

3 Publishing Books

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This section seeks to unpack the 'black-box' that is the publishing of books. It provides some guidance on different stages in producing a book, from why bother to write one to ways of ensuring you reach your target audience.

Why write a book?

Writing a book, whether on your own or with a colleague, is not easy! There will be plenty of times when you ask yourself 'why am I doing this?' The intellectual and organisational effort required is immense. If you are writing a monograph (an authored rather than an edited, research-based book) there is a need to sustain an argument over approximately 90,000 words. If you are editing a book this throws up its own challenges. Introductions and conclusions need to pull together the contributions of individual chapters. Awkward contributors have to be managed. Let no one tell you writing and/or editing a book is straightforward (Kitchen and Fuller 2005). It is not! So, given this, why write a monograph or edit a book?

There are a number of reasons for producing a monograph. Some are specific to writing a book while others are more general reasons for publishing academic work. First, writing a monograph remains a highly valued activity. Whilst some have argued that in the UK the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has devalued the worth of academic books (Harvey 2006), the intellectual effort involved, from having the original idea to the final delivery of the manuscript, means that monographs continue to be benchmark publications, although this does differ from one country to another. They are good for your career (Kitchen and Fuller 2005). Second, and in contrast to journal articles, they allow authors to produce a sustained argument. There is greater capacity to construct a serious theoretical argument and to give empirical findings a real airing. You are not constrained in the way you are when writing journal articles and may also have the freedom to be both provocative and creative. Third, monographs travel across disciplines. If you want to appeal to publics beyond geography then writing a monograph might be a good way of going about it. They also last – disciplines are known for the books they produce, less so for their articles.

For edited collections many of these arguments also hold true. While you won't write the whole book, you will have the initial idea. You will be the intellectual spark, and it will be you – perhaps with colleagues – who will put your imprint on the collection through the volume's introduction and the conclusion. These chapters are important. They set the scene and pull together the points made in the individual contributions. Edited collections can be an effective way of uniting a group of authors working on similar subjects but from different perspectives, or of collating the uses of, or approaches to, new theoretical frameworks or specialist techniques forming a benchmark volume. Specialist conference sessions or workshops can be good starting points for such a book.

Choosing a publisher for your book

When considering writing a book it is worth looking at the profiles of different academic publishers. Think about the sort of book you want to write. Who is its intended public? Many academic publishers are now focused on textbooks and unlikely to be interested in publishing a research monograph, but some do still specialise in this area. It is also worth checking the activities of the learned societies relevant to your field – for example the British Geological Society publish a range of different types of academic books themselves. While these societies have more restricted marketing and distribution systems than large multi-discipline publishers, for a specialist book with a specific audience they may be ideal. There are also examples of partnerships between learned societies and mainstream academic publishers where the society sets the agenda for the series but gains expertise and facilities from the publishing partner – one example being the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) Book Series published by Wiley-Blackwell. Speak to academic colleagues about their experiences, visit publishers' stands at geography conferences and check publisher and society websites. You should be looking for answers to the following questions:

- does the publisher publish in your research field?
- does the publisher produce the type of book that you want to write? (e.g. textbook, research monograph, edited book, conference proceedings, reference book)
- are hardback and paperback versions of the book published simultaneously? If not, how many hardbacks does your book have to sell before the publisher will commission a paperback run?
- does the publisher have a good reputation amongst the intended readers of your book?
- what marketing and distribution system does the publisher have? For books likely to appeal across disciplines it may be advantageous to choose a publisher with an appropriate range of catalogues (e.g. (human) geography and sociology, history, economics; (physical) geography and geology, engineering, meteorology) to maximise exposure and potential audience
- does the publisher have a sales team to promote books internationally?
- does the publisher send out copies to academic journals for review?
- does the publisher attend large academic conferences and participate in book exhibitions?

- does the publisher have a track-record of accommodating specific author requirements and/or are they willing to negotiate over such requirements? For example some publishers are willing to make certain books available in economically-disadvantaged countries at a locally-viable cost.

If a publisher gives you the answers you hope for to most of the above questions, you've probably found the publisher for you. Unlike simultaneous submissions to journals, which are not allowed, it is permissible to submit your book proposal to more than one publisher at the same time. Different publishers will react in different ways if you choose to tell them you have done this. For some it will not be a problem, for others it might be.

