From Dissertation to Publication



How to turn your dissertation into journal articles and book manuscripts

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Roadmap

1. Book, articles, or both? Deciding what your dissertation should become
2. Where to publish. Outlets for early career scholars (articles and books)
3. The conversion. Turning a chapter into a standalone article
4. The book route. From dissertation to book manuscript, plus first book prizes

Book, Articles, or Both?

The First Decision: What Should This Become?

- There is no single right answer. It depends on your project, methods, and field norms.
- Ask yourself: is the dissertation one sustained argument (book) or several distinct contributions (articles)?
- Consider your job market and tenure context: book fields vs article fields, and what your target departments count.
- Geography matters: In North American political science, articles are dominant (but books still count, especially in theory and qualitative subfields). In the UK and Europe, monographs are the focus in many depts.
- Timing matters too: articles move faster and signal productivity early. A book takes years but can define your research identity.

Qualitative vs Quantitative Projects

Qualitative / interpretive:

- Often best served by a book
- Rich context, cases, and narrative need space
- Comparative and historical work reads well as a monograph

Quantitative / experimental:

- Often best served by articles
- Each empirical result can stand alone
- Journals reward clean, single-contribution papers

Mixed methods projects can (and often do) split the difference.

Yes, You Can Do Both

- Publishing a book does not mean giving up on articles from the same project.
- Presses generally expect (and like) to see articles that build interest in the book. OUP, for example, is happy to see at least one article out of the book project, and often has no hard cap.
- The usual norm: articles should not reproduce the book wholesale. Spin-off pieces, single chapters, or method papers are fine.
- **Watch out for images and figures:** journals often take copyright of published figures, maps, and photos. Reusing them in the book (or vice versa) can require permissions and fees. Plan image rights early.
- When in doubt, ask your acquisitions editor what their press allows. Get it in writing.

Where to Publish

Article Outlets for Early Career Scholars

- **Be realistic and strategic:** the top-3 general journals are long shots for anyone. Solo-authored early career work often lands best in strong subfield journals.
- Subfield and regional journals value deep expertise, which is exactly what a dissertation gives you.
- Look at where the work you cite most is published.
- Check turnaround times and desk rejection rates (ask peers, check journal websites). Early career time is precious.
- Solo authorship is normal and respected for dissertation-based work. Do not feel pressure to add coauthors.
- Avoid predatory and pay-to-publish outlets. If the invitation email is flattering and unsolicited, be suspicious.

Book Outlets: Presses

Academic (university) presses:

- The standard route for a first book
- Peer review counts for tenure
- e.g. Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton, Cornell, Chicago, Michigan
- Series editors matter: find the series where your book fits

Commercial academic presses*:

- e.g. Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge, Bloomsbury
- Peer reviewed, so they count as scholarly monographs for tenure
- *But: high-volume and less selective, so a weaker signal at book-oriented departments
- A credible fallback

How Review Actually Works (and How Long It Takes)

Articles:

- Submit to one journal at a time
- Editor screens first (desk rejections are common and fast)
- 2 to 3 anonymous reviewers
- Decision: reject, R&R, or (rarely) accept outright
- R&R: revise plus a response memo; often a second round
- Roughly 3 to 6 months per round; a year from submission to acceptance

Books:

- Proposal (plus sample chapters or full ms) to an acquisitions editor
- Editor sends it out to expert readers (2 to 4 reader reports)
- You write a revision memo responding to the reports
- Editor takes the package to the press board for approval (the syndicate), then contract
- Each stage takes months; review to contract can easily run a year

The Conversion: Chapter to Article

It Depends on How You Wrote the Dissertation

Three-paper (article-based) dissertation: the articles were written in article form first. The dissertation is really an intro and conclusion wrapped around somewhat non-continuous papers. Conversion is mostly unwrapping.

Traditional monograph dissertation: chapters lean on the rest of the manuscript (shared theory, shared lit review, cross-references). Conversion is harder, but very doable. (This is what I did.)

Either way: an article is not a shortened chapter. It is a rewritten, self-contained argument.

Making a Chapter Stand Alone

- Rebuild the front end. The chapter borrowed its motivation, theory, and lit review from earlier chapters. The article needs its own compressed versions of all three.
- Pick one contribution. A chapter can do three things. An article should do one thing well. Cut the rest (it can become another paper).
- Kill the cross-references. "As shown in Chapter 2" becomes either a citation, a brief summary, or nothing.
- Shrink ruthlessly. Chapters run 12 to 15k words; most journals want 8 to 10k. The lit review usually takes the biggest hit.
- Reframe for the journal's audience, not your committee. The committee wanted proof you did the work. Reviewers want to know why the finding matters.

