FAQ for Books

I’m an author. Where do I begin?
I’m a book editor. What’s expected of me?
Here are the tasks common to each book project.

Initial steps:
- Draft a book outline (developed by project editor)
- Submit a proposal to the book publishing committee
- Identify authors (your list of chapter contributors)

Once the proposal is approved:
- Obtain chapter outlines from your chapter authors
- Draft a development schedule with deadlines (set by project editor)

Work is underway:
- Receive first drafts
- Review, comment on, and mark up first drafts
- Obtain revisions/second drafts from authors
- Final review
- Assemble all appendix material
- Assemble front matter (your biography, contributor biographies, foreword, introduction, preface, acknowledgments, etc.)
- Submit for final approval

Book production:
- Review page proofs (6 to 8 weeks after production begins)
- Make minor corrections
- Book is ready to print!
- Answer marketing survey; help solicit reviews for your book

How should I enlist contributors?
You want experts as authors. You don’t want to pick someone who needs to get up to speed on a subject. You need someone who has this as a core area of interest.
**What’s in it for me as an editor or author?**
Increased visibility, an important contribution to the section (and the bar association), and a means of promoting your practice. Many of the section’s authors say that authoring a book leads to other writing and speaking opportunities. The section also offers substantial discounts to authors on copies of the book, making it possible to give copies of the book to existing and prospective clients to highlight your expertise.

Don’t forget the qualitative benefits: Whenever you take the time to write something, it truly sharpens your edge. People who are constantly writing or speaking are honing their skills.

It’s a good way to leverage material you have used before. Have you written an article for a newsletter? You can expand on it and update it for a book chapter. (Bear in mind that chapters in books need to be original works geared for each particular ABA book; self-plagiarism must be avoided.)

The section occasionally pays a small royalty on certain types of books. These are (1) single-author books and (2) books with no more than three authors. Royalties are not paid on edited volumes (i.e., multi-author works).

**Should this be an article or a book?**
**Length:** Much depends on the length of the manuscript. For a book, we’d like a minimum of 100 pages. **Timeliness:** Books are never going to be as cutting-edge as articles, in part because of the time it takes to assign the chapters, receive them, review them, obtain revisions, and then move the book into copy-editing and production. **Scope:** It’s O.K. for an article to scratch the surface; a book must provide more information, more context, and a logical means for navigating the material.

**What if we see a need for a book on that subject anyway?**
Identify the underlying truths and consistencies, and adhere to them. Be practice-oriented. Help readers find ways to make sense of a given practice area. Don’t disappoint readers by trying to keep up with changes in the law within the pages of your book, especially if more changes are expected. By the time the book comes out, the information could be out of date.

**What’s the shelf life for a SciTech book?**
We want books that have staying power of at least a few years. New editions and updates are always popular.

**What kinds of books have staying power?**
Simply put, books that help readers become better lawyers. Successes include books that compile, in a single place, the small, nitty-gritty details of a specific area of the law. That said, the book must have a framework and a narrative that pulls everything together. A compilation of lists does not a book make. People are already overwhelmed by Too Much Information, and if the major elements of your book can be found via Internet search, there’s little reason for people to buy it.
If the law in a particular subject is in flux, it may not be the best time to publish a book on the subject. Our strengths are in publishing practical, practice-oriented books enhanced by succinct legal analysis. This approach distinguishes ABA books in the legal publishing marketplace.

Who are our readers, and what do they want?
It’s good to have a typical reader in mind when working on a book or writing a chapter. Think of the in-house counsel who has – maybe – an hour to get a good grasp of things. If a book lacks a practical emphasis, it could seem too esoteric, and that’s when you’ll start losing your readers. Most people don’t have time for that.

That said, make sure that the material is covered to an appropriate depth. Don’t give people a false sense of proficiency in a particular area by handing them a surface treatment of a subject. We cannot assume a “here’s the answer to all your problems” approach, but we must be practical. Shoot for a balance of ready, easy-to-access solutions based on a foundation of solid knowledge.

What else are readers looking for?
Where possible, offer practical tools. These can include, either within the book or as appendices:

- Sample letters
- Sample forms
- Checklists
- Bullet-point lists of key points

What’s the average page length of a SciTech book?
They can range from 100 pages to 600 or 700, but the optimal length is 300 to 350 pages. This is equivalent to roughly 400 to 500 manuscript pages. An estimated page length is required in the book project proposal, and the book publishing board requires authors and editors to adhere to this page estimate.

What happens once I submit my manuscript?
With approval from the book committee, these steps will take place:

- Copyediting – the manuscript is reviewed for grammar and style. As a general rule, text is edited in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Page composition – the copy-edited pages are composed according to ABA and section standards.
- Page proof reviews – authors receive a proof copy of their book or chapter(s); these are usually sent as PDFs and are due back as soon as possible. Focus is on correcting egregious errors without rewriting text.
- Page proof corrections – the proof mark-ups are incorporated into the book.
- Indexing – once the book’s pagination is set, any back matter is developed (index, table of cases, etc.).
- Front matter – the book’s table of contents is created and all front matter is sent to lead editor/author for proofing. All contributor biographies are checked.
- Final file – once all corrections have been made, the final file is sent to the printer.
What kind of support may I expect from ABA Publishing?

In the proposal stage:
- Help in focus your approach to the subject
- Identification of similar books published by the ABA
- Review of your proposal before it is sent to the book committee
- Development of a business case for your book

Manuscript development:
- Help with style and formatting questions
- Recommend of best practices that work for similar books or projects
- Tips on the best way to reach your audience
- Informal reviews of draft chapters
- Help in arranging reviewers for your final draft

Marketing:
- Pricing and creation of custom cover designs
- Creation and updating of product pages for the ABA web store
- Design and copy-writing for space ads with ABA Journal and section periodicals
- Preparation and monitoring of budgets and sales reports, tracking costs, reprints and inventory
- Preparation of sales materials for purchase by online retailers, trade bookstores and international markets
- Implementation of specific marketing campaigns including direct mail, email, testimonials, on-site meeting sales, publicity and special offers

Give me your tips for enforcing deadlines. Two of my authors simply won’t deliver.

Does the book absolutely depend on the chapter(s) you’re waiting to receive? If so, call in help from the project liaison, the book committee chairman, or ABA Publishing. You may need to devise a work-around or reassign the chapter(s). Bear in mind that the longer you hold the project for latecomers, the more stale the other chapters risk becoming. Ultimately, there are cases where you’ll have to tell contributors that the book will go to press without their chapter(s) if the material is not sent in time.

When will my book be in print?

On average, ABA Publishing books have a 4-month production cycle from receipt of the reviewed and approved manuscript to availability through the ABA Web Store.