

How to Write a Book Proposal, Advice from 7 Agents and Published Authors



By The Editors September 10, 2019 Career

Book proposals act as a business plan for your book that will hopefully convince a publisher to invest.

But how does one write a compelling book proposal?

Here are some things you need to remember, according to agents and published authors:

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Dianna Booher, MA, CSP, CPAE



Author of 48 books | CEO, [Booher Research](#)

Emphasize your book's uniqueness

When I start a new book or when coaching clients to shape their book idea, we start to do preliminary research for the *"Competitive Analysis"* or *"Comparative Analysis"* section.

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REPORT A

Almost without fail, we find a multitude of other books on the same topic. The key to selling the new book is finding a unique angle on the topic.

Your book might be unique for many reasons:

- A unique format (A condensed version? An encyclopedic treatment? A quiz format?)
- A different tone (Humorous, lighthearted? Serious treatment? Researched, academic reporter style? Expose?)
- Access to new research? New photos? New data/polls?
- Historic panorama of the topic?
- A contemporary update on an old topic?
- New analogy or metaphor that provides new perspective?
- New sources for interviews?
- New theory or solutions?

In short, the editor must see the topic in a unique light to justify “one more book” on the subject.

Neil Gordon



Consultant | Advisor to New York Times Bestselling Authors

The false assumption that most people make about book proposals is that they need to only talk about the book as a concept. But book editors slog through dozens of these a week and, depending on the imprint, may acquire fewer than 1% of all submissions.

They're not only hungry for a genuinely gratifying reading experience but they want to be absolutely clear that the book being proposed is a sure thing. Some tips to ensure the certainty that this is a book worth investing in include:

Ignore conventional wisdom with a summary at the beginning

This is a book, not a research paper. Start the book with a compelling story to grab the editor right away – start the proposal in the same compelling way you'll presumably start the book itself.

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Share the story of your platform and not just the stats

It's true that publishers aren't going to take a chance on an author who doesn't have a following. But rather than just list the number of people on your email list or in your social media following, show how much it's grown and how quickly (if that's actually what happened).

Don't just state that you have 50,000 people on your list, explain how you suddenly went from 4,000 to 50,000 in only a year and it's continuing to grow at an equally rapid pace. If a lot of people have purchased products from you, state that as well.

Do comparative titles, not competitive ones

Everything has been said before in one way or another. Your job is not to tell the publisher that no book like yours has ever been published, but that other books like yours have done incredibly well – there's clearly a market for them.

F. Barish-Stern



Writing Consultant | Editor & Publisher, [Golden Quill Press](#) |

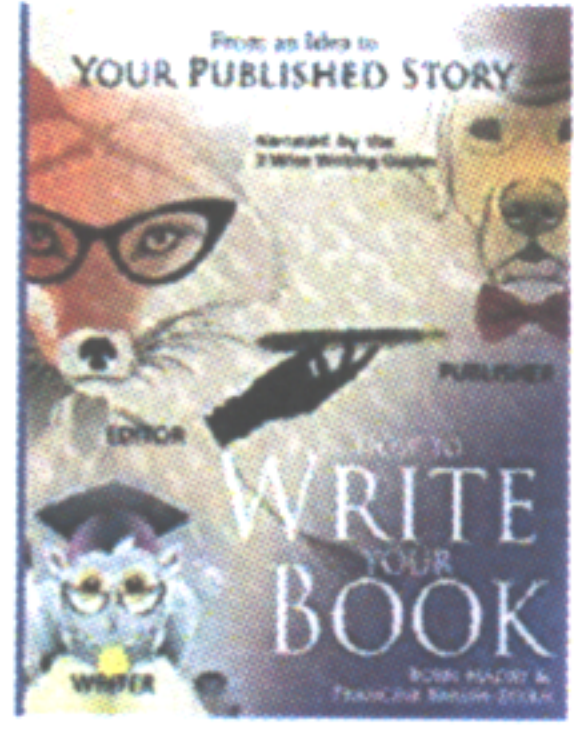
Author, [HOW TO WRITE YOUR BOOK: From an Idea to Your Published Story](#) |

Know your audience

The most essential information a book proposal can relay to an agent or publisher is the author knowing their audience. Saying this book is for everyone is a broad concept and factually wrong. No one book is for everyone.

