

Transforming a Thesis into a Book

Some Suggestions and Recommendations

Your thesis was, perhaps, a text written, in the first instance, for satisfying your own curiosity, and/or for examiners whom you wanted to convince that you know your subject well. When transforming your thesis into a book, your aim should now be to convince future reviewers that your contribution is useful, substantial, balanced, and fully reliable. Here are a number of ideas how you can get closer to reaching these aims:¹

1. **The Title:** As this will be a book for the academic public, your title should accurately reflect the content. The title of your book is, in a certain way, an announcement which particular niche in the literature you are claiming to occupy with your study. It should not be too broad, therefore. Also, academics will usually have little appreciation for originality at this particular point. The book title should neither raise expectations that the text does not fulfil, nor should it be cryptic or hide some important aspect of your book. Both, reviewers and buyers of your book may be ordering it not knowing the book's list of contents or abstract. Thus the title can be very important: If a reviewer agrees to review your book, yet later finds that its title promised more than the text delivers, she/he might regret agreeing to review it and reflect such disappointment in her/his review (or, if you are lucky, simply refuse to review it). Similarly, if a buyer spends money to get your book and then finds her/his anticipations are not met, she/he might send it back to the publisher.

¹ See also Howard Becker with a chapter by Pamela Richards, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Eleanor Harman et al., *The Thesis and the Book: A Guide for First-Time Academic Authors*, 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

2. **The Abstract for the Book's Back-Cover:** While your title should be a sober and precise summary of the book's content, your abstract can, in contrast, be, to a certain extent, "sensational." That means that here you should emphasize the novel aspects, and, perhaps, original, or, even, surprising results of your research. This is general practice. You could outline a puzzle that is resolved in your study, or formulate questions that your book tries to answer. Be creative in this part!

3. **The List of Contents:** This is an important part of your book since the list of contents is a piece of information that many potential buyers will use to decide whether to buy your book or not. The list of contents will also appear in the presentation of your book at www.buchhandel.de. Thus the headings of your chapters and sections have not only the function to structure your investigation. They should also concisely and accurately reflect your matters of concerns and line of argument. Your list of contents should neither be too long, nor too short.

4. **The Foreword:** Try to secure a foreword (or afterword) from a scholar in your field—perhaps, even a prominent one. Alternatively, you may propose an important personality related to the subject matter of your book, e.g. a head of an international NGO, sympathetic politician or other public figure. Usually, a reference to the foreword can be included in the extended title of the book, i.e.: "With a foreword by ...". Such a foreword will both, make your book more marketable, and protect you somewhat from uninformed critique. Your study will be taken more seriously, if a specialist agrees to support it in this way.
However, do not approach several possible authors for a foreword at the same time. Requesting such a foreword might be a delicate matter. If you prefer, I can approach, on behalf of the series, a possible author of a foreword whom you can suggest and who should, normally, know you and/or your work already somewhat.

5. **The Introduction:** The main purpose of the introduction is twofold—to highlight the usefulness of your study and to summarize your main ar-

gument. The former means that you clarify what addition your book makes to the already existing literature. The latter includes a preview of the final results of your investigation. Scholarly books are unlike detective stories where readers, only towards the end of the text, find out “who the perpetrator is.”

Also, while your thesis’s introduction might have contained theoretical considerations (perhaps, many of them), abstract theorizing is less important for a book in this book series. Often, a short reference to some theoretical studies will suffice.

Whereas even relevant theoretical literature is not that important for books in this series, previous *empirical* research on, or directly related to, your subject clearly matters. In your introduction, you should venture to convince the reader that you are fully aware of the secondary literature in your field and “state of the art.” Sometimes it is useful to extensively review this literature, but sometimes it might be sufficient just to mention the relevant authors (who, by the way, might be future reviewers of your book).

6. **The Secondary Literature:** Identifying scholarly books relevant to your investigation can be relatively easy using, for instance, electronic bookshops or the search engine of a university library. In contrast, unearthing all relevant papers in scholarly journals or collected volumes is, sometimes, more difficult. Go through the bibliographic information of the secondary sources that you already have, and find out about specialized search engines for scholarly journal-papers (e.g. www.ingenta.com). Make, in particular, sure that you do not miss any papers in the leading Anglophone journals in your field. Missing a seminal article could be, potentially, embarrassing. You may make also some additional efforts to find out about literature in the language of the country that you are studying.
7. **The Main Body of the Text:** The fact that you have been proposed to submit a manuscript on the basis of your thesis usually implies that the substance of your study is worth a publication as it is. Therefore, you

usually do not need to add new chapters on aspects not yet explored in your study.

