Sample Book Chapter

by Author Name

When putting together a nonfiction proposal, it’s important to have sample writing, but not your entire manuscript–unless specifically requested [see here for the reason]. So how many chapters should you include?

A good rule to follow is to include the introduction along with chapter one and two. That said, there are often reasons to deviate from this.

I often guide authors to submit a good sampling of what their actual manuscript will look like. For example, if you spend the first section discussing history or research in your manuscript, then also include another chapter or two from the middle of your manuscript so agents/editors can evaluate your writing from your other sections as your tone and subject matter will be different.

If your chapters are on the shorter side, you may want to include more so agents/editors can view more of your writing instead of just a few pages.

A few things to keep in mind:

Your proposal as a whole (including sample chapters) should not be more than 50 pages or you run the risk of the entire thing not being reviewed.

Your sample chapters should showcase your book, so pick the introduction (your proposal overview introduces the book to the agents/editors; your introduction introduces it to your readers) as well as the ones that best represent your concept and writing.

Your sample chapters should be long enough for authors/editors to experience your writing. If you’re unsure and your proposal is under 50 pages, include another chapter.

Have a few additional chapters completed that are not included in your proposal in case you receive a request for more.

While you don’t have to have your entire manuscript written yet, you must know how your book will be laid out [see Chapter 4 for why].

Bonus tip: have your proposal reviewed by a few peers before you formally submit to an agent. Do they want to read more? It’s important to lay out your book so reviewers understand the entire concept and then leave them wanting more.