Writing and submitting your proposal

In the majority of cases in order to get a book contract you have first to write a book proposal. This is a sales document – it is your attempt to sell yourself and the book you want to write to a publisher. Before writing your proposal, and as part of identifying a potential publisher for your book, you need to consult the publisher's website which should include instructions on how to structure and submit your proposal (information for the RGS-IBG Book Series is provided on page 59). Most publishers request very similar material, including the following:

- a summary overview, which outlines the book's central argument, drawing on the work of others to make an intellectual case for why such a book should be commissioned
- a detailed outline of the book's structure and content, with a short paragraph describing each chapter, and how it speaks to the main arguments of the manuscript. This should show how the book's arguments develop over the manuscript. For edited books, most publishers require a list of chapter titles and named contributors (and their affiliations). Many publishers require an estimate of the final length of the manuscript (and have strict limits for maximum length)
- a realistic definition of the primary and secondary markets for the book
- a list and assessment of competing titles and the ways in which your book will be different from these existing publications
- author's/editor's curriculum vitae and other academic biographical details.

In some cases publishers also like to receive sample chapters or full manuscripts. This is particularly the case in the US, where there is a strong tradition of graduate students turning their PhDs into books in order to gain tenure. In the UK and elsewhere, revising PhDs into books is not the norm, although it does happen, for example in Germany. And, of course, there are also certain risks involved in writing a book for a particular publisher before getting a contract. Put simply, it might not get commissioned and you then have to revisit it in light of the requirements of other publishers.

For proposals for edited books you are often in the awkward position of having to approach contributors before you have a publisher, as the publisher will rarely approve a contract if the contributors are not identified. If you are unable to confirm all of your contributing authors, most publishers will tolerate some uncertainty about who will contribute to the book, but you will need to state clearly who has been approached and has agreed (if only in principle) to write chapters. You will also need to indicate what steps you will take to control the quality and consistency of the chapters and what steps will be taken to ensure the final book is coherent and balanced. Protocols for this vary. In some cases the book editor reviews each chapter and only when the book is complete is it sent out to external review, whilst in other cases individual chapters may be sent out to external reviewers by the editors before they compile the volume. The most appropriate procedure is likely to be dictated, if not by the publisher, then by the editor's level of expertise in relation to the breadth or depth of the subject matter.

The proposal review process

The person to whom you might send the proposal differs from one publisher to another. In some cases you might submit it to the general geographical list, which would mean sending it to the Commissioning Editor. Alternatively you might send it to a series editor, who will tend to be an academic. There are numerous series in which geographers can publish. Wiley-Blackwell supports two special geographical book series: *Antipode Book Series* (edited by Noel Castree) and the *RGS-IBG Book Series* (edited by the two of us). Why does this matter? Well, even when two series are published by the same publisher the division of labour between the academic editor and the commissioning editor might differ. In some cases the academic editors have the final say on which proposals are commissioned; in others it is the commissioning editor that makes the final decision. In addition, in this example, both series are 'geographical' in focus but they have different remits. Most obviously, the *RGS-IBG Book Series* publishes both human and physical geography books whilst the *Antipode* series focuses squarely on radical geographical scholarship.

Once your proposal arrives at the publishers it will usually be sent for review by at least two academics in the field. These will be chosen by the series or commissioning editor, although you may have the chance to suggest possible names. The publishers will be looking for the academic reviewer to comment on the following types of questions:

- what are the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed book?
- what would you see as the likely readership for this book?
- who is going to read it and who is going to buy it?
- are you aware of any competing titles? If so, how does the current proposal compare to these?
- is the author/editor the best person to produce this book? For edited books, are the intended contributing authors the best/most appropriate?

Once the editor receives the reviews they will then act. In some cases this means liaising with others at the publishers. In other cases it means speaking with other editors or an editorial board, as is the case for the Wiley-Blackwell *RGS-IBG Book Series*. The editor will then make a decision on your proposal. If the decision is to accept then the commissioning editor will present the proposal to senior staff within the publishers for contract approval. In most cases this is straightforward, but in some cases authors might be required to make some changes to their proposal before being issued with a contract. The decision to reject a proposal, at whatever stage, can be taken for all manner of reasons. Sometimes the proposal is simply not good enough. In other cases it might be felt that the book does not fit in the publisher's list or series. Whatever the outcome, the reviewers' comments will be forwarded to you, so even if the proposal is not accepted you can take on board the comments when producing a revised proposal that might then be accepted elsewhere.

The contract and delivery of your book

Don't think that submitting the manuscript marks the end of your work – it doesn't! When you sign a contract with the publisher it will detail your responsibilities including specifying the expected word length and delivery date. The contract will indicate the number of presentation copies you can expect and will set out a royalty percentage. This is always low. Very few academics make any money on publishing academic monographs (see question 5.9 in Section 5 FAQ). The publisher will also provide guidelines detailing how the manuscript should be formatted. As with journal articles, it is the author's responsibility to secure the right to reproduce any copyright images or other material, and to pay any necessary permission fees (see question 5.5 in Section 5 FAQ). Sometimes publishers will agree to pay you an advance on future royalties towards these expenses.

