



# Publishing Your Doctoral Thesis

Nicola Parkin, Commissioning Editor  
(International Relations), Routledge

As a commissioning editor of a politics and international relations research list at a commercial press, the aim of this article is to provide a brief guide to the process of converting and publishing a PhD thesis from the publisher's perspective.

There can be a lot of pressure on successful doctoral candidates and junior researchers to convert and publish their PhD thesis. The publication of a first monograph can strongly contribute to the success of a junior academic's career: it enables the author's work to become more widely read and cited; it can strengthen the author's reputation and it can help a candidate when seeking a job and/or applying for grants and funding. This article is structured around the most common questions that a commissioning editor is asked and seeks to demystify the process and provide signposts to help junior academics, or those new to the publishing process, to make the right choices.

### **Is my PhD thesis suitable to be converted into a book?**

While many PhD theses are suitable for conversion and publication as academic books, some are not. 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 reworked as journal articles, while some can be suitable for both selected journal publication and a viable book manuscript. Publishers depend on the peer review process provided by academic referees and series editors to assess the scholarly quality and standard of a book project. When a commissioning editor considers new proposals for publication, their approach is not as an academic, but as a publisher. Publishing is a highly competitive and financially-driven business and assessing a book's commercial potential is an important consideration.

### **What makes a successful monograph?**

The monographs that tend to be most successful, commercially and 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;
- have a comparative approach;
- present findings and conclusions that can be applied more broadly across the discipline.

A book might be of high scholarly merit but if it is considered unlikely to be a commercial success, it might be rejected.

### **At what point in my research should I approach a publisher?**

While it is prudent to start thinking about how you might publish your thesis earlier, most publishers prefer you to wait until your PhD has been awarded before you formally submit your project to them.

### **Are multiple submissions acceptable?**

Although multiple submissions are not acceptable for journal articles, many book publishers do accept that you might submit your proposal and manuscript to another publisher simultaneously. It is courteous to discuss this with the publisher when you first submit your project and it is useful to bear in mind some publishers are not willing to consider a project under these terms. When a publisher does accept a project submitted to multiple publishers, it is the responsibility of the author to inform the publisher and should the author choose to accept a contract from an

alternative publisher, it also expected that the author will inform the other publishers as soon as possible and withdraw their project from consideration. One final recommendation I would make is to ensure that you change any references to other publishers and editors in your cover letter and proposal. It does not create a good impression when an editor receives a letter that explains how keen the author is to publish their book with a competing press or book series – in fact some presses have been known to reject proposals on this basis.

### How do I decide which publisher to approach?

It is important to carefully consider your options. Many academic publishers and presses today focus on textbook publishing only and it is important to find one that publishes monographs, research titles and PhD conversions. The most obvious choices would be university presses and commercial academic publishers. There are also non-profit publishers and professional associations, but there are few other outlets for publishing academic monographs that also offer effective marketing and distribution. There are also niche publishers who specialise in areas which bigger publishers may not. Large academic conferences including those organised by the PSA, UACES and BISA in the UK, ISA and APSA in the US, EPSA and ECPR in Europe and WISC and IPSA globally feature book exhibitions where publishers display their latest publications. The exhibitions are useful places where you can seek advice from publishers and also gain an overview of the scope of their lists. It can also be useful to talk to your former supervisor, examiners or colleagues for any recommendations. It is important to be realistic when considering presses to approach, as some university presses – especially the larger more prestigious ones are not willing to publish PhD conversions and only a handful of reputable commercial academic presses will consider PhDs.

It is important to identify a publisher who publishes in your area. In reality the quickest way to do this is to browse the latest titles on their website. You can also look at the references and bibliography in your own thesis, browse your own bookshelf, the library catalogue or sites such as Amazon to see who is publishing the volumes that most complement the research focus of your project. When seeking a publisher it is important to identify one that has a good reputation for publishing extensively in the same area as your potential book. The reputation of the publisher with whom your book is published can affect how the book is perceived and the academic reputation of a publisher is normally grounded in the process of peer reviewing projects and manuscripts. From a practical point of view, if you are aware of a publisher's publications in your field then it would also suggest that the publisher has effective marketing and distribution.