Conversion: Practical Tips

- Write a fresh abstract before revising. If you cannot state the one contribution in 150 words, the article is not ready.
- Check journal policies on prior dissemination. Most journals are fine with content from a publicly deposited dissertation, but check, and consider an embargo on the dissertation itself if you are planning a book.
- Recycle strategically: methods sections and data descriptions transfer easily; framing almost never does.
- Get fresh eyes. Someone who has not read the dissertation will spot every place the article silently assumes chapter context.
- Expect the R&R to pull the paper even further from the chapter. That is normal and good.

The Book Route

A Dissertation Is Not (Yet) a Book

- The audience changes. The dissertation proves competence to five people. The book makes an argument to a field.
- Cut the defensive apparatus. Long lit reviews, methodological throat-clearing, and exhaustive robustness discussion mostly go.
- Find the narrative arc. Chapters should build toward something, not just sit next to each other.
- Voice matters. Books can (and should) be more confident and more readable than dissertations.
- Classic resource: William Germano, *From Dissertation to Book* (University of Chicago Press).

What Reviewers Actually Said (My Proposal)

Four reader reports on my book proposal, one refrain:

- **Reviewer A** (recommending acceptance!): "some sections retain traces of dissertation-style density"
- **Reviewer B**: "The sample chapters still read like a doctoral thesis, rather than as a book" . . . "not just replicate their dissertation chapters, but extract the underlying meaning"
- **Reviewer C**: "the ms reads like a dissertation . . . not simply providing a literature review as is often the case in dissertations"
- **OUP Reviewer 2**: "the chapters still read a bit too like a PhD thesis" (but also: "this book has great potential")

Lessons From Those Reviews

- Framing must match scope. Reviewer B: the title and synopsis promised breadth; the chapters delivered a narrow causal pathway. Be explicit about what the book does and does not cover.
- Extract lessons, do not replicate chapters. Reviewers want the underlying, generalizable knowledge, not the empirical setup you wrote for your committee.
- The literature dates while you revise. Reviewer B flagged that most references were old and listed recent work to engage. Budget time to update the field survey.
- Define your audience honestly. Scholarly, policy, or student readerships each demand different levels of technical detail (and reviewers will check).

More Lessons (From the OUP Report)

- Results over methods. "Greater focus on results rather than research methods or process." Long methodological detail belongs in an appendix; the chapter should interpret findings.
- Reviewers hand you a reading list. Engage it in the revision memo, even where you push back. It shows the editor you took the review seriously.
- Subfield experts will read it. A migration scholar flagged that my scarcity claim holds only for distress-type displacement. Committees are generalists; press reviewers often are not. Scope your claims precisely.
- The world keeps moving. Major events in your case countries after fieldwork ends (for me, Bangladesh in 2024) must be addressed. A book cannot freeze at the defense date.

The Book Process

- Prospectus first. A 5 to 10 page pitch: argument, contribution, audience, chapter outline, timeline, comparable titles (see OUP template).
- Approach acquisitions editors early (conferences are great for this). You can talk to multiple presses; you submit the full manuscript for review to one at a time unless told otherwise.
- If you can, run a book workshop / manuscript conference: invite 3 or 4 senior readers to tear apart a full draft before the press sees it.
- Typical timeline from defense to published book: 3 to 5 years. Plan your tenure clock accordingly.
- Keep the dissertation embargoed if your press cares (many no longer do, but ask).

Early Career Book Prizes to Know

- **OUP Early Career Researcher First Book Prize:** annual, humanities and social sciences. Up to 10 winners publish with OUP fully open access (full OA fee waiver) plus hardback. Eligibility: within six years of your first academic appointment (career breaks excluded).
- **APSA-IPSA Theodore J. Lowi First Book Award:** recognizes a first book in any field of political science, any method.
- **APSA section awards:** many sections run best first book or best dissertation awards in their subfield. Have your chair or press nominate you.
- Prizes are not just vanity: they signal quality to hiring and tenure committees and boost book sales.

Takeaways

- Decide book vs articles based on your project and field, not fear. Doing both is common.
- Aim articles where your literature lives. First books belong at peer-reviewed presses.
- An article from a chapter is a rewrite, not a trim. One contribution, self-contained, aimed at reviewers.
- A book from a dissertation means a new audience, a real arc, and a confident voice.
- Look up first book prizes (OUP, Lowi, APSA sections) about a year before your book is ready.

Questions?