Nevertheless, especially Master's theses often can, and should be, extended through—what I would call—“thickening” of your argument. That means that you return to your sources, the WWW and the library/ies and try to find additional information related to your subject. The more facts, dates, names, numbers, and quotes (all adequately referenced) your argument contains, the more respected your book will usually be. For this book series, your text does not have to be theoretically sophisticated or methodologically advanced. But it should be *dense*, i.e. filled with useful empirical data and references to secondary literature. Try to support every evaluation, generalization, or inference you make with as much material as possible—statistics, quotes from participants, citations from scholarly books, or any other suitable means.

You may have spent little time on checking the orthography, grammar, and style of your thesis. Obviously, for a publication these matters become important. If we detect even a few orthographic or stylistic errors the whole manuscript will be sent back to you for further editing. Note that we will not do a final editing of your book, but only screen it.

8. **Footnotes:** Among the first parts many academics, after reading the list of contents and abstract, skim through when approaching a scholarly text are the footnotes. This is because the primary and secondary sources listed in a publication usually indicate whether this is a “serious” study or not, and where the author “is coming from.” When writing your thesis, you may have thought of your footnotes as something secondary. For your book, in contrast, think of the literature list in your footnotes as your “academic business card.” Your references should be both impressive in length and flawless in style and orthography. Your bibliographic information should be comprehensive, correct, written in a uniform format, and without even minor mistakes in punctuation. From experience, we would draw your special attention to empty spaces: In almost every manuscript we receive, there are missing or unnecessary empty spaces. Often also, adequate English-language transcription (or

German-language transliteration) of titles of foreign-language sources is a particular challenge. Essentially, your footnotes indicate to the reader, already before she/he starts to read the main text, your concern for detail and exactness—qualities greatly valued by many academics.

9. **Conclusions:** Although you should, at this point, already have stated your research results, at least, twice—namely, in the introduction and main text body—do not hesitate to summarize your argument in your conclusions once more. This may seem redundant, but is, in fact, standard academic practice. Proceeding from your summary, you can move ahead to some broader implications of your study. Be careful, however, not to go too far here: Academics prefer soberness and understatement, especially when formulating claims that go beyond the present study. Moreover, be self-reflective and self-critical in your conclusions and (re-)state openly the limitations of your study! This will in no way diminish your study's worth, but indicate modesty. It may take out some steam from possible critique in future reviews of your book. Often, a smart conclusion of a book is to indicate how later studies could verify, falsify, modify or specify your results.

10. **Appendices:** Do not underestimate the importance of appendices for future evaluations of your book! In this section, you have a chance to make your book more valuable to the reader and to convince even reviewers critical of your argument of the usefulness of your publication. Thus, tables, transcripts of interviews, chronologies, glossaries, diagrams, biographies, lists of "Further Reading," etc., and, especially, your translations of primary sources from foreign languages into English or German will, most probably, be appreciated. A particularly important contribution could be your English or German translations of previously unpublished foreign language texts related to your study. However, be careful not to violate any copyrights or ethical rules when publishing primary sources. Incorporate references to your appendices in the argument of the main body of your text.

11. **Proof-Reading/Correcting:** A last but, by no means, the least important process through which your manuscript should go through before final submission is its critical reading by as many other persons as possible. Such readers can be divided into four categories:

