

Publishing Your Humanities Book

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE, REACH YOUR READERS



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Outline

- I. Identifying your readership
- II. Developing your book proposal
- III. Selecting a publisher
- IV. From peer review to publication
- V. Marketing your book ... why we must do it (together)

A starting point: Who are you writing for?

- Who are your readers? (Be honest!)
- What types of books are already on their shelf?
- What aspects of your book will (or won't) make them want to add your book to their shelf?
- How are they likely to find out about your book?

Writing for readers

Be clear and honest with yourself: why are you writing the book you're writing?

Write the book you'd want to read.

“Really effective writing involves sitting down and thinking hard about the best way to present that argument to the reader. ...This ... requires empathy.”

- Stephen Walt, “On Writing Well.” *Foreign Policy*

Elements of a book proposal

Concise abstract or book blurb

- This is your “elevator pitch” and should be a brief summary of the book that could be understood by an educated lay reader.

Detailed statement of aims that outlines the manuscript’s arguments, themes, and significance to the field

- Why will this book matter to the readers? What kind of a critical intervention are you hoping to make?

Annotated table of contents that clearly develops the content and structure of each chapter

- How does the narrative arc of your book address the interests, needs, and expectations of your proposed readership?

Assessment of the work’s fit with existing literature and comparison with published books

- Why will these readers be interested in *your* book on the topic? What are you doing that’s new or different?

Discussion of the intended audiences and market for the book

Discussion of how the book fits within your targeted publisher’s portfolio**

Don't forget the nuts & bolts

Word count

Delivery timeline

Number of images

If the book is based on your dissertation – what have you done to convert the project to a book?

Author bio and CV

Selecting a publisher

The importance of “fit”

- For the publisher: with our lists and our markets (readership)
- For the author: with your vision and intended readership

All publishers have the same general toolkit to develop manuscripts and market books, but how we do this and, importantly, what we prioritize varies from publisher to publisher.

The editor's assessment

Questions I ask myself:

Has the author been thoughtful and targeted with their submission?

Does the proposal present a rationale for the choices that have been made in the text?

Do the author's hopes and expectations for the project align with the publisher's strengths?

From peer review to publication

1. Preparing for peer review

- *Before sending in your proposal materials, proofread from the perspective of a possible reader.*

2. Peer review

- *Process varies by publisher, so be sure to clarify the process with your editor. Be transparent about your expectations and needs.*

3. Contract negotiation

- *Do set a realistic ms due date and ask questions, if necessary, before signing.*
- *Don't ask for changes to every line of the boilerplate contract.*

4. Final manuscript

- *Be sure to read and re-read any guidelines sent by the publisher. Think through possible permissions issues early on.*

Tips for marketing your book

- Include in your email signature with a link to your publisher's webpage
- Add to your personal or departmental webpage
- Display in your department and/or have stocked at your university bookstore
- Post announcements to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media
- Send email announcements
- Submit announcements to relevant blogs, listservs, and professional networks
- Add to your Academia.edu profile with searchable keywords
- Create an author page on Amazon

More tips for marketing your book

- Attend academic conferences
- Give talks
- Work with your university communications or PR department
- Contact alumni magazines
- Write op-eds and guest blog posts
- Develop a blog or other social media stream
- Add to Wikipedia reference lists

Further reading

Stephen Walt, “On Writing Well.” *Foreign Policy*.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/15/on_writing_well

W.W. Norton & Company, “Nine Tips for Academics Writing for a General Audience.”

<http://wwnorton.tumblr.com/post/32954793512/nine-tips-for-academics-writing-for-a-general-audience>

Stay in touch!

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