proofreading process. In self-publishing, all the weight of printing, advertising and selling, with associated costs, falls on the author. Predatory publishers may ask authors for payment, may not pay any royalties, and usually do not carry out print runs of the book until or unless copies are actually ordered. The dangers of being published by such a company are summarised by Wikipedia (n.d.). At the end of the day, you may see (one complimentary copy of) your book in print, receive no royalties and, most importantly, receive little academic kudos. Such a book, for instance, would carry little weight for PBRF.

The reliable method of publication is to use an established publisher. The book will then undergo a review process, usually by

two academics, a contract will be agreed and signed, the manuscript will be professionally edited and proofread, with layout by a graphic artist, it will be printed in high quality, and marketed through established channels. You will also receive royalties; they may not amount to much, depending on the type of book, the sales, etc. Nevertheless, the payment of royalties is a contractual policy to acknowledge you as the creative author of the work.

It is important to remember that publishing a book represents a substantial financial investment by the publisher. As a result, they have a lot of say as to the contents of the book, etc. An author should therefore follow the publisher’s instructions and guidelines about the procedure, contents and format of a proposed book. It is obviously better to get a book published, even if it turns out to be not quite what you envisaged in the first place, than to have a publisher reject a proposal because you insist that your (perhaps not very business-minded) ideas of what the book should be are right.



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*"If you have a great idea for a book, do not write the book."*

For the publisher, it is therefore a business decision whether to publish your book or not, taking into account the bottom line of whether they think the book will sell. In business communication, two fundamental elements are always emphasised: audience and purpose. Who are you communicating with, and what are you trying to achieve by communicating? In this case, you are writing a proposal for the publisher, and you are trying to convince them that your intended book is a good business prospect. Your proposal should therefore be written in persuasive language, including all information that helps to achieve this. In this respect, it is rather like the start-up plan that forms the basis of many of our student applied management projects. You are trying to convince the audience to invest in your idea.

If you have a great idea for a book, do not write the book. Instead, approach an appropriate publisher with a proposal.

They will then decide whether they want to publish it, "as is" or in modified form, and give you a contract to sign. Then, and only then, you write it. Otherwise, you may end up with a book that has taken you many hours to write, and nobody to publish it.

All reputable publishers have "Guidelines for authors" on their website. These tell you the dos and don'ts of writing a proposal and writing a book, including making sure that you understand how much information the publisher needs in order to decide whether to publish. The following sections describe the information that publishers typically ask for.

#### **Background, rationale, aim**

This is a general paragraph or two that set the scene, and explain why you thought of proposing this book. In brief, it introduces the subject, explains who is likely to buy and read the book, and perhaps relates it to your teaching experience. It is rather like an abstract for what follows.

#### **Title**

Give your proposed book a title. It is likely to be a provisional title, and may well change on the basis of (i) suggestions from the reviewers and the publishers' marketers, and (ii) your own thoughts, after you have actually written the manuscript, and it turns out to be somewhat different from what you originally envisaged.

Make sure the title captures the main subject of the book. Cute titles may work in fiction, but are usually inappropriate in academic writing. If necessary give a main title, plus a subtitle. The main considerations are that it is clear to a potential reader what the book is about, and that the book can be found easily when searching online.

#### **Structure, chapters**

Include a table of contents that shows how many chapters you plan to have. Show if there is some structure to the chapters, e.g. the first three chapters are on X, the next three on Y, and the final four on Z.

Some indication of the contents of each chapter are usually required. This can take the form of a short paragraph, or a bulleted list of points.

Some publishers ask for at least one sample chapter. This is not a huge amount to ask for, bearing in mind that the proposal may be rejected. However, it does give the publisher and the reviewers a clear indication of the style and tone of the book, whether you are a competent academic writer, whether the editor/proofreader will have to do a lot of work in order to bring it to publication standard, etc.

#### **Market**

This is probably the most important part of the proposal. If nobody is likely to buy the book, the publisher will reject your proposal.



Who is the book primarily aimed at: students, lecturers, academics, teachers (pre-service or in-service), institutional libraries, etc? Will people buy class sets of the book, or will they only buy individual copies? Will the book be used in classroom exercises, or will it only be bought, read and referred to? Are there specific courses at specific institutions that will make the book a set textbook or recommended reading? Will the book only sell in New Zealand, or also in Australia, Asia, Europe, the USA, worldwide?

### Competition

What books are already on the market that cover similar ground to your proposed book? How does your proposed book differ from those books? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Is there a USP (unique selling point or proposition) that distinguishes your proposed book from all the others? Is it that your proposed book is more up-to-date in a fast-changing field?

### Format

What kind of publication are you proposing? Is it simply a book? If so, the decision as to whether it should be published in hardcopy as well as a modern e-book is the publisher's.