Once you pass the completed manuscript to the publisher it is likely that it will be reviewed by at least one academic referee. This should take a couple of months and you will then be expected to respond to these comments, which normally will consist of matters of substance rather than style. Typical revisions that you might be asked to make include the balancing of content, removing any repetition and reducing the length of the book (make sure it is within the word limit you agreed before you submit it!). Once you submit the final version of the manuscript it will be passed on to another section of the publishers, or increasingly, to a freelance employee. Typically the manuscript will go through the following stages:

- copyediting: the publisher commissions someone to read the manuscript. They check the grammar, the spelling of the text and the references. The copy-editor will contact you with a list of queries which you will need to address before the manuscript is typeset
- typesetting: the manuscript is typeset according to the publisher's house style

- proofs: you will be sent a copy of the proofs, which you will be required to check promptly for errors. A professional proof-reader may also be appointed by the publisher. At this point in the publication process an index has also to be compiled, either by you or by a professional indexer. Where 'professionals' are employed it is likely that you will have to pay for this against your future royalties
- printing: the manuscript is finalized and the book is printed
- publication: the advance copies are sent to you a week or so before publication, with the rest to follow once the book is published.

Post-publication activities

Books don't sell themselves. They have to be sold. While the publisher will market the book it is also your responsibility as the author to do your bit. This can take a number of different forms. All publishers ask authors to complete a marketing questionnaire. This makes the job of the publisher easier. Authors are required to provide a whole host of information usually including:

- short academic biographies
- short and longer descriptions of the book, including its main purpose and the thinking behind writing it
- key features
- the book's main competitors and its USP (unique selling points)
- details of the book's main audience
- mailing lists around which details of the book should be circulated
- conferences or professional meetings where the book should be displayed
- scholarly journals which are likely to review the book.

It is worth providing as much information as you can to the publishers. That will improve their ability to market and to sell the book. It will make sure that you see your book marketed effectively, reviewed in journals and on sale at conferences. There is nothing worse than having invested all that time and effort in writing a book to find it not on display at conferences or not being reviewed in journals. Ultimately whether a book sells or not depends on a number of things. Some of these are beyond your control. What you can do as an author is to produce a clearly written and organised book that is aimed at a particular audience and then do your bit to market it wherever and whenever you can. Good luck!

Box 5: Writing a book in physical geography

Martin Evans

Perhaps increasingly the currency of science is the paper in a well-cited international peer-reviewed journal. Why then would a physical geographer want to write a book? Possible motivations include both research and pedagogic reasons although often, as they should be, these two poles are comfortably blurred.

Why write a research monograph?

One of the challenges which has faced physical geography since the quantitative revolution is how to upscale detailed process measurements to address problems at landscape scale. Increasingly technological changes such as high resolution remote sensing, cosmogenic isotope approaches to surface dating, and the computational power required for high resolution numerical modelling have begun to offer useful approaches to this problem. However, truly integrative quantitative models of landscape function require a basis in a conceptual model of sub-system interaction that is often lacking or simplistic.

The recognition of the importance of understanding connectivity within and between sub-systems in fields as diverse as geomorphology and landscape ecology (e.g. Briery *et al.* 2006) emphasises the need to properly understand interactions between what might be quantitatively well specified landscape sub-systems. Clifford (2001) suggested that physical geography might be regarded as an emergent property of our detailed process investigations. Consideration of such emergent properties requires a reflective and synthetic approach to the data. There are questions about landscape function that cannot yet be addressed in a fully quantitative manner, in part because the conceptual underpinnings are not fully in place. Publishing at book length allows the physical geographer to establish narrative connections between substantive empirical findings. Essentially the synthetic understanding of a particular landscape or physical system which can be developed in the less constrained format of the book has the potential to be an important tool in the development of the conceptual models which can underpin further quantitative analysis at the landscape scale.

In addition to the academic reasons for book publishing there are also potential benefits in enhanced links with user communities. Many fields of physical geography have important interactions with the policy sphere. Writing a book is a useful way to communicate with the policy community. Whilst this community is actively engaged with the academic literature time constraints mean that they are perhaps more likely to refer to a considered synthesis of recent work than to your full *oeuvre* of journal literature. In this context, and given that funding for applied work is an important source for many areas of physical geography, it can only be a

good thing to be identified as ‘that geographer from the University of Rummidge who wrote the book on...’.

My own experience of writing a book was a monograph in the *RGS-IBG Book Series* co-authored with Jeff Warburton (Evans and Warburton, 2007). The motivation to write the book came from the feeling that there was a larger story emerging from our ongoing work on peatlands, which required more space than the typical journal article to fully explore. In some senses it was also a manifesto aimed at influencing future peatland research to consider more fully the physical components of peatland systems. Only time will tell if we had any success in this regard but as the research assessment bureaucracies continue to demand ‘agenda setting science’ writing in book form is one way to develop and promote your preferred research agenda.