The marketing and distribution offered by a publishing company should be a key consideration. Publishing a first book should enhance an academic's reputation with the potential to further their career and bring about new opportunities. If an excellent book is written and published but not supported by sufficient marketing and distribution, it is likely to sink without making an impact. When considering a publisher, it might be prudent to find out about the following:

- Does the publisher have an established reputation for quality publications and reliability in your area?
- Does the publisher offer global distribution and marketing? Important non-UK markets include North America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Australasia.
- Do they have sales and marketing teams/offices in and outside the UK who will promote and sell books to the local market?
- Does the publisher send out review copies to key academic journals?
- Does the publisher effectively market their books in catalogues and through targeted email campaigns and will they offer author flyers or other marketing material?
- Does the publisher have the capacity to keep your book indefinitely 'in print' through print on demand technology?

- Does the publisher have an online presence, promoting books and events through their website and social media. Are they offering books/chapters through interactive content platforms?
- Does the publisher publish ebooks as well as print formats?
- Will the publisher bring out a paperback edition of the book some time after the initial hardback publication?
- Does the publisher attend large academic conferences and take part in book exhibitions?

All of the above make an important contribution to raise the profile of an academic book and can significantly increase the potential sales. The author too can play an important part in the promotion of their book: distributing and displaying flyers when giving presentations, flagging up appropriate conferences and workshops, using social media to generate interest in the book and announcing publication through their own networks.

It is also a good idea to identify whether the press requires subsidies for the production of the book, as this can be a substantial cost. Many of the larger publishers do not require their authors to contribute to the normal production costs of the book. However, there are some costs that are often the author's responsibility which include permissions costs for reproducing any previously published material and the indexing of the book. At Routledge we always require an index and if the author does not wish to provide their own, we will offer to charge the cost to the author's royalties, rather than requesting payment upfront.

### Should I consider submitting to a specific book series?

You may be aware of a potential series that you would like to submit your book to. At Routledge almost all our research titles are published in series that are thematic, reflecting the key sub-disciplines. Book series are an effective tool that help market our books. Librarians often follow the progression of a book series and keep up to date with the latest titles. Series also bring related titles to the attention of readers of individual titles as they often form the basis for email campaigns or small, targeted online catalogues. It is by no means obligatory to submit a proposal to a specific series and the publisher may offer to place a book in an appropriate series on your behalf. You can usually find information about book series from publishers' catalogues, their websites and at conferences, or from academics in your own networks.

If the series has academic series editors then you may wish to approach them for some preliminary feedback as they can provide valuable advice on the content of your book and whether they feel it would be a strong fit with the series they edit. Depending on how active the individual series editors are, it can be beneficial 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 and more competitive as most series editors only want to include books they feel strongly embody the aims of the series and can cherry pick a small number of projects. The upside of this is that being published in a competitive series with a recognised reputation in the field can be advantageous and a good selling point when applying for funding or a new position.

### I have chosen a publisher, what material should I submit?

Before you begin writing your proposal I would strongly recommend that you have a look at the publisher's website to see if they provide instructions about submitting a proposal for publication, as it is likely most publishers will reply and ask you to reformat your proposal to reflect their guidelines. Most publishers request very similar material, including but not limited to the following:

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

The word length of the final manuscript is expected to be between 80,000 – 100,000 words. It is very rare for a PhD to be published in the format of the thesis and a proposal for a PhD should also include the changes you intend to make. Questions and issues to consider include:

- Which parts will you cut or modify?
- How you will be adapting the language and style? Some aspects of the ‘scholarly infrastructure’ of a PhD such as the literature review or detailed notes on methodology are important to impress your examiners but not vital in a book. You should also reduce any unnecessary jargon and notes.
- Most people find it necessary to streamline the argument and the writing to reduce repetitions and overlaps, and to lighten the empirical material.
- You may wish to restructure the content, changing the order of the chapters.
- You will need to explain how you will draw out and expand the main findings and conclusions.

If some time has passed since the PhD was written you will also need to ensure the book is up-to-date and considers recent publications in the field.