So do your research; find out who, specifically will want to read your work, and who can benefit from what you have to say. But the flip side of that coin is that you understand what competitive books are currently on the market.

The reason this is so important is that once you have identified your audience, you need to understand what is currently available to them; what are the similarities to your work and probably more important what are the differences, and why those differences should and will matter to your readers.



HOW TO WRITE YOUR BOOK: From an Idea to Your Published Story

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Damian Birkel



HarperCollins Leadership Author | Founder & Executive Director, [Professionals In Transition](#)

Perhaps the single most important thing to remember is that you write the proposal first, and the book only after your proposal is approved by the publisher. In my experience as a HarperCollins Leadership Author, all 3 book proposals were 25 pages or less.

Start with an overview of what your book is about

From there, you must justify why your book is different and provide a competitive analysis of other similar books. Justify the market (in terms of potential audience and why your book will appeal to them).

Provide summaries (overall and per chapter)

Next, write an overall summary of your book and detail by chapter what is going to be covered. Next, create a 2 page summary of each chapter. Finally, end with a conclusion and potential next steps for the reader.

[Veronica Kirin](#)



Anthropologist | Entrepreneur | Author, *Stories of Elders* | TEDx Speaker

Many authors are deeply focused on their books. The story, the facts, the development, and design. In many ways, books are our babies. I was no different.

But I had an edge that prepared me for pitching my book to agents, editors, and publishers, that many authors do not. I am a serial entrepreneur.

Consider your target market

As my book developed, I knew that I needed to consider my target market and include that voice in my writing. I also included calls to action, gently embedded in relevant chapters, inviting readers to further engage with my work.

When it came time to pitch my book to agents, I was already thinking of my book simply as another product offering. This is what most authors miss. Today, authors are actually entrepreneurs with a product to pitch, a target market, and a unique value proposition.

Publishing houses and agents alike now look at social media following and historical track records to make decisions. Sadly, most authors miss out on this method of thinking when they begin pitching, leaving them at a disadvantage.

Agents need to know how you're different as an author

The book could be a work of art, but if you don't make it clear why it matters, how it's different, and how it will make them money (in more subtle terms), you'll be overlooked.

Your cover letter should include all this, as well as your own qualifications. You, the author, are the thought leader, the public figure. If the public can't believe in you, they won't believe in your work, and neither will agents.

Does this reduce the romance of writing? On the contrary, it adds to it. With the internet, we now can study how the publishing world works, research competitors, and find an edge and add it to your writing and pitching.

You have a better chance of finding the right fit than our predecessors, but you must be willing to brag about your 'baby' a bit.

K.J. Kruk



Award-winning Visual Artist | Author & Illustrator, *Leo Gray and the Lunar Eclipse*

With the infinite number of queries that agents and publishers receive, I knew off the bat that I had to do something a bit more unique to help my manuscript stand out from the crowd.

Utilize unique presentation

So I developed a Splash Page (or one-page website) that had an interactive flip-book sample of my work to let everyone more easily “see” what the ebook might look like.

Included in the Splash Page was a very short summary of the book (similar to what you’d expect to find on the back jacket or flap copy), some concept illustrations, and a brief proposal of what I envisioned for each book in the series along with plans for my own personal marketing.

All of the writing-focused solely on the book itself, who it was to be marketed towards, and my plans to promote it as opposed to alluring self-flattery or anything about where I went to college or boring life’s story.

Low and behold, not only two agents but two publishers called back almost immediately after I sent my proposals out! And that's the short story of how my first book, *Leo Gray and the Lunar Eclipse*, went from being a 70,000-word manuscript about a boy who follows his dreams to the moon, to a properly bound and published novel that you can find in-store today!

Collette McLafferty



Author, *Confessions of a Bad, Ugly Singer*

We know within ten seconds of meeting someone if we would like to know them better or not. Think of the query letter as a literary version of a firm handshake, warm smile, and sincere eye contact.

