



Transforming your doctoral thesis for book publication

While the University of London Press does not publish unrevised doctoral theses or dissertations, we do invite proposals for academic books based on doctoral research – and it's crucial to understand the difference between the two.

If you're a humanities researcher considering publication options following the completion of your doctoral study then this guide is for you. It covers the differences between a thesis and a monograph, and guidance on key steps to take when reimagining your thesis as a book project, planning and preparing a book proposal, and the writing process.

Planning for Publication

A good place to start is to recognise that in order to write a successful academic book based on your doctoral study, you shouldn't be aiming to produce a revised thesis. Think of the book as a different output from the same research.

What does this mean in practice?

The table below summarises some of the key differences between a thesis and a monograph, which the rest of this guide will delve into more deeply.

	Thesis	Monograph
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To demonstrate your ability to carry out original research and present this in an extended written format; - To gain a research qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To present original research; - To make a contribution to furthering debates and influencing scholarship in a discipline/disciplines
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your supervisors and examiners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholars in and beyond your own field; - International; - Possibly students, professional readers or practitioners
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starts with research question and moves to answer - Substantial literature review and methodology chapters/sections - Can be highly repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starts with the answers - Integrated, succinct use of literature and explanation of methods - Engaging, clear and logical narrative and exploration of ideas
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavily referenced with dense quotations to evidence claims and arguments; - Frequent use of specialised language/jargon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stronger authorial presence; - Quotations only where necessary; - More accessible with less specialised language

Publishing a book based on your doctoral research therefore usually involves a substantial amount of planning, time and work. Before diving in, it is worth considering the following questions:

1) Is a book the right publication format for my work?

Although your thesis is likely to have been a book-length piece of work, this does not automatically make it suitable for book publication. Think about, and seek colleagues' feedback on, whether your research lends itself to presentation in book form. If so, would this be a 'traditional' length book (i.e. 80–90,000 words) or a short-form book which is increasingly an option for authors (c.20–50,000 words). Or would it be better as one or more journal articles? Think realistically about the likely readership of a book – is there actually a market for this, and how would your book fit alongside existing scholarship in the area?

2) What is typical in my field or discipline?

The monograph still plays a central role in humanities discourse alongside articles and chapters but in the sciences, for example, new scholarship is usually published in journals.

3) What would be advisable in terms of my career stage, current position and future career plans?

Factors to consider here include the time and commitment required to write the book (normally a minimum of 12 months, often longer); your access to institutional support and library resources; whether speed of publication is required; and your own professional development plans.

Preparing a Book Proposal

If you decide to pursue book publication most publishers – including University of London Press – will require you to submit a book proposal as a first step. Most publishers have a blank proposal form for you to complete.. This will typically ask for information on a number of areas including the rationale and aims of the book, its likely readership, selling points and existing comparable titles, as well as details of the content itself and usually a request for some sample material.

Some tips specific to preparing a book proposal based on doctoral research include:

1) **Take time between completing your thesis and starting a book proposal**

If possible, set aside your thesis completely for a few months following completion. This can give you the distance needed to be able to approach it afresh in order to start rethinking the project entirely for book publication. Think about how your book could be expanded to reach a larger readership – if the focus is too narrow (for example, a focus on a particular town, or on one book), academic publishers won't be able to see a viable market for the book and are more likely to reject it. Look at books in your field to get an idea of how you could adapt your own work – perhaps the central topic could be expanded to include discussion of ideas you could only touch on briefly in the thesis, or had to cut in the interests of a tighter focus.

Take plenty of time to write the proposal itself to ensure the publisher has all of the information they need in as much detail as possible. This will make a good first impression and save time in the long run.

2) **Don't send the publisher a copy of your thesis**

Publishers generally won't want to see a copy of your thesis, and will instead base their decision on whether to publish your project or not on your completed proposal form and sample material. Make sure that the sample material isn't taken directly from your thesis – one or more sample chapters should already have been revised into book form for consideration (and, hopefully, external peer review). It's also worth checking whether the publisher you want to approach will take books based on revised theses – the University of London Press does, as we want to encourage new scholarship, but not all presses do.

3) **Consider which publisher you want to approach carefully**

It's worth spending some time researching which publisher you want to approach with your proposal. Be aware that it's good practice to send your proposal only to one publisher at a time – assessing proposals takes time and often money by publishers.

Have a look at books that you used during your doctoral study to find out if there's a dominant publisher in your field, and look at publishers' websites to get a feel for which subject areas

they offer to make sure you're approaching a publisher that's a good fit for your book. If you're interested in submitting your proposal for a certain series published by a press, do flag this in your proposal form – it helps the publishers to see that you're aware of the market for your book, and how it might fit with their list.

