

TURNING YOUR DISSERTATION INTO A BOOK: A HANDY GUIDE FROM FIRST-TIME AUTHORS

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You're finished writing your dissertation -or nearly so. Now what? The immense amount of thought, time, and effort you invested in your research brought forth some fascinating findings, so you're eager to share your work with as many people as possible. Beyond presentations at conferences (which are, unfortunately, quite ephemeral), there are two primary routes for sharing academic research: journal articles and books.

The first step in turning your dissertation into a book is deciding whether it should be a book in the first place. Does the topic require sustained and detailed treatment that can unfold only in book form? Or can you make your points equally well (if not better) in several article-length manuscripts? If you already have an academic position, how does your department treat books in terms of the tenure and promotion process? Some departments effectively require books for tenure, whereas others perceive articles as the "real things" and books as "extras." Even if you've always imagined turning your dissertation into a book, there is no shame in deciding it would be better published as a series of articles and/or book chapters.

How To: A Step-By-Step Guide

So you've decided that your dissertation ought to be a book. What steps are involved? There are variations at every stage of the process -depending on the nature of the project, the press, and the author's personal preferences -but here are some general guidelines.

The Prospectus The ultimate preparation for this transformation involves envisioning your dissertation as a book, and writing this up. Write a prospectus in which you outline and explicate, in approximately 5-8 pages:

- . What your manuscript is about
- . Why it is sociologically important
- . A proposed table of contents
- . The likely audience for the book (e.g., academics, general readers), including course adoption possibilities (name specific courses)
- . Competing similar books, if any
- . Your proposed revisions(if project is obviously a dissertation).

Some acquisition editors may want to see sample chapters (e.g., introduction plus one substantive chapter) along with your prospectus. More on these below. Certain presses may ask for particular information in the prospectus, which will be listed on their website.

Choosing a Publisher Research which book publishers would be a good fit for your topic. Look for series on your topic and/or a history of publishing in this subfield. Ask your colleagues about publishing houses/editors they recommend. Survey your own shelves and see which books you like and who published them.

Once you've identified several possible publishers, shop your prospectus around to book acquisition editors. One great place to do this is at ASA meetings and other appropriate conferences attended by book editors (e.g., NWSA); it is, however, possible to shop your book around entirely by email. The best way to set up meetings at ASA is to contact editors via email at least a month beforehand to request a short appointment. If you can drop names (e.g., "Jane Smith [author of Great Book with Press X] suggested I get in touch with you"), you're more likely to get a reply. Attach your prospectus in the email. If you don't have an advance appointment, some editors will meet with you at the booth in the bookroom (though be forewarned, some editors are very busy and hard to track down at ASA). Bring hard copies of your prospectus to hand out at the meetings with your business card and a cover letter attached. Be prepared to discuss what your manuscript is about in 2 minutes or less. This is also the time to ask editors questions about things like their publication timetable (how long will this take?), their process of working with authors (do you work closely with authors or are they pretty much on their own?), how do they market their books, etc. (If you have a tenure deadline approaching, be sure to let them know.)

It is okay to talk to several publishers at this stage of the game (in contrast with journal publishing). However, some publishers frown on sending an author's ms. out for review if other publishers are doing so as well. **If** this is something you want to do, it is wise to notify and receive consent from both parties before proceeding. (Tell them that X press is also interested and that you'd like to consider both options and see what they say.) That said, working with more than two or three presses is a bit excessive. For a trite metaphor, it is similar to being in the early stage of a romantic relationship. It is probably okay to see more than one person so long as everyone knows that this is the situation.

Revising the Dissertation (Initial Steps) If a publisher is interested, they will ask for your manuscript or pieces of it and a list of possible reviews who can comment on needed revisions and make recommendations for revision. Although reviewers are used to reading over dissertations, the less your ms. feels like a dissertation and the more it reads like an academic book, the better. Caution: Many people get stalled at this point, laboring for months or years to revise their dissertations before sending them out. Don't let yourself stall too long. Keep in mind that you will be doing revisions down the line based on reviewers' suggestions, and that at this stage, reviewers are most likely to pay attention to your introductory and concluding chapters. You may therefore choose to focus your energies on these -for example, replacing a formal "literature review" with a more comprehensive introductory chapter that situates your research question in the literature.

Don't expect reviewers to be quick. Once you send out your beloved ms, you may not hear from the publisher for many months. However, if you find that six months (?) have passed without word, definitely inquire as to its status! Your reviewers will outline suggested revisions. Read and consider these carefully -some will be more useful than others -and ask for advice from colleagues and your editor. If you are interested in proceeding with Press X, you typically will be asked to respond to the reviewers recommendations in writing, explaining which revisions you plan to undertake and which you believe are best undone (and why). Some presses will offer you a contract at this point, while others prefer to wait until more of the project is completed (more on contracts below).