Show a potential publisher you know who your readers are and how to reach them

List competing titles they would read in your genre and why they would be compelled to add yours! Describe the platforms you currently use to engage readers, as well as how your audience crosses over to the publishers own reader base.

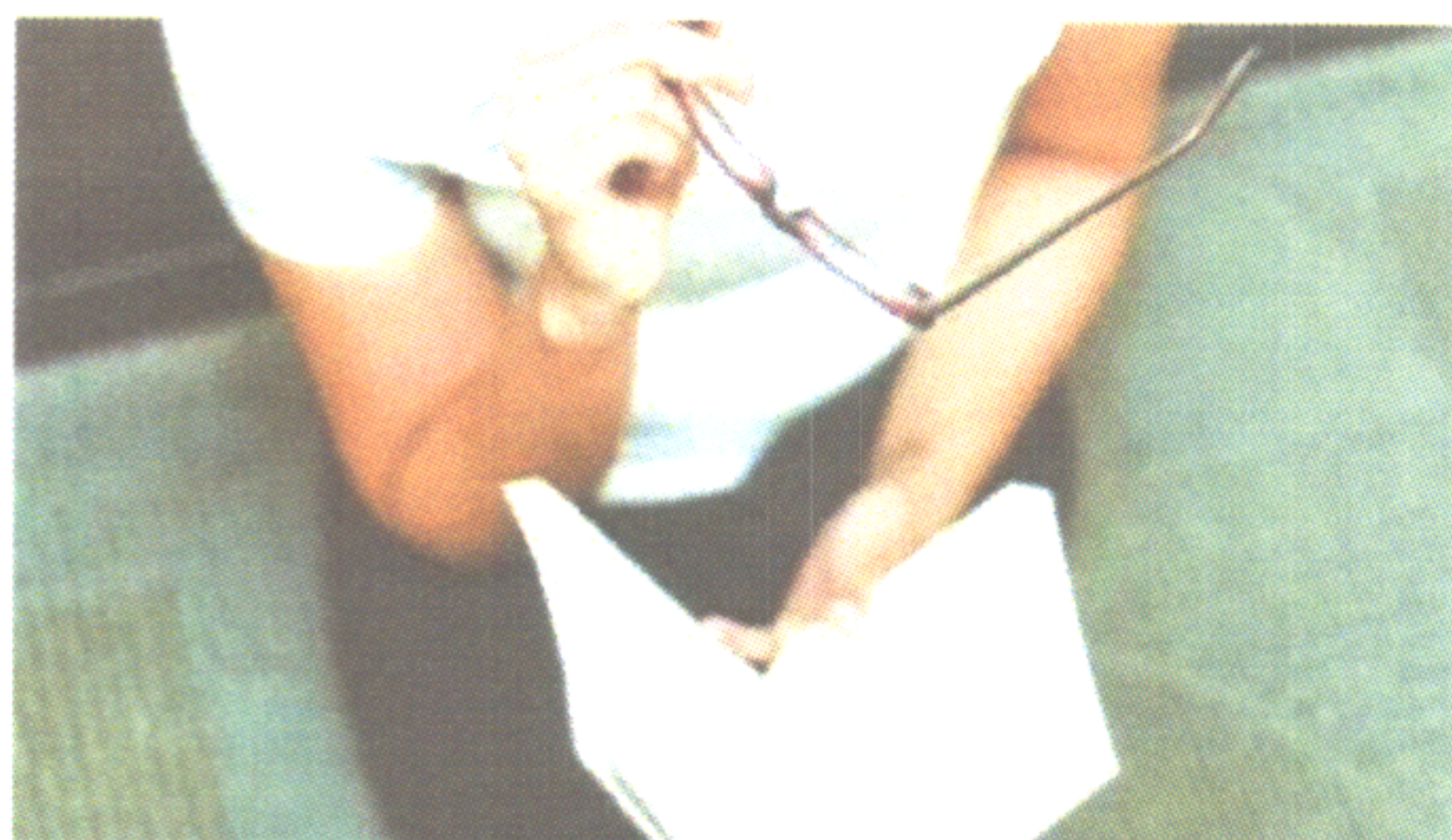
The more you know about the person and company you are pitching, the better. We tend to warm up to someone if there is a factor of familiarity.