It is likely that most publishers will request electronic submission of material so the best practice for submission is to go onto their website and look for the details of the appropriate commissioning editor to approach. If you are unsure then select the person you think looks most suitable, editors are used to passing on proposals to colleagues whereas emailing multiple commissioning editors at the same press separately often leads to confusion and a delay in response.

### How does the review process work?

If your book is accepted for consideration by the press, the proposal, sample chapters or manuscript will usually be reviewed by at least two academics in the field and the anonymous reviews will then be forwarded to you. The reviewers are required to comment on a number of issues, including: the subject area/topic of the proposal; the strengths and weaknesses of proposed book; how the project might be improved; the size of the market and potential competing titles; the author’s qualifications; and finally whether they recommend publication. You will then be invited to respond to the comments and while you are not obliged to take all of the reviewer’s suggestions on board, you should explain why if you do not do so. At this stage a publisher may request that you revise the proposal and the table of contents. If the changes are significant the publisher may send the revised proposal to be reviewed again.

If at this stage, both yourself and your Editor are satisfied with your response to the reviews/revised proposal and proposed changes, it will then be presented by your Editor to their Editorial Board for contract approval. If your proposal is accepted, you will be offered a contract. It is possible that your proposal might be rejected, but that you are invited to revise your proposal in line with specific comments and resubmit. In this case it is likely that your revised proposal will need go through the review process again and would be treated as a new project. If your proposal is not approved you will also be informed with a brief explanation why.



The most common reasons for a book proposal to be rejected are:

- negative academic reviews received during the review process;
- the book does not make a substantial or original contribution to the discipline;
- the market may be considered to be too small for the book to be commercially viable;
- the proposal may not fit the company's strategy for the specific list;
- there are too many competing titles and the market may be saturated;
- the publisher may have a very similar title under contract already.

An Editorial Board's decision is usually final. If the proposal is rejected on commercial grounds, you could ask the Editor if there is another publisher they could recommend. If the reviews provide constructive suggestions about how the book can be improved you may wish to rethink your proposal and resubmit it. For example, if the book is considered not to be commercially viable based on the narrow focus of the case studies, further case studies could be researched and included to give the book a broader and more comparative context, which would also increase the book's market appeal.

The review process can take some time and varies from project to project, and can depend on the publisher and the time of year. I would expect this process to take two to four months.

### What information is included in the contract?

If you are offered a contract, this document will explain your responsibilities and the responsibilities and obligations of the publisher. It will also indicate the word length, the expected delivery date (this will be set in consultation with the author to ensure it is realistic), the royalties, and the number of presentation copies you can expect. The royalties for research publishing are generally low, they can be non-existent and in some cases a subsidy is requested. If this occurs you might wish to approach another publisher.

At this stage you can expect guidance about how the final manuscript should be formatted in the form of an electronic document with "instructions for authors" or similar (these are also often available on the publisher website to download and consult). Occasionally publishers require camera ready copy which means the author has to submit the final manuscript fully typeset. If this is the case, the publisher should provide guidelines about how to prepare this and it is worth finding out at contract stage what you are responsible for providing.

### What happens on delivery of the manuscript?

When you deliver your final manuscript, it is likely to be reviewed again by academic referees and/or approved by the press before it is accepted for publication. You may at this stage be required to make further changes to your manuscript and then resubmit. When your final manuscript is accepted, the production of your book will begin and your manuscript will go through most of the following stages:

- Copyediting: this involves a detailed reading of your manuscript to ensure the text is consistent, grammatically correct and correctly referenced. The copy-editor will send the author a list of queries that need to be answered before the manuscript is typeset.
- Typesetting: the manuscript is typeset according to the house style as it will appear in the published book.
- Proofreading: at this stage the author is sent the proofs to check for any errors in the typesetting. A professional proof-reader may also be employed at the same time to do the same task. It is also at this stage that the index needs to be created; either by the author or the publisher may commission a professional indexer on the author's behalf.

Printing: the manuscript and files are finalised and the book is printed and bound and/or made available as an ebook.

