



The 3Cs of Publishing

Literary agents and publishers invest hours looking through piles and piles of proposals in search of new authors to publish. And every single one of those agents and publishers looks for the same three things in **every** proposal they review.

Agents and publishers use different words for the three elements and that's fine—the words aren't what's important here. The concepts themselves are what is vital. Why? Because they perfectly triangulate **everything** a publisher or agent needs to initially know and see about you and your proposal.

For the sake of clarity, we have named them, "The 3Cs." How you express the "Cs" within the context of an industry appropriate proposal is a critical success factor in making a great first impression on an agent or publisher.

CONCEPT, CROWD, AND CRAFT

The 3Cs are elements needed for a successful book, and each author has a different expression of each of the Cs. The intersection of these parts is both fluid and dynamic, expressing the personality, gifting, and ability of each individual author. This allows each author to shine in the areas they are most gifted in while getting support in the areas that need to be strengthened. The Cs provide a way for agents and publishers to evaluate where an author is and how to support and encourage them going forward.

When we speak of the fluidity within these elements, we are simply recognizing that each author is at a different place with each of the Cs than the next author—and that's ok—with some important caveats.

When evaluating a proposal, our agents give three possible "points" to each C (with 1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest). Therefore, a proposal could receive a maximum score of 9.

Let's review each component individually.

CONCEPT: HOW BIG IS THE IDEA?

This is the area we find that has the most upside for new authors and one that a well-crafted proposal **will** highlight. A wise person once said, "*The minds of men [and women!] are not inflamed by small ideas*" and when it comes to literary agents and acquisition editors, it is most certainly true. These professionals have seen it all.

While very few book concepts are new, is what you are contributing to the overall conversation fresh? Relevant? Inspiring? Intriguing? Why is your concept going to get the attention of an agent or publisher? What makes it unique? Answering these questions can help your proposal move to the top of the proverbial pile!

This C is the one area that an author can affect the most change in the short term, and taking the time to sharpen your idea and its eventual articulation can pay big dividends. This is especially important if, like many first-time authors, describing your following as a “crowd” would be a bit overstated. Our proposal development services can help you hone your messaging.

CROWD: HOW BIG IS YOUR PLATFORM?

Platform. It feels like it’s both an invisible 800-pound gorilla and the proverbial pink elephant—dominating publishing decisions but really not talked about all that directly. Not too many editors or agents want to be “that guy,” you know, the one that is only about the business side of publishing and not the art.

The fact is, gone are the days when authors just wrote a great manuscript and then let the publisher do the work of marketing. Publishers have cut way back on their promotion budgets, and authors are expected to be more involved by strategically articulating how they will use their circle of influence (platform) to engage and sell to their audience.

Regardless of whether it’s talked about or not, an agent or acquisition editor *is* going to pay close attention to this portion of your proposal, and how you present this information is very important. Not that many authors are a 3 or even a 2, so don’t lose heart. Demonstrating thorough knowledge of your target reader and a laser focus on developing a following can help mitigate concerns of both agents and publishers. Showing progress in your efforts is very important.

CRAFT: HOW GOOD IS THE WRITING?

We give every publishable author a rating of 1 to begin with. In our experience, 85–90 percent of published authors fall into this category, so it’s not bad—in contrast to many of the writing samples we receive, you’re publishable!

The number of writers we rate as a 2 in *Craft* is in the 10 percent range and writers that receive a 3 rating is less than 5 percent. Here is the honest truth: You won’t become a significantly better writer in the next six months but the important thing is for you to know where you are at—today. Own who you are as a writer and continue to work at your craft.

IN CONCLUSION: NO, THIS IS NOT A FOURTH C

...it just kind of worked!

You have worked so hard! So make sure you invest the time to craft a proposal that gives you an opportunity to be signed by a literary agent and/or publisher!

Just like first dates, first impressions are important with literary agents and publishers! Acquisition editors in particular talk about “proposal fatigue,” which is a state of mind, a kind of numbness that comes with looking at so many proposals, especially poorly crafted ones. We’re here to make sure your first impression is a good one!

Don Jacobson
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