Whilst it may not be the primary purpose a well-written monograph is an important pedagogic tool, invaluable for upper-level classes and postgraduate students. It is, however, a rather different discipline to writing a targeted undergraduate textbook, which is considered separately below.

Why write a textbook in physical geography?

The pedagogic motivation for writing a textbook is straightforward. As academics we all make use of textbooks as an organising framework. The basic role of the textbook is to propagate the accepted wisdom but across a range of subfields it is possible to identify textbooks that have been hugely influential in advancing a particular view of the discipline. Writing a textbook really is your chance to influence a generation of physical geographers both within and beyond academia. Textbooks are important in establishing paradigms and whilst the volume which overturns a paradigm may be a once in a generation event most books can play an important role in updating the accepted wisdom and perhaps subtly changing its emphasis. For this reason writing a textbook should not be seen as exclusively the role of longer serving academics. Many of the more valuable and innovative texts of recent years have been written or edited by relatively early career geographers.

Writing the book

What of the practicalities? Well the good news is that because book publishing remains something of a minority interest within physical geography publishers are often keen to receive proposals. In general, opportunities to write traditional monographs are fewer but there are some options, including the *RGS-IBG Book Series*. Once a contract is in place there is the small matter of writing the book. This is typically a departure in writing style for physical geographers raised on a diet of 6000 word papers and for most physical geographers the best comparison is probably with writing a PhD thesis. It will take longer than you think, and, like a PhD,

the final editing and assembling of front matter and so on will take much longer than you think. Nevertheless, it is a rewarding experience and the satisfaction of seeing the finished product is considerable and if you end up on 'Desert Island Discs' in 30 years time you are more likely to be introduced as the author of 'insert your latest greatest book' than the author of 62 peer reviewed papers!

Box 6: Finding a publisher and publishing a book

Stephen Legg

Like most first time authors, I found the prospect of securing a publisher incredibly intimidating. The publishing world appeared to be a closed sect, which could only be penetrated by an ingeniously orchestrated series of applications, references, re-drafted proposals, and good fortune. The reality, thankfully, is much simpler. Most publishing houses have clear online applications for proposals, which should obviously be followed as closely as possible, and the lists of existing and forthcoming coming books and series provide a pretty navigable route to the most receptive editors. The application process also stressed to me the invaluable importance of seeking advice from colleagues and mentors, as well as from published sources (e.g. Germano 2001).

Your editor(s) will continue to offer you advice, so your preferred choice for publishing house should obviously be weighed up against the likely degree of editorial input. This will vary with regards to an individual editor, but also with regards to whether you are applying to publish a stand-alone book, one in a discipline-specific series, or a book in a subject-specific series. All of these have their advantages with regards to, for instance, a unique project, one seeking disciplinary exposure, or one in need of specialised advice and targeted publicity, respectively. These are not mutually exclusive categories of course. My experience with the *RGS-IBG Book Series* at Wiley-Blackwell showed that a series book can also be treated individually, and thus be marketed by other series/sections at the publishers, but also that the right choice of referees can secure expert advice, whilst still situating the work in a series that seeks a wider audience within the discipline of geography.

Many first time publishers will be using material from their doctorate, whether written directly up into a book, or as the basis for new directions of post-doctoral research. I was (well) advised during my viva and afterwards that a publisher might have difficulty accepting a proposal which, like my thesis, had two analytical frameworks (colonialism and nationalism) as well as the competing

claims of theoretical work (on Foucault) and empirical work (on Old Delhi). I thus returned to do some research on my original case study of New Delhi and worked on a more thorough theoretical and historiographical exploration of my approach. These provided opening arguments for the book (Legg, 2007), which then framed two chapters that were based on the first half of my thesis and some new research work.

This approach may also present opportunities to prepare research papers on topics of interest, which connect to the book material but do not fit into the proposed structure. While these papers *can* then be referred to in the book, one reviewer of my manuscript argued that if this material was relevant it should be in the book, if not then it needn't be referenced. Each editor should have guidelines on this, as well as a policy on reprinting already published material. I personally found publishing papers a valuable means of securing extra feedback, as well as an outlet for pursuing more detailed theoretical and empirical sub-themes within the wider project (as well as the more pragmatic necessity of complementing a book proposal with other published material in order to find a job...) While publishing times vary, my book took a year from final submission to publication, which is substantially less time than it has taken several of my journal papers to make it into print. And while many young academics in the UK may be concerned that a book only equates to one RAE/REF submission, the rewards in terms of publicity and recognition are widely recognised and rewarded (especially within university frameworks regarding promotion etc). Good luck!