

Tips for Turning your Dissertation into a Book

The potential for a PhD thesis to be published as a book is not decided by academic quality alone, but also by its potential commercial value. Some PhDs can lend themselves better to being published as journal articles, while some can be suitable for both. Publishers depend on academic referees to assess the academic quality and standard of a volume and when a commissioning editor considers new proposals for publication, their approach is not as an academic, but as a publisher.

The monographs that tend to be most successful, commercially and not just academically, are books that:

- Make a significant and original contribution to the field, empirically and/or theoretically;
- Appeal to a sufficiently large proportion of the discipline or one of the larger sub-disciplines;
- Have international appeal, either discussing subjects of international relevance or including international case studies;
- Take a comparative approach; and
- Present findings and conclusions that can be applied more broadly across the discipline.

You may also wish to explore potential series that you would like to submit your book to. At Routledge almost all of our research titles are published in series that are either thematic, reflect sub-disciplines, or are related to an organization. Libraries can register their interest in a series and receive books published in the series on a standing-order basis; a series can also bring related titles to the attention of readers of individual titles. Even if you do not submit your book proposal for a specific series, the publisher may place a book in a series on your behalf. You can usually find information about book series from publisher's catalogues, their websites, and at conferences.

Series are an effective tool to help market books

If a series has academic series editors, you may wish to approach them for some feedback as they can provide valuable advice on the content of your book and how to submit and prepare your proposal before it is sent to the publisher. Depending on how active the individual series editors are, it can be advantageous to publish your book in a series that has external academic series editors. These series can offer a more detailed and involved review process as the series editors will provide feedback on the content of your book, in addition to the academic reports solicited during the review process. Publishing in these series can be more challenging as the series editors may be more selective when choosing books that reflect their interests and the content of the series. It can also be more competitive as most series editors can only take on the responsibility for a limited number

of books, in addition to the demands of their academic positions, and can cherry pick what they consider to be the best potential books.

It is good to be aware that most PhD conversions are published in hardback format and sold at a high price with a small first print run of approximately 300 copies. For a published book to be considered a commercial success, it needs to sell approximately 75% of the initial print run to ensure that sales have covered production and other costs. These books sell mainly to the international library market and while chapters may appear on secondary reading lists or in course readers, most research titles are unlikely to be adopted and used as a textbook for undergraduate students; the expected audience would be advanced students, researchers, and academics in the field. For a book to succeed in this competitive market, it will need to have international appeal. Books with narrowly focused case studies on areas of limited interest do not tend to sell as well. A book might be of high scholarly merit but if it is considered unlikely to be a commercial success, it might be rejected.

When writing a proposal you need to bear your potential audience in mind at all times ... and a thesis and book have different audiences

A PhD is written for a specific audience: the supervisor and the external examiners. A book is published for a much broader audience and it is very likely that the potential purchaser of your book will have different expectations – for example, the literature review is an important part of a thesis but a book purchaser will be more interested in your specific findings and research rather than the books you have read. You also need to bear in mind that the purchaser is not always the reader. Libraries purchase the large majority of hardback monographs, sometimes at the request of university lecturers, but often titles are purchased by libraries that have registered their interest in specific subject areas or series and are sent the book automatically or on approval. For this reason it is very important that the title be clear and descriptive, using key words to indicate the content and subject appeal of the book to potential buyers. Given that most research publishing sells to the international library market, the title needs to be clear to non-native English speakers and non-subject-specialists.

A clear and descriptive title can ensure that your book is easily found by potential readers using key word searches on book databases

Practical things to think about when converting your PhD thesis

When putting together a proposal document to send to a publisher you will want to consider the following points about how you will convert your thesis into a successful monograph.

- ❖ **Modifying or cutting parts.** If your thesis contains a literature review this will need to be cut in favor of engaging with related and prior scholarship in a more nuanced way. If it contains an extensive section explaining the methodology behind the research this will also need to be reduced to a brief explanation about how you went about your research and drew your conclusions.
- ❖ **Revising the introduction.** More than a summary of what is to follow, the introduction is key as it lays claim to a specific point of view and brings together the strands that comprise the book's argument in a way that will tighten the structure and focus the overall analysis.
- ❖ **Adapting the language and style.** You may need to consider how you will change the language and style of your thesis to make it more attractive to a wider academic audience. This could include looking at the annotations and references and reducing any unnecessary jargon and footnotes. As an example, in one review the academic referees noted that the conclusion read like a list of recommendations in a report, which would need to be changed for the book. This was to ensure the style of the book flowed more smoothly and that the author developed a more robust critical analysis throughout that would successfully engage the readers.
- ❖ **Restructuring the contents.** You may want to rearrange the order of the chapters in your thesis and to consider what order might work best for a book.
- ❖ **Streamlining your argument.** Many people find it necessary to streamline the argument of their thesis, reducing any repetition. Consider the length of the book. We generally require our monographs to be around 80,000 words, although they can be up to 120,000 words.
- ❖ **Adding international case studies or comparative studies.** If your thesis is limited to one area it may be wise to think about how it could be made to be relevant to an international audience by adding material related to other locations.
- ❖ **Expanding on your conclusions.** If your PhD is on a relatively narrow topic you may want to consider how the conclusions you reach can be drawn out and expanded upon. Can they be applied more broadly in similar areas, or would your findings be relevant in other countries?

Writing and submitting your proposal

Most publishers request very similar material, including the following:

- A statement of aims including 3-4 paragraphs outlining the rationale behind the book
- A detailed synopsis including chapter headings
- Projected length and schedule
- Definition of the market
- A list and assessment of the main competing titles
- CV/author biography
- Sample chapters or full manuscript

Proposal Guidelines are available on our website or upon request from any Commissioning Editor.