

# TWEED

editing tailored to the academic

*Dissertation-to-Book*  
Guide

No. 2

ENVISIONING *your*  
DISSERTATION *as*  
Something Else Entirely

The first TWEED guide of this series established that a dissertation—even a good one—does not a book make. Composing for publication is a different kind of opportunity than writing for your degree committee. Revision will always be part of the process of giving your dissertation an afterlife, but revision *into what?*

See Guide No. 1 for definitions of key terms.

## Let's Take a Look at Your MANY, MANY OPTIONS

- 1. Take a break.** You need at least a few months away from your dissertation before you involve yourself with it again. This need not be wasted time, however. Pass your writing along to friends and colleagues who care about you enough to invest some time into reading and critiquing it.
- 2.** Once you've taken a break, consider the obvious choice. You could jump right into making the dissertation into your first **scholarly monograph**. Your first book as an academic is a critical one, as booksellers often use sales of your previous book to determine how many copies of your *next* book they will order. So even though a first scholarly book will likely have well under 1,000 copies in its first print run, your first book should be strong. It is literally the foundation of a marketable career.

If you have an academic teaching position, your university may have a program to support your publication efforts with editing and marketing services. (Examples include Emory's Center for Faculty Development & Excellence and Georgetown's Booklab Office of Scholarly & Literary Publications). Look into third-party foundations that support first-book authors: the American Antiquarian Society and the Social Science Research Council, for example.

- 3.** Future TWEED guides will focus on the specifics of revising your dissertation, but suffice it to say that if you choose to turn your dissertation into a book, you have options regarding how thoroughly

you will rework the material. Remember that every dissertation will need at least surface-level polishing to minimize jargon and the overqualifying typical of even advanced student work.

You might consider submitting to a **dissertation series**. Many university presses and academic associations dedicate lines of books specifically to revised theses. Also check with specialty research institutes and university libraries for such series.

Publishing with a dissertation series does not mean that you will submit your dissertation fresh off its defense. But you will engage with it, typically, for a shorter length of time than if you were aiming for a standalone monograph. If you feel the weight of your tenure clock, if you have pressing personal considerations, or if you are really anxious to begin working on your *next* publishable book-length manuscript, consider dissertation series. This is particularly advisable if you have a professional connection to a reputable series with a distinguished editorial board.

One drawback of this publishing avenue is that the print runs can be significantly smaller than those for standalone scholarly monographs—which are themselves usually quite modest. You would have, however, the advantages of a somewhat simplified revision process and the power of association with an established series. Clearly, this is an excellent choice for many recent PhDs seeking publication.

- 4.** If you revise your dissertation heavily, you may end up assigning yourself **additional research**. Far from a setback, this is an opportunity. You'll recognize that once you have thoroughly reconceptualized your dissertation.

- 5.** Having carefully considered the arc of your dissertation, you can assess whether it might be the foundation not for a monograph but for **two books**. It may be a rare occurrence, but it is certainly true that some topics are best given more space. You may have realized this as you wrote the dissertation, wishing you had more time or had narrowed your topic further.

Perhaps you realized that your dissertation was at core an excellent topic that you set up expertly.

But your subsequent chapters moved in a direction that, in retrospect, you recognize was not the best treatment. You may want to salvage that core chapter but **draft new material** to fill out the manuscript.

**6.** Even at an early stage, many academic careers have a throughline: your interests over the course of your graduate program may all fit together. Perhaps you have a conference paper that would actually complement your core dissertation chapter nicely. Can you think of other topics or arguments that would fit the theme? You may first envision this kind of manuscript as a **collection of essays**, but it's not very common for a first book to be such. Instead, construct a coherent **umbrella argument or narrative** that will thoroughly tie these chapters and articles together. Then pitch that as your book idea.

**7.** This next option may be revolutionary for PhDs in the humanities but is simply *de rigueur* for those in the sciences: **journal articles**. You can choose your strongest chapter—or two or three—and revise toward submission in one or more scholarly journals.

Perhaps you realize that your literature review chapter, for instance, is not going to be interesting for a wider audience. Maybe that leaves you with two or three chapters that are stronger. Do they stand on their own? You will have to revise them to

be self-contained entities. Academic writing is infamously bloated. You do your material and your readers a favor by presenting a concise and powerful argument.