How long is the book you are proposing? Do not give a figure in terms of

number of pages, as this varies depending on the layout, font size, etc. Instead, give the estimated number of words. If you have written a sample chapter, you can (i) find the length easily by using MS Word's Word Count, and (ii) then estimate the overall length of the book.

If the book is for classroom use, is there a student's book and a separate teacher's book with extra guidance about how to use the material?

Nowadays, many books have a Companion Website, hosted by the publisher. This may contain supplementary material such as additional readings, colour images, test banks, a teacher's manual, video links, annotated website links, a glossary, PowerPoints, soundfiles, etc, depending on the nature of the subject.

Publishers are always keen to know if the book will contain many diagrams, illustrations and tables. These often have to be re-produced by a graphic artist in order to be of publication quality, and that all adds to the cost.

Similarly, material that you use, but over which you do not hold copyright, will probably need to be checked for copyright permission from the copyright holder. Fair use for academic purposes allows you to use a reasonable amount as quotations, properly

referenced. However large passages, especially if they are creative literature, as well as graphics re-produced "as is" from the original source, will probably need copyright permission.

### Timeline

The publisher probably uses freelance editors and proofreaders, and graphic artists. They all need to know when the manuscript is likely to be ready, so that they can plan their workload. It is better to be realistic than optimistic in stating a deadline.

### CV

Many publishers ask for a brief CV, say one page. The purpose of this is to gain reassurance that you are qualified to write this book, if they agree to publish it. The three main persuasive items are therefore (i) qualifications, (ii) work experience, and (iii) previous publications. If you have had a book published previously by a reputable publisher, this will carry weight.

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*"Is there a USP ... that distinguishes your proposed book from all the others?"*



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*“Above all, ... try to be persuasive.”*

### Referees

If you feel you are expert enough in a field to write a book about it, you probably have a worldwide network of professional colleagues in the field. In contrast, the publisher may not know many people in the field. They may ask you to suggest 3 – 5 people who would be qualified to be reviewers of the proposal.

These people may be almost personal friends of the author. As a result, the publisher may not actually use those people, but at least they give the publisher an indication of the field and where you stand in any debates within the field.

Above all, remember that your proposal, like any proposal, should try to be persuasive. While not including anything that is of dubious truth, make the best argument of the information you do include.

Wikipedia (n.d.). *OmniScriptum*. Retrieved from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OmniScriptum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OmniScriptum)

### Conferences

11 – 13 July 2018  
CITRENZ 2018 conference  
“Innovation, Technology, Education”  
Wellington  
[itx.nz/CITRENZConference](http://itx.nz/CITRENZConference)

20 – 22 July 2018  
22nd Business Administration,  
Managerial Economic & Financial  
System Forum  
Mercure Hotel, Sydney  
[csg.review-maer.com](http://csg.review-maer.com)

5 – 7 October 2018  
CLESOL (Community Languages and  
ESOL) conference  
“Transforming our landscape”  
Christ’s College, Christchurch  
[www.clesol2018.org.nz](http://www.clesol2018.org.nz)

27-28 October 2018  
Melbourne International Business and  
Social Science Research Conference  
“Innovation in Research and Research  
Training”  
Melbourne  
[www.melconference.com.au/public/](http://www.melconference.com.au/public/)

1 – 2 December 2018  
Australian Academy of Business  
Leadership  
“Collaboration and networking beyond  
regional boundaries”  
Scenic Hotel, Auckland  
[www.anz-conference.com.au/public](http://www.anz-conference.com.au/public)

11 – 14 February 2019  
CAUTHE conference  
“Sustainability of tourism, hospitality  
and events in a disruptive digital age”  
Pullman International Hotel, Cairns  
[www.cqu.edu.au/about-us/structure/schools/bl/cauthe-2019](http://www.cqu.edu.au/about-us/structure/schools/bl/cauthe-2019)

## Staff outputs

Presentations at the CRIE conference “Online learning in international education”, 15 – 16 January