- *The “competent” reader:* Specialists in your field are the most obvious choice for readers of your manuscript. Although it might be difficult to convince a leading expert on the subject to spend time to go through your manuscript, you should, if you have any such acquaintances, definitely try. (Sometimes such a reader can then be also the author of the foreword; see above.) Basically, every reading of your manuscript by an additional specialist is an extra insurance against future possible critique. Probably, some remarks or corrections by such specialists will constitute immediately relevant improvements of your argument that can be incorporated easily. Any such changes for the better should be scrupulously acknowledged in footnotes as, for instance, “Personal communication with Professor, 3 July 2004.” Other critique, in contrast, may contradict the argument of your thesis, and find your disapproval. Such critique is, nevertheless, worth using in your text too: It might well be a point that future reviewers will raise. You should thus, if appropriate, take advantage of the opportunity to address such critique in the main body of your text or in a footnote, in advance. In this case, you will have to decide yourself whether you mention the source of the criticism or outline it anonymously before responding. There is no golden rule here.
- *The “incompetent” reader:* A less obvious choice for a reader of your manuscript would be people who do not know anything about your subject, let's say your 18-year-old brother who just finished high-school. Sometimes such readers can, however, be rather useful in alerting you to jargonized or cryptic arguments. If you can, try to get such a reader.
- *The “critical” reader:* A third, more obvious choice for readers are persons who might not be specialists in your field, but are familiar with academic matters and would be willing to read your manu-

script with a particularly critical eye. These could be friends or peers in your current or former course. The issue here is that you will need, at least, one reader who knows a bit about your subject and about academia and who is—in contrast to the above specialist or “incompetent” persons—prepared to read every line of your manuscript *carefully*. You can offer such readers that they will be mentioned in a special section “Acknowledgements” of your book and that you could get for them, as a thank you, a copy of the book (which you can buy from the publisher for the special price for authors).

- *The “language-competent” reader*: You could, finally, also try to find a reader who has some special competence in the language in which you are publishing, i.e. is a language teacher, translator, linguist, or other person who deals with language professionally. Obviously, this aspect is especially relevant if you want to publish not in your native language. In fact, if the latter is the case you would be obliged to find such a corrector who would be explicitly mentioned in the “Acknowledgements” as the person co-responsible for the language aspect of your manuscript. However, even if you are publishing in your native language, having your manuscript read by somebody with special expertise in orthography, grammar, etc. is, usually, a good idea.

12. **Publish or Perish? A Final Note of Caution**: Certainly, a publication of a book will contribute to your career—whether in academia or beyond the “Ivory Tower.” Also, you might never get an extended feedback to one or more journal article/s that might also come out of your thesis. In distinction, your book will almost certainly trigger some responses in the scholarly community as it will be sent for review to the leading journals in Russian and East European studies, and, perhaps, further relevant review journals.

On the one hand, you should, therefore, not miss this opportunity (or a similar offer you may receive from another publishing house). On the other hand, before deciding whether to go ahead with publishing your

thesis, you might want to also consider some draw-backs of a full publication of your thesis, at this point. Among them are the following two:

First, a Master's thesis could, some day, constitute a basis or chapter for a future doctoral dissertation. In this case, publishing it now might not be advisable as it may prevent you from fully incorporating your Master's thesis into your doctoral dissertation. In other cases though, this might not be a problem at all. You should discuss this issue with your future or current academic supervisor. She/he should know the appropriate regulations in your doctoral program, and may have some additional advice on what might be a good publishing strategy for you.

Second, in certain cases, a publication of your research results in a particularly reputed Anglophone journal might be a more important element in your possible academic career than the publication of a book. To be sure: *ibidem* Publishers does not demand that your research results have not been published, in another format, before. *ibidem* Publishers also does not forbid a re-publication of your results in the form of journal-articles after you have published the book. Yet, the *journal* that you may approach will, almost certainly, require that your results have not been published anywhere else before (at least, not in the same language). In the aftermath of a publication of your article, the journal may also require you to seek permission from the journal's publishing house to re-publish your research results in the context of a book.

Sometimes, an elegant solution to the former problem can be to publish an article in a journal with a footnote saying that a more extensive presentation of your research results may be found in a forthcoming book. Your reference could look the following way:

² For a more extensive documentation of the results of the present research project, see <your name>, *Book Title: Book's Sub-Title*. Soviet & Post-Soviet Politics & Society 24 (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2007, ISBN, in print).

Note, however, that, in this case, the timing becomes important: The journal editors will usually need some assurance that your article in their journal appears indeed *before*, and not after, the book. Should there be

such a time-conflict, *ibidem* could delay the publication of your book until the respective journal article/s has/have come out. Note also that you should usually not refer to a forthcoming book unless your final master-copy has already been approved for printing, and been assigned a volume number in the series.

I look forward to receiving your book manuscript!

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PS: If you think that any of the above recommendations are redundant, wrong, or incomplete, please let me know!