It is better to send a handful of well-researched proposals than to blindly cut and paste pitch letters en masse in hopes of hitting the jackpot.

In my case, I wrote a memoir about a crazy real-life experience I had singing in a tribute band. I ended up signing with a publishing company that specializes in "rock and roll non-fiction".

After two years of rejections from larger publishers, a targeted approach to a specialized imprint from my agent got my foot in the door. Not only did loyal fans of my publisher buy my book, but my supporters also purchased additional titles from other authors on the roster.

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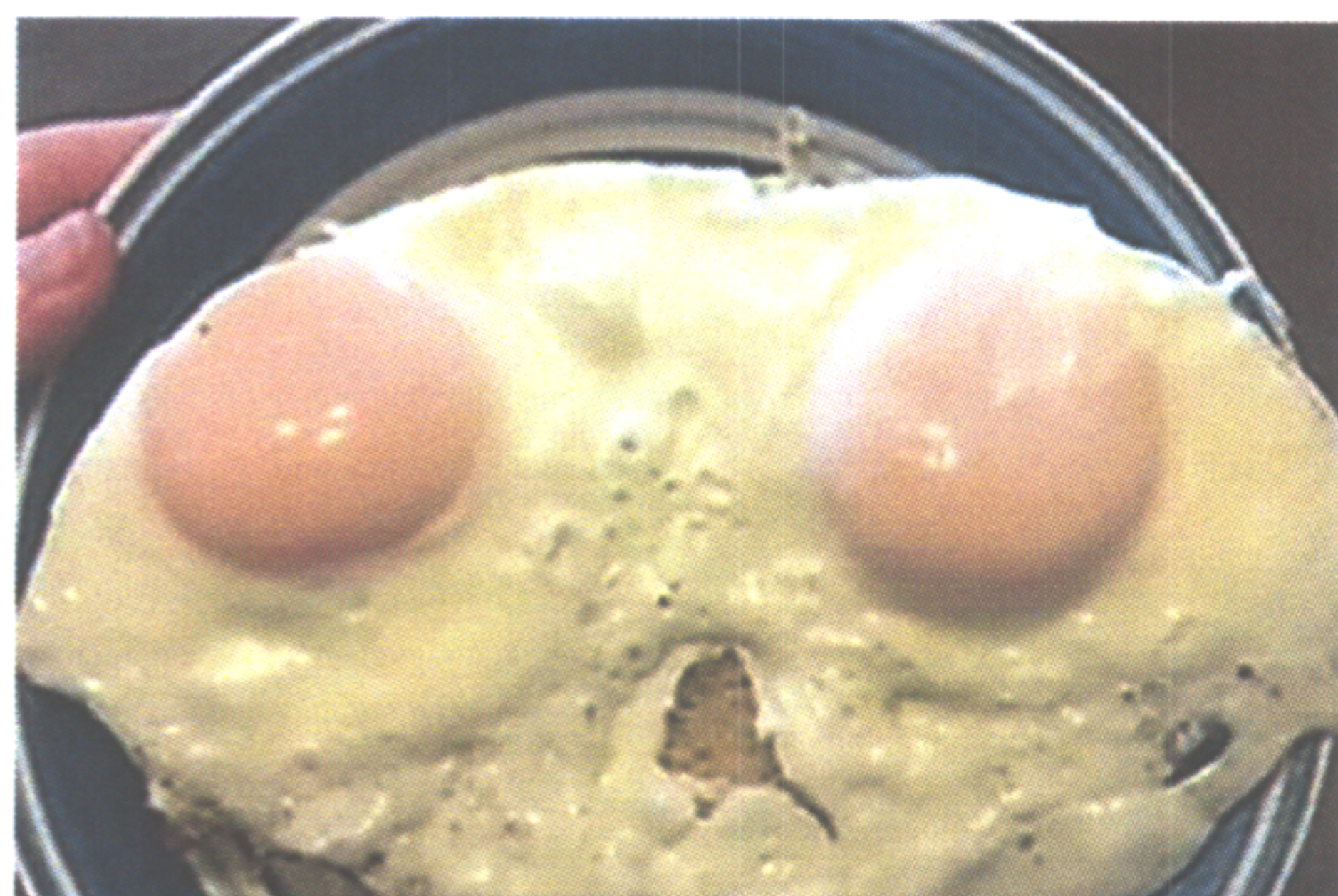