- Addison, A.** (2018). NZ tourism boom but have we considered the community experience and are we getting the balance, right?
- Addison, A., & Taumoepeau, S.** (2018). NZ volunteer tourism abroad in Tonga.
- Addison, A., & Taumoepeau, S.** (2018). Training gaps in selected tourism destinations of the South Pacific offering pathways and possible solutions to narrow these identified training gaps.
- Ali, E.** (2018). Online and distance education in Bangladesh: The teacher’s perspective.
- Al-Shamaa, S., & Pranish, T.** (2018). International students’ perceptions on Plagiarism: A case study of Postgraduate students in the Business Administration Programmes, Auckland Institute of Studies, New Zealand.
- Brown, A.** (2018). The impact of technology on spelling.
- Chen, B., Lawson, A., & Theresa, Z.** (2018). Preparing future hospitality stars: An investigation into the soft skills required for the hospitality industry from a student’s perspective.
- Griffiths, C., & Parvin, S.** (2018). Flipped, blended and online: A 21<sup>st</sup> century technological methodological cocktail.
- Lakhani, S.** (2018). Improving business forecasting.
- Lakhani, S.** (2018). Strategies during recessionary times.
- Lakhani, S.** (2018). The ideal blend of face-to-face and online learning for international students.
- Losekoot, E., & Theresa, Z.** (2018). Retirement home managers: Education and industry experience.
- Memon, S., Watts, M., Kumar, R., & Choe, K. W.** (2018). Evaluating the role of performance support systems for students’ academic success.
- Menzies, L.** (2018). A review of two approaches to peer assessment for selected business courses at a tertiary institution in New Zealand.
- Parvin, S., Sadman, N. A., & Victoria, S. B.** (2018). Brexit: Opportunities and challenges for New Zealand.
- Spring, J., & Losekoot, E.** (2018). A time and place for Kaitiakitanga and Manaakitanga in New Zealand’s tourism product? Developing a research strategy to examine inter-cultural use of indigenous concepts in sustainable tourism development.
- Subramaniam, G., Shahariah Asmuni, Fauziana Fauzi @ Mat Rawi, & Jamaliah Mhd Khalili** (2018). Teaching methods and enhancing students’ engagement in a classroom.
- Taumoepeau, S.** (2018). You don’t have to travel abroad to get the benefit of international education. A case study of Tonga and Samoa tertiary training programmes.

## Other outputs

- Ali, E.** (2018). Internationalisation of education and delivery model. Keynote presentation at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Financial Markets: Issues and Challenges, Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu, India, 6-7 January.
- Griffiths, C.** (2018). Developing learner autonomy through learning strategies. Plenary delivered at Annual ELT and Applied Linguistics Conference, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, February.

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See us at:  
[www.ais.ac.nz](http://www.ais.ac.nz)

We're also on Facebook!

- Griffiths, C.** (2018). Strategy training for autonomy in ELT: Keys to success. Workshop conducted at Annual ELT and Applied Linguistics Conference, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, February.
- Hennessy, J.** (2018). Review: The clinical effectiveness of a cognitive behavioural therapy intervention in a work setting: a 5-year retrospective analysis of outcomes. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. doi.org/10.1177/1744987117746275
- Jackson, K. E.** (2018) What makes poverty? *Tui Motu InterIslands*, 223, 12-13.
- Losekoot, E., & Theresa, Z.** (2018). Retirement villages: Hospitals or hospitality operations – Management attributes and traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 34, 75-81.
- Soruç, A., & **Griffiths, C.** (2018). English as a medium of instruction: students' strategies. *ELTJ*, 72(1), 38-48. doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx017
- Soruç A., Dinler A., & **Griffiths C.** (2018). Listening comprehension strategies of EMI students in Turkey. In Y. Kirkgöz & K. Dikilitaş (Eds) *Key issues in English for Specific Purposes in higher education* (pp. 265-287). English Language Education, vol 11. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-70214-8\_15
- Subramaniam, G., Ali, E., Brown, A., Osman, I., Muhamat, A. A., & Parvin, S.** (2018). *Report on feasibility study of Islamic banking in New Zealand: Perception and awareness among potential customers.*
- Subramaniam, G., Dzulnain, S. M., & Maniam, B.** (2018). Presenteeism over productivity: Perception of the Malaysian female labour market. Presentation at the the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Precarious Work and Vulnerable Workers, Auckland University of Technology, 31 Jan – 1 Feb.

## About Auckland Institute of Studies ...

Auckland Institute of Studies is a unique tertiary institution with a distinctive international focus. Since its inception, this developing institute has attracted students and staff from countries around the world and has now developed a number of close relationships with leading educational institutions internationally.

### Our programmes

Master of Business Administration  
Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration  
Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration

Graduate Diploma in Business  
Bachelor of Business

Postgraduate Diploma in Information Technology  
Graduate Diploma in Information Technology  
Bachelor of Information Technology

Graduate Diploma in Tourism Management  
Bachelor of Tourism Management  
New Zealand Diploma in Tourism and Travel (Level 6)  
New Zealand Diploma in Tourism and Travel (Level 5)

Graduate Diploma in Hospitality Management  
Bachelor of Hospitality Management  
New Zealand Diploma in Hospitality Management (Level 6)  
New Zealand Diploma in Hospitality Management (Level 5)  
Licence Controller Training (LCQ) (Level 4)  
New Zealand Certificate in Food and Beverage Service (Café Services) (Level 3)  
Barista Skills Certificate (Level 3)  
Food Safety Certificate (Level 3)  
English as a Foreign Language Certificate in TESOL

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