

The Proposal

It would be rather splendid if our pictures just spoke for themselves, silently bringing a coalition of editors, agency art buyers, distributors, curators, stock library directors, gallery visitors and general-purpose lovers of photography together around the table. But unfortunately, that doesn't happen. Instead, we must talk and write about our work and, in order to garner interest in it, write proposals.

The proposal, with some variation depending on market, has two purposes: an inward purpose and an outward purpose.

The inward: it helps the photographer to reflect on their work; why am I interested in this; how feasible is it; how will I go about it?

The outward: you are selling the idea to a potential market, markets, or audience; who is it for; how will it work; what's the appeal?

Your proposal should not be overlong, but this will vary depending on purpose. For example, an editorial proposal should be succinct while still getting across all necessary points; an application for funding or a residency will, by necessity, be more detailed and therefore longer. All proposals should have the following:

Set the scene: Draw your audience in, entice them, create an emotional response.

Describe: Pack in all the necessary details that supports the proposal – information to garner a favourable response.

Bona Fides: Instill in the reader's mind that you are committed and capable. Confirm your track record, subject knowledge and research.

Sell it: What are they getting; how does this fit the client's requirements?

Selling an idea is key here and is related to the market you are aiming your work at. Is your proposal generic or specific? Reportage/photo-essay pieces may sit within a weekend supplement looking for strong work on a multitude of themes. If you create a photo-essay about a sport's team for example, it may appeal generically in this way, but would also appeal to special interest magazines relevant to that sport. A story about some social issue or crisis, is more likely to appeal to the newspaper and news magazine market.

As a degree student, you will have to write about your work in multiple forms: contextual studies, visual research in books and blogs, artist statements and, most of all, proposals. Use the proposal to refine your ideas, consolidate and consider the purpose of your work.