



ASHGATE PUBLISHING LIMITED

Gower House, Croft Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 3HR, UK
Telephone: +44 (0)1252 331551 Fax: +44 (0)1252 344405 Web: www.ashgate.com
Email: info@ashgatepublishing.com

PhD Guidelines: transforming your thesis into a book

The First Stage

You have completed or are about to complete your doctoral thesis and you are thinking about publishing your thesis as a book. There are a number of important questions to ask yourself at this stage:

- Am I prepared to invest a minimum of 12 months work in transforming the PhD into a book?
- Is my research best suited to publication in book form, or would it be better presented as a journal article, or a series of articles?
- Which would be the best approach in terms of my career development?
- To what audience would my book be addressed? Can I quantify it?

It is extremely rare for a PhD to be published as a book without significant reworking. Exceptions may occur when a doctoral student, usually with a publishing track record, has planned for book publication from the outset. On the surface a PhD may resemble a book more than a journal article, but the accepted language, format and mode of argument are generally very different. The process of rewriting is almost always more difficult and time-consuming than authors imagine. Ashgate suggest that a minimum of 12 months' work is needed – however it has been known to take 5 years and more!

Certain types of argument lend themselves to publication in either book or journal form. For example a historical study in which conclusions emerge from the narrative, or an attempt to push a particular debate further through the close reading of texts, may require 80,000 words for development; while a single conclusion reached by or proved through primary research may be much more effectively presented in 10,000 words. Bear in mind that research that is likely to date quickly may not be suitable for presentation in book form. Your thinking may be influenced by whether or not you have an academic position. A full-time contract for 12 months (preferably longer!) gives you a relatively stable position from which to write a book. If you are seeking a suitable post, it may be advisable to concentrate on journal publications for the moment.

A PhD thesis is a sophisticated test of research abilities. It is not a work aimed at an audience, beyond your supervisor, examiners and immediate colleagues. For a book to be viable, even in a relatively high-priced hardback edition, a publisher will need to be sure of selling several hundred copies. And unfortunately, in a crowded marketplace, only a small proportion of those who might be interested in your book will be persuaded to part with £40 or more to purchase it.

The advantage of journal publication is that, since journals are sold by prior subscription, there is a guaranteed audience, and the work is likely to be available in libraries as soon as it is published.

How to Prepare a Book Proposal

If you do decide that publication in book form is most appropriate for your work, the next stage is to prepare a book proposal. Most publishers, including Ashgate, will send guidelines to prospective authors on request. It is important to think of the book as a separate entity from the thesis at this early stage and to plan a structure with the points below in mind, aiming for a coherent narrative flow. You may, for example, need to add chapters or to omit them completely. A good book proposal can be anywhere between 4 and 15 pages in length. It must include:

- A general rationale for the book
- A statement on the expected audience
- A brief review of the existing literature (particularly any potentially competing titles) and the place of the book within it
- An expanded list of contents including an abstract of each proposed chapter
- A brief CV

Bear in mind that before the proposal is sent for review, it must attract the attention of the commissioning editor and possibly others at the publishing company. It is therefore inadvisable to use technical vocabulary or to assume too much familiarity with specialised concepts or literatures.

Many publishers, including Ashgate, require authors to send one or more sample chapters for external review with the proposal. You may choose to take the chapters you feel will need least revision from your thesis, but it is often more effective to send a revised chapter. The first chapter is ideal, but may be the most difficult to rewrite for publication, in which case try working on a substantive middle chapter instead. **Do not send the complete thesis, unless the publisher specifically requests it.**

It can be very useful to ask a colleague with publishing experience or your PhD supervisor to read through the proposal and sample material before you submit it to the publisher.

The Process of Rewriting

Once you have signed a contract with the publisher and agreed a deadline, the real work begins! In most cases the publisher will provide you with copies of the external readers' reports, which should give you some useful suggestions. The following are general guidelines:

- Look closely at the books you have found most persuasive in terms of scholarship and most engaging as reading experiences and work out what makes them successful. Be ambitious: try to write the book you would most want to read about your subject.
- Keep your audience constantly in mind. It is important to write for the widest potential audience, rather than just for those engaged in similar research areas. Do not assume that readers will be as familiar with the literature as you are.

- The opening chapter is the reader's "way in" to the argument. It must be as accessible and compelling as you can make it.
- Think about the narrative flow of the book. Your goal is to tempt readers to read from beginning to end of the book. Many PhDs have a more "stop-start" approach, in which a point is made and then backed up with evidence. It may be possible to reduce some of this evidence, or to confine it to endnotes.
- In general you should aim to cut out or significantly reduce your review of the literature. Instead, relevant literature should be cited at appropriate points throughout the text.
- Substantial methodology sections should be omitted. You may discuss your methodology in the introduction or opening chapter of the book, or talk about it briefly as you present your results.
- In general, your conclusions should be developed and summed up throughout the book rather than towards the end. A strong introduction should indicate clearly where you are going.

And some technical points:

- Keep footnotes and endnotes to a minimum
- Remember to remove all references to 'this thesis' or 'this dissertation'. We advise authors not to mention the book's origins as a PhD thesis in the preface or acknowledgments, as this information is often repeated in catalogue listings for the book and it can, unfortunately, be detrimental to sales.
- Approval of quotes from interviewees will need to be obtained if they were not aware at the time of the interview that their comments would appear in a published format. Alternatively, these quotes could be made anonymous or omitted altogether.
- Be aware that not all illustrations/tables/diagrams are suitable for book publication. If in doubt ask the publisher.
- Remember that you will need permission to quote copyright material. The "fair-dealing" rule covers single quotations of up to 400 words, or multiple quotations from a work of not more than 200 words each and 800 words in total, for the purposes of review and criticism. Permission must be sought for longer quotations, illustrations or diagrams taken from other published sources, quotations of lyrics or poetry of more than one line and any epigraphs.

During the process of fine-tuning a PhD for publication it can be very valuable to have chapters read informally by colleagues or other contacts. An external eye can be helpful in pointing out omissions, suggesting new arguments, and in reassuring you about the quality of the work. In addition, if English is not your first language it is highly desirable that you find a native speaker with expertise in your field to check through the final manuscript.