Publishing a dissertation chapter as a journal article can be done **in support of book publication**. It is a separate step, to be sure, but article publication can lead to many opportunities. Editors stay on top of journals in their fields, and they do contact authors on the basis of interesting articles. You may also garner lecturing opportunities and gain some general visibility for sparking discussion on your subject. All of this supports any book proposal you submit to a publisher at a later time.

Be careful, though: having one chapter appear as an article can be advantageous, but only if untapped material remains in the dissertation as a whole. If you have published all of your meaty chapters in journals, then editors will not be as keen to invest time and resources in your project because they won't be printing anything new. If you do publish multiple chapters as articles, you should understand that you are going down **an alternative path**, one that probably will not end in publication of *this* material as a book. Your *following* project will have the benefit of this prior publication history.

Whether you choose to submit parts of your dissertation to journals should be decided based not only on the shape of your research but also

## 🌀 RESOURCES *Worth Consulting* 🌀

TWEED constructs guides on the basis of professional editing experience, education, personal experience in the academy, and the wealth of expertise available in books, periodicals, and the Web. Here are some exceptional resources that provide broader perspective and more specific advice.

- Leigh Deneef and Craufurd D. Godwin, eds. *The Academic's Handbook*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- \*William Germano. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- \*William Germano. *Getting it Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- John A. Goldsmith, John Komlos, and Penny Schine Gold. *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Christopher J. Lucas and John W. Murry, Jr. *New Faculty: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Beth Luey. *Revising Your Dissertation: Advice from Leading Editors*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato. *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002.

\* *Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing*. Explore the whole series for rigorous insight from publishing professionals.

upon the climate of your discipline. Journals are often read more widely than books in some fields, but not all. Academic publishing is changing rapidly, so it may be difficult to predict what will serve you and your project best. Weigh your discipline's conventions against your own nonconformism carefully.

One more important note: seek out **the best possible journals** first. While publication in major journals is inherently impressive, inclusion in minor journals does not *de facto* make as strong a case. William Germano suggests creating a tiered list of journals in your field. Submit to the top tier. If none pans out, move *directly* to the next tier. Spend no time on disappointment. Your work will find a suitable home only if you keep at it.

8. In addition to print journals offering online access to their content, **online academic journals** are springing up more and more these days, especially in scientific fields. Many are associated with reputable organizations or universities, and many are peer-reviewed. Although they are the wave of the future (or of the present, some would say), electronic journals may not yet be as well esteemed as established print journals. The online publishing landscape is changing constantly, as is its relationship to the hard-copy publishing world and to tenure processes. Keep tabs on these developments, as the digital realm may offer a perfect fit for your dissertation or other projects.

9. Some dissertation advisors indeed advise their students to consider **self-publishing**. A publicly accessible e-book may suit your goals, but remember that hard-copy publication is the gold standard, and for good reason. Most tenure review committees will not consider an e-book to be anywhere near as solid evidence of your worth. The key is **peer review**, which all university-press-published scholarly monographs and academic journal articles undergo. Seriously consider this as you sift through publication options.

## ☞ MOVE *Boldly* FORWARD ☞

Now that you have been introduced to a veritable cornucopia of ways to publish your dissertation, **strike while the iron is hot** (after you have taken your mandatory post-dissertation break, naturally).

Many dissertation topics are timely. That is, you may have investigated something that is particularly prescient *right now*, perhaps something of historical or cultural significance. If you wait, yours may no longer be the first or definitive statement on that subject.

In other cases, the subject area is discussed so actively that if you wait too long there will be dozens more sources that you have to read, digest, and incorporate into your manuscript. In light of this, what is your dissertation's shelf life?

You may decide to scrap the dissertation, but do it for the right reasons. Being sick of the topic isn't enough. Do it because you have something bright to move on to. That's William Germano's advice in *From Dissertation to Book*. He says that if you move on, do it fast. And think of it as *deferring* dissertation revision for the time being. You had your reasons for exploring that topic, and there may be an opportune moment to return to it.

*Your advisor and mentors should be your primary resources as you weigh these many publication options. An editor can help you decide by performing an assessment of your project.*

## ☞ Stay tuned for ☞

TWEED Dissertation-to-Book Guide N<sup>o</sup> 3:

**Again, for the First Time:  
Revising Your Manuscript**

## ☞ 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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