- Publication: the advance copies are sent approximately five days before publication and the remaining author copies are sent when the books are received and logged in the warehouse. The book is now available for purchase.

The production schedules vary from publisher to publisher and it is hard to specify how long this will take. At Routledge our production schedules are considered to be reasonably quick and it takes approximately six to seven months from when our production department begin work on the book, after the final manuscript has been accepted.

### Can I include previously published material?

Including previously published material in the book, for example chapters that have been published in academic journals or in an edited collection, is not normally an issue for publishers as long as it does not exceed more than 25% of the final book. It can be considered beneficial to have published one or two chapters in journals, particularly well-respected journals, as this demonstrates that the author has successfully published as an academic and their work in part has met the rigorous review standards set by many journals. Publishing an article can also increase interest in a potential book and act as advance marketing for the author's future publications.

### Who will read my book?

When writing a proposal you need to bear your potential audience in mind at all times. A PhD is written for a specific audience: the supervisors and the examiners. A book is published for a broader audience and it is very likely that the potential reader of your book will have different expectations, for example the literature review is an important part of a thesis but those reading your book will be more interested in your specific findings and research rather than the books you have read. While one or two 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.

### Who will buy my book?

The main purchaser of research monographs is the international library market. The market for academic books has become increasingly challenging. Many libraries continue to face budget cuts and there is growing competition for the budget from journals. Increasingly library purchasing decisions are triggered by a request being completed by academics/students at the institution (patron-driven acquisition). For this reason it is vital that the title is clear and descriptive, using key words indicating the content and subject appeal of the book. This will ensure that your book is easily discovered by those browsing online or in catalogues for new work in their research area. Books with narrowly focussed case studies on areas of limited interest do not tend to sell as well because they appeal to a very small amount of scholars.

### How many books will I sell?

It is good to be aware that most PhD conversions and research titles are published in hardback format and sold at a high price with a small first print run of a few hundred copies. For a published book to be considered a commercial success, it needs to sell approximately 75% of the initial print run and this should ensure that the book sales have covered production costs, share of company overheads and broken even.

## What about Online Publication or Open Access?

In the digital age, there are now more opportunities than ever before for scholars to disseminate their work. Some of these can involve bypassing the traditional publishing model by making your work freely available online in a variety of formats from a series of blog posts or browsable documents to downloadable PDFs and ebooks. The advantage of this self-publication is that you are entirely in control of the publishing process and distribution and can charge as little or as much as you want. The downside is that self-publishing free online does not offer the same academic and scholarly credibility as publishing with a reputable publisher who have undertaken peer review of your manuscript. Therefore, with these kinds of publishing models, it will likely be difficult to get the appropriate recognition for your work from the market or the academy.

Another recent innovation is to co-operate with a publisher to publish your book Open Access (OA). The peer review process and contract stages will probably be the same but the fundamental innovation is that you (or your funder or institution) will pay an upfront fee to the publisher in return for the electronic version being made available freely for reading, copying and distribution. Some publishers will also continue to sell a print version of the book. Check the publisher's website to see if they have an OA book programme.

## A few final thoughts

If you are unsure or have any questions about publishing your thesis, do ask your supervisor and more senior colleagues' advice and if you are at an academic conference, speak to a commissioning editor and ask them about the process. Most editors are approachable and happy to answer your questions and can provide you with some initial feedback before you submit a proposal. There are a growing number of chances to attend workshops on publishing at conferences and it is worth taking advantage of this as it can provide a great opportunity to hear from publishers, experienced academics and series/journal editors. If you have submitted your proposal unsuccessfully, do some more research and approach another publisher and/or consider publishing one or two chapters from your thesis in the form of a journal article. Publishers do look at the CVs and publication background of potential authors and it is considered favourably if an author has published journal articles. Depending on how time sensitive the thesis is, it is also acceptable to take a break and come back to your thesis at a later date. It is not unusual for an author to publish one or two journal articles from the thesis and then prepare a proposal for a monograph based on a fully revised, restructured and updated PhD thesis two or three years after it has been awarded. Publishing your first book can be hard work, but very gratifying and rewarding. I wish you the best of luck!