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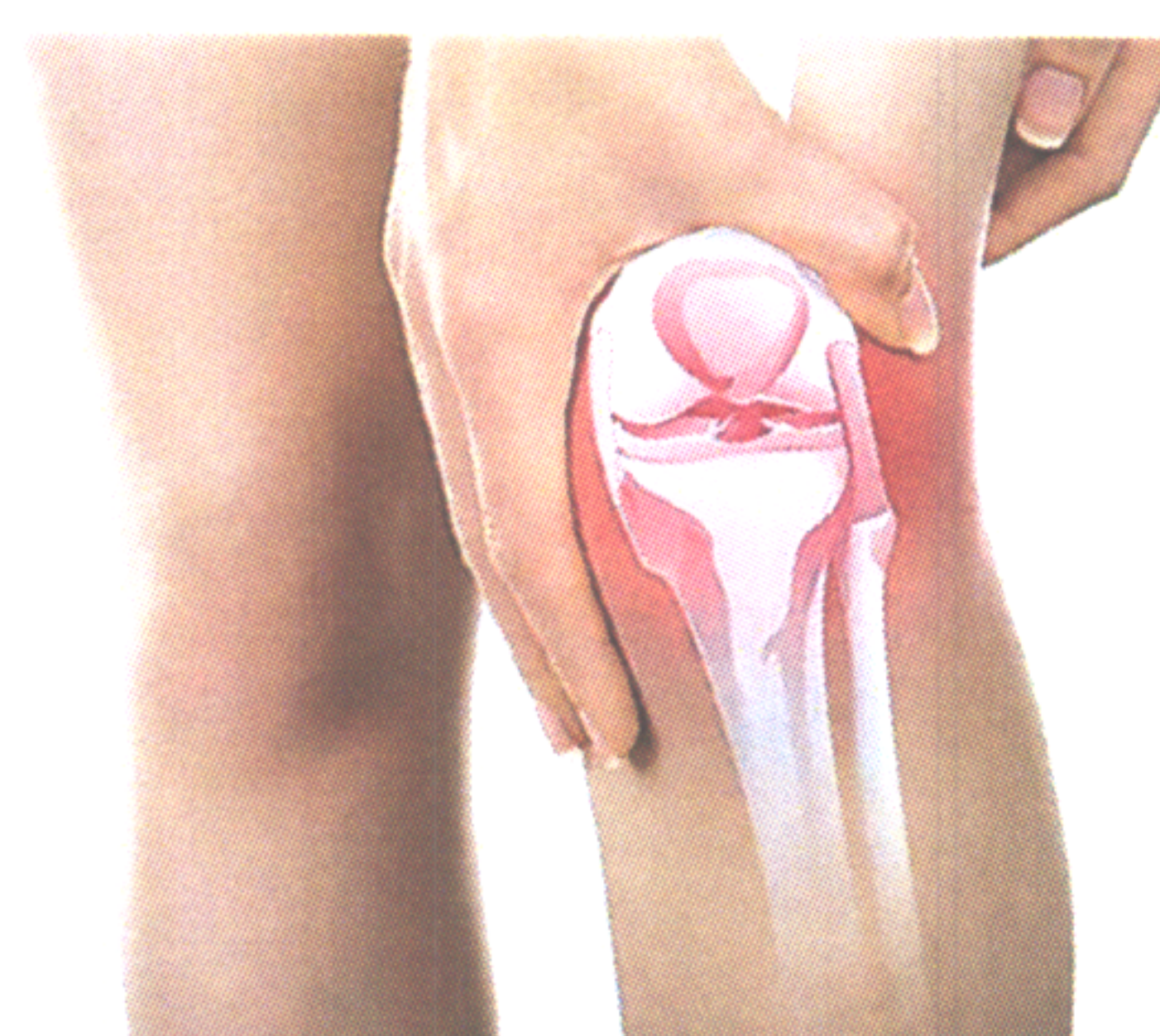
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