



Honor Frost Foundation Publication Series

Turning a thesis into a monograph

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Congratulations! You've successfully defended your dissertation or thesis, and you are now officially a Doctor of Philosophy! The composition and defense of your dissertation was a formidable process, and yet you are not finished. You want to ensure that your argument is seen by as many of your academic peers as possible, and so you wish to publish your dissertation as a monograph.

For new PhDs, this will be another formidable process because a dissertation and a monograph are not the same thing. They are structured differently, they have different audiences and content, and they have different tones and styles.

To turn a thesis into a monograph, you will have to revise, restructure, and rewrite your dissertation. Be prepared to spend a year or more developing this new manuscript. It is an arduous process, but certainly a very rewarding one. And the HFF Publications Manager will help you along the way (and she is a thesis-to-monograph survivor!).

Here a few of the key differences between theses and monographs. Understanding these will help you strategize how to turn your thesis into a monograph that will position you as an authority and expert in your field.

1. Audience: the audience of a thesis is your advisor and your dissertation committee. The audience of your monograph will be the entire community of scholars in your field, including established professionals and new generations of scholars around the world. Always keep this expanded audience in mind as you revise your thesis into a book for all these people to read, study, teach, and enjoy. Also: if you know your audience, you'll know how to write your book, and how to market it.
2. Length: your thesis is almost certainly too long for a book. You will have to take out your surgical tools and make drastic cuts. Monographs are generally in the range of 80,000 to 100,000 words. They do not include the vast literature review, the details of theoretical paradigms that you've carefully weighed, or the detailed and technical methodological surveys that were probably required of your thesis. Those are places to make the first cuts. Also: if it bored you to write it, it will bore your audience to read it. Cut there, too.

3. Scope: if your argument is to be considered among those of first-rate scholars, it will have to appeal to them, but it will also have to engage with them. This may mean broadening your scope from a micro-analysis of a specific case study or series of case studies to explaining how these studies fit into the greater horizon of scholarship. If your thesis was on the port of Tyre in the 8th c. BCE, you will need to broaden your scope (either by expanding it geographically or chronologically, or both) and tie it in to other comparable scholarship. How can your study contribute to current debates on Iron Age mobility in general? This will make your argument appealing and relevant to your new audience of fellow scholars.
4. Content: books, even scholarly ones, are qualitative in nature: that is, they describe, explain, define, and connect. If your thesis leans on the quantitative, this should be excerpted and published as a peer-reviewed paper in a relevant journal. Your book can then reference that published data rather than boring your audience with numbers – which, let’s face it: no one will read anyway. But they will read it if it’s in a relevant journal. And they will read about it – a summary of the quantitative findings and their implications – in your book, contextualized among novel, humanistic observations about socioeconomic networks, cultural identity, environmental relationships, etc.
5. Timing: your book should not be a snapshot in time; rather, it should be as timeless as possible. Your book should remain relevant for decades to come. This is another reason to cut the quantitative in favor of the qualitative: numerical data quickly becomes outdated and obsolete. Instead, imagine how readers 30 years from now will receive your book. Write for them.
6. Tone: in writing your thesis, you had to forcefully argue why this study was necessary, and you probably aggressively justified that necessity by pointing out the flaws with everyone else’s approach. But now is the time for humility: a mature scholar acknowledges that nothing we do is without the scaffolding of those who came before us. Make your tone humble, even if critical at times; coming across as overly hubristic will raise a red flag among readers that you are still a grad student and may think you know more than you actually do. Reassure your readers that ancora imparo – “I’m still learning” – but that you are confident that you have something unique to offer your discipline. Offer that thing, with humility.
7. Structure: pick out your favorite monograph, the one you wish you’d written. Why do you love this book so much? How does the author entice you with the introduction, and use that opening segment to lure you in and excite you about the content and argument? How does the author use each chapter to structure the argument, and build up a case? Does the author give you a concluding

chapter, and if so, what is its purpose? Model your monograph on a very successful book, and of course, cite that book!

If this process sounds too onerous, or you think that your dissertation just isn't cut out for a monograph (e.g., it's too technical or quantitative), consider breaking it up into distinct papers to submit to peer-reviewed academic journals. This is not admitting defeat! To the contrary, having numerous peer-reviewed papers circulating through the academic community is a smart, strategic way to get your name out there and your work cited. In most cases, papers have a much greater audience, and a greater impact, than books. And while all those papers are being published and read, you can brainstorm new ideas for your groundbreaking monograph.

Links for further reading:

<https://ehs.org.uk/society/students-ecrs/turn-thesis-to-monograph/>

<https://www.uclpress.co.uk/pages/from-thesis-to-monograph>

<https://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=725994&p=5240490>

<https://www.lexacademic.com/blog/from-phd-to-monograph-how-to-revise-your-thesis-for-publication/>

<https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book-authors/your-career/early-career-researcher-hub/revising-the-dissertation>