4) Have a clear rationale for why this book is needed (especially if your thesis is openly available)

The rationale for publication section is an important part of any book proposal, whether it's based on doctoral research or not. However, as it is increasingly likely that your institution will make your thesis open access via their institutional repository, it is particularly vital that you explain in your proposal the rationale for publishing the book given the online availability of your thesis. Publishers invest a lot of time and resources into assessing proposals and publishing new books and they may be reluctant to do so if it is freely available in a very similar form elsewhere. Ask yourself: what new contribution to the literature will the book make?

You should always let your publisher know if your thesis is available online and provide a link if available. Some publishers will also ask for details of whether an embargo is, or can be, applied on access to your thesis.

Writing the proposal form can be a really useful exercise in helping you to think through the book project, so do spend time on it.

5) Use the proposal form to explain the revisions you will be making to your research for publication

Look at the four areas in the table above again and use them as a guide to explain in your proposal the differences between your thesis and the proposed book. What new material will you explore that isn't in the thesis? Is the scope (geographical, thematic, chronological etc.) different and, if so, why? Will you add or remove any chapters and how will they be reorganised? How will you present the material to ensure it's accessible to broader audiences? What new objectives do you hope to achieve?

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Once submitted, your proposal will go through an initial assessment by the commissioning editor, and series editors where applicable. They may request revisions and resubmission at this stage, reject the proposal if unsuitable for their list, or proceed to external review. If a decision is made to proceed, the editor will send your proposal for peer review by two or more academic experts in the field. The review process can take some time depending on reviewers' schedules – normally a minimum of two months can be expected. Once the peer

review is complete, the editor will consider the feedback and send you the reviewers' reports along with an overall decision on the outcome. This could be a rejection, a request for revisions (don't be disheartened – this is common!), or acceptance of your proposal and an offer of a publishing contract.

Writing the Book

If you are offered and accept a book contract, you can then use the peer reviewers' feedback on your proposal to give a helpful steer on the areas to work on and develop when writing the full book. Some further advice to consider is below (though please note that these general points may not be applicable for every individual project).

Purpose

- The purpose of the thesis is very different to that of the book. For the thesis, you've had to demonstrate your ability to carry out original research and evidence every stage of this. The book's purpose is to use your original research to offer new perspectives and contribute to furthering debates and influencing scholarship in your discipline(s). This needs to be reflected in your book's scope, your understanding of its likely readership, its organisation and presentation, and using an active rather than passive authorial voice.

Audience

- Your thesis was written for a very specific audience – your supervisors and examiners – with expert understanding of your particular field. The book will (and should!) find a much broader, international readership across directly and indirectly related fields. More contextual information may be required for readers less familiar with this background – think about what readers of your book can realistically be expected to know.
- Consider whether broadening the scope of your study would increase its appeal and ensure that the significance and impact of your arguments on bigger debates in the discipline is clear.

Structure

- You are likely to be carrying out a significant restructuring of your thesis to align it with the new purpose, scope and audience for the book – this may involve removing chapters or adding new ones, deleting repetition, or rearranging the organisation entirely.
- It is usually appropriate to cut down or remove separate literature review chapters/sections, and cite or integrate references to the literature at relevant points throughout instead.
- Similarly, you may have included a long methodology chapter or section in your thesis, as part of fulfilling the requirements to demonstrate to your examiners that you can

carry out original research. These can also usually be removed for the book and your methods briefly discussed at relevant points instead. N.B. This guidance may not be appropriate for those working outside the humanities, especially in STEM subjects.

Writing

- Although a certain amount of complexity in language may be needed to convey complex ideas and arguments, this should be as clear and accessible as possible.
- The audience for your book may not be familiar with the specialised vocabulary of your field, so dense language and unnecessary jargon should be avoided.
- You will have needed to cite heavily throughout your thesis to evidence your research and its relationship with the literature, using frequent footnotes/endnotes and references. This can impact readability, and any quotations or references that are inessential to your arguments should be removed (while taking care to maintain the academic integrity of your work).
- Take a look at other monographs in your discipline that you find engaging. What is it about their writing style and approach that makes them successful?

A few further practicalities

- Images/ third-party material: Think carefully about what third-party material (illustrations, tables, graphs, song lyrics etc.) is essential for the book, as permissions from copyright holders are likely to have to be obtained to allow you to publish them in your book. Publishers will usually agree to a maximum number, and be aware that for most publishers you as author will be responsible for seeking (and paying for) any necessary third-party permissions, which can be a time-consuming and sometimes expensive process.
- Title: It is usually advisable to choose a different title for your book from the title you used for the thesis – not only to distinguish the two outputs but also because the title of your book will be used to serve a different purpose and audience. Academic books are now usually discovered by librarians, readers and reviewers through online searches so your title should include the main keywords for your book to ensure it is discoverable. The title should be concise and clearly reflect the content of the book so it is apparent to your readership (and publisher!) what the book will be about. Avoid using quotes or esoteric references, even in subtitles.
- Support: Remember you can always get in touch with your publishing contact during the process of writing the book if you have questions or need any support!

To request the University of London Press's book proposal form and guidelines, or for any further information, please contact Emma Gallon, Publisher (emma.gallon@sas.ac.uk).