From there, you'll work with your assigned editor to shape your ms into a book! Caution: This can seem overwhelming, but if you tackle the revisions in small pieces, it is definitely do-able. Set goals, create a schedule, and make deadlines for yourself. Perhaps most important, allow others to read drafts and provide feedback as you go.

Revising the Dissertation (Later Steps) Editors vary considerably in terms of their direct involvement in your project. Some editors may be interested in seeing each piece (i.e., chapter) as it develops, providing you with detailed comments along the way, while others prefer to wait to see the revised ms as a whole. Sometimes the contract is contingent upon completing the outlined revisions, and other times the contract comes beforehand. There are advantages and disadvantages to both scenarios.

In many cases, turning a dissertation into a book entails a great deal of streamlining. Edit extensively, but never throw anything out. What you don't use in the book, you can always turn into an article (or three).

Signing on the Dotted Line Contracts are legal documents that tend to be difficult to decipher and mostly boilerplate. In most cases, the contract binds you to the press but does little to obligate the press to publish the book or market it in certain ways. It usually specifies what percentage of sales you should receive in royalties, how many free copies you are to receive, who owns the copyright or the film rights, whether the hardcover and paperback editions will appear simultaneously, and/or how reprints are to be handled. Some contracts will also specify that you must give the press the first rights of refusal for a next book. Some of these details are more negotiable than others. Consult with senior mentors with significant book publishing experience to better understand which terms you want to redress. Academic books are notoriously poor sellers, sad to say. Advances are relatively rare, especially for first-time authors, and typically range from \$500-2000. Royalties depend on sales (and get counted against your advance) and are generally small. In other words, don't expect to get rich off your diss!

Worst-Case Scenarios If things go seriously haywire at your press, know that you can request to be released from your contract. (If you received an advance, you will need to pay it back.) Note that you are not allowed to shop your book around -nor is another press allowed to acquire it before your contract is cancelled.

Final Steps (Really) Once you've completed a full draft of your manuscript, you will send it to your editor. At this stage, s/he may request additional revisions, or s/he may decide to send it out for a final review by experts in your field. Once you've received feedback from the final review, you'll make another round of revisions (and write another letter responding to the reviewers).

Several months later, you will receive a gigantic stack of paper: Your book in 12-point Courier font, replete with proofreading marks and various queries (e.g., Did Frankie Avalon or Bobby Vinton star in that movie?). Take a deep breath and respond as instructed. A few months later, you'll receive galley proofs, ready for final proofreading and indexing. Expected turn-around time for both is about 3 weeks. Some presses will index for you and charge you against your royalties. You may also want to hire someone (e.g., an outstanding student) to do one round of proofing -and do another round yourself. Having your ms. professionally indexed is expensive (as much as \$3 per page), so if you've got the time, consider doing it yourself.

While your ms. is in the proofing/typesetting stage, you'll also be asked to complete a lengthy Author's Questionnaire, detailing all manner of information about you and your career, as well as providing suggestions for cover design, marketing (including ads), journals and magazines for reviews, and so on. Boring, but important, so take care.

Some Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Who is your audience? Frequently, academics research topics that have social and political relevance and thus imagine they can write a book for everyone: other academics, undergraduates, and the public. In fact, it is very difficult to write for multiple audiences in a vocabulary that engages academic vocabulary while remaining popularly accessible. Similarly, some academics will not recognize a book for a popular audience as serious scholarship. It is important to recognize who you imagine to be your readership (which is not to say that it will end up that way) and write with that audience in mind.

2. Why are you writing a book? Choosing an audience and a press depends on why you are writing a book in the first place. What do you need this book to do for you? Do you need it to get a job? Tenure? Academic fame? Are you writing it for policymakers? People similarly situated as those in the book? Often, we want multiple things from the book, although some aspects remain more primary. Making a decision about these issues will help to guide other decisions, particularly as some presses have better popular distribution, faster or slower production time, more respect at research universities, or different strategies for pricing, publishing in paperback (or pricing hardcovers similarly to paperbacks), and in their efforts to market books.

3. How much work on revision do you want to do? Many presses have moved away from actively guiding the revisions process, leaving much of the choice to authors. Others have a more hands-on approach and may even send a manuscript out for multiple rounds of external review before publishing. It is important to identify how significantly you would like to revise the manuscript and how much feedback you would like in the process. These priorities may help you think about the kind of press, editor, and publishing experience you want.

4. Do they get my book? As the author, you know better than anyone what the book is saying and what you would like to do. At times, a press may show excitement for your project but in fact expect changes that do not reflect your goals or do not remain true to your analysis. Balancing these issues and identifying whether a press or editor is right for you is equally important.

Additional Recommendations (Or, On the Shoulders of Giants)

At every stage of the transformation process, turn to colleagues and mentors for help. You can glean a lot about presses and editors -reputation, practices, etc. -from word of mouth. Ask to see examples of prospectuses, responses to reviewers, and author questionnaires; most folks will be happy to oblige.

If you need inspiration (or distraction), read examples of outstanding books that resemble yours in terms of methods, topic, target audience, and so forth.