

TWEED

editing tailored to the academic

Dissertation-to-Book
✧ *Guide* ✧

No. 1

A DISSERTATION is
✧ *an Auspicious* ✧
BEGINNING

Whether you are about to embark on writing your dissertation or already have it in hand, you have **an opportunity**. Chiefly, if you shape your dissertation into a book-worthy manuscript, you will have a better published monograph than you might have in an earlier, less competitive era. Specifically, your argument will be exceedingly coherent. Your work will be more interdisciplinary and reach a broader audience. You will also enhance your writing style, excising jargon and improving clarity.

Now more than ever, **a dissertation needs shaping before it is published as a book.**

In *From Dissertation to Book*, seasoned editor William Germano says that the “open secret of academic publishing” is that “a book doesn’t actually *need* an original theory.” This may shock you, but the reality is that scholarly presses tire of seeing revised dissertations that start with theory. Instead, they like to see a

narrative directed according to an author’s *interpretation*. You can begin with big ideas, but think of them as memorable frameworks that your reader will use as lenses as she continues to read. A book focuses on the subject at hand rather than rehearsing the history of scholarship on that

✧ *Generally speaking, A BOOK...* ✧

- ... aims to reach interested non-experts
- ... is a product designed either to bring prestige or revenue—or both—to publishing partners
- ... when published, counts toward tenure
- ... is mostly narrative
- ... draws the reader in immediately
- ... sets a scene, artfully providing broad background
- ... demonstrates points instead of relying on documentation
- ... focuses more on primary sources than on secondary literature
- ... makes the scholarly apparatus of the dissertation invisible
- ... adopts a judicious tone, neither too emotional nor too stiff
- ... features evocative chapter titles
- ... has a short, straightforward table of contents
- ... cites infrequently—perhaps once per page
- ... is edited and proofread

✧ *Key TERMS* ✧

A **DISSERTATION** is a lengthy research exercise undergone by PhD candidates for degree completion. A **THESIS** is an umbrella term that refers to dissertations as well as master’s- and undergraduate-level capstone projects.

A **MANUSCRIPT** is a text that is not (yet) published.

A **MONOGRAPH** is a scholarly book concerning a single subject. Even in the rare case that it has more than one author, it is not a collection of standalone essays.

A **BOOK**, for our purposes, is a published manuscript.

A **UNIVERSITY PRESS** is a publisher affiliated with an educational institution. Most of its titles are scholarly and peer-reviewed.

A **SCHOLARLY PRESS** is either a university press or a commercial academic press.

PEER REVIEW is the process by which scholars are enlisted to anonymously critique and appraise academic manuscripts under consideration by a book or journal publisher.

subject.

One of your most powerful tools is access to **databases** of dissertation abstracts and, often, full-text files. Find books by junior scholars that interest you—perhaps ones published by presses to which you aspire. Then use UMI ProQuest and the Networked Digital Library of Theses and

Dissertations (NDLTD) to see if those books started as dissertation projects. (Also check with the scholar's alma mater; Stanford is one example of a university that no longer submits to ProQuest but does self-archive.) If so, you can compare the published books to the material available online. Your school may also keep a library of its recent dissertations, which you can access free of charge.

Not only will you have read interesting research, you will have concrete examples of the revisions that occur between the dissertation and book stages.

Nota bene: For a scholarly writer, **reading widely** is a great asset. If you are familiar with the artistry of excellent journalists and novelists, then you can better employ such creativity in your own writing.

Now that you are beginning to understand broadly the quite different shapes of dissertations and books, you can take steps that will affect your own writing more directly.

This guide is not meant to substitute for the sage guidance of your advisor and mentors.

✧ *Stay tuned for* ✧

TWEED Dissertation-to-Book Guide N^o 2:

Envisioning Your Dissertation as Something Else Entirely

✧ *By Way of Comparison,* ✧ A DISSERTATION...

- ... is written for a committee of a few, highly specialized individuals
- ... is an exercise designed to demonstrate competence and depth of knowledge
- ... is created under time constraints
- ... is usually very detailed
- ... justifies itself by pointing out gaps in existing literature
- ... engages other scholarship as a way of proving that the author knows her stuff
- ... features a formal structure for its contents, which can also be expressed list-like in the introduction
- ... includes several citations and notes on each page
- ... may benefit from the work of an editor—or at least careful review by a collaborative writing group

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

✧ *that Differentiate a Dissertation from a Book* ✧

- ... overreaching when stating the project's significance
- ... saying what will be argued instead of simply making an argument
- ... defensive overqualification of statements, which obscures meaning and undermines the argument
- ... a stuffy tone designed to sound as if the author belongs in the academy to which he aspires
- ... overuse of passive voice
- ... long, sometimes painfully descriptive chapter titles
- ... a convoluted, overly complex table of contents that lists every chapter subheading

✧ TWEED Editing ✧

With personal and professional experience in higher education, TWEED answers the call of the scholarly writer, offering editing tailored for academic success. Katie Van Heest, M.A., has a certificate in editing from the University of Chicago and offers an affordable range of services for scholars and students.

TWEED's book preparation services give you a competitive edge. Revising your dissertation for publication? Writing a scholarly monograph or article? TWEED performs developmental editing that realizes the potential of your manuscript or idea. You create your own package from the range of available services: assessment, structural plan, thorough plan implementation, proposal development, consulting, and more.

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