Writing and Publishing an Academic Book

Writings and Media originally published on SAGE MethodSpace
www/methodspace.com

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Table of Contents

1. Types of Academic Books
2. Book idea? Now what?
3. Market Research and Analysis for Book Proposals
4. Pedagogy of Book and Chapter Organization
5. Envisioning an Edited Book
6. Proposing an Edited Book
7. Selecting Book Chapters for an Edited Book
8. Relating to Contributors When Editing A Book
9. Collaborative Writing & Editing
10. From Dissertation or Thesis to Book: Q & A
11. Collaborative Writing & Editing
12. From Dissertation to Book

Links to Media

- Author Interviews on SAGE MethodSpace
- “Write a Book: From Acquisition to Publication” Webinar Recording & Slides
Introduction

Empirical research reaches readers in many forms. Academic books, that is, books based on empirical research, can be scholarly or practical. While peer-reviewed journal articles reach academic readers, books have the potential to reach a wider audience and create ripple effects that can influence theory and practice.

Publishing a book is a significant undertaking—and the actual writing is only one part of the process. This collection of posts introduces some of the essential stages for publishing sole-authored or edited books. The linked media allows you to hear from the experts. A webinar recording, “Write a Book: From Acquisition to Publication,” features practical advice from Leah Fargotstein, SAGE Acquisitions Editor for Research Methods, Statistics, Evaluation, and Education, and Eric Garner, Managing Editor of US books production at SAGE. Author Interviews offer first-hand experiences from successful writers.

The material included here originally appeared on SAGE MethodSpace. Note that blog posts are not peer-reviewed. SAGE MethodSpace is an online hub for writing and resources by SAGE authors and contributors on topics related to designing, conducting, and disseminating research.

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Citation: Salmons, J. (2020). Writing and publishing an academic book: SAGE MethodSpace.
Types of Academic Books

What is a book?

To begin with, let’s contemplate what we mean when we discuss books. Like many words, the definition has changed, thanks to technology. Does the term book refer to something with a lot of pages, bound and encased in a cover? Or is a book an audio file I listen to on my phone? Or a graphic story I grasp from pictures? Is a book a series of chapters, outlined in a table of contents and read in sequence, or section read from a downloaded PDF file? Is a textbook a big heavy (and expensive) tome, or a website I log into to access readings and media? As a writer, what form and delivery define this thing you call a book. Importantly, what do the readers you hope to reach expect from a book? Let’s look at some options and define terms we’ll use throughout this guide.

Type, Content, and Audience

Who are you trying to reach? Are you hoping your book will be adopted as a text, read by others in your field or discipline, or used as a how-to guide by professionals or practitioners? Do you expect it to be a reference book accessed through an academic library, or available to anyone at the local bookstore?

- **Handbook of research:**
  Reference book that provides in-depth foundations on the topic(s), with contributed chapters or sections
  *Primary readers:* Academics and students

- **Scholarly book:**
  A research-based book.
  *Primary readers:* Academics and students, some general-interest readers

- **Textbook:**
  A book designed for instructional purposes.
  *Primary readers:* Students

- **Workbook:**
  A book that contains exercises or prompts to be completed by the reader.
  *Primary readers:* Students, professionals, practitioners

- **Guide:**
  A practical how-to book.
  *Primary readers:* Students, professionals, practitioners

- **Professional or trade book:**
  A book typically written for a non-academic audience, can focus on how to apply or use research findings
  *Primary readers:* Professionals, practitioners
Size and Form

What is the ideal length for your book?

- **Small book:** These books can range from 5,000 to 50,000 words
- **Monograph:** Length dependent on content, typically shorter than a full-length book
- **Full-length book:** Usually 70,000 words or more
- **Workbook:** A book that allows readers to fill in templates, write or draw
- **Handbook or reference book:** 1 or more volumes

Delivery

How do you want readers to access books? While e-books have been commonly available for scholarly and academic books, newer forms such as audio or graphic books are becoming more popular and will undoubtedly reach the academic market soon.

- Print book
- Electronic book
  - Is it sold and read as an entire book?
  - Is it sold and read as discrete sections or chapters?
  - Is it distributed in formats easily read on mobile devices?
- Audio book
- Graphic book
Book idea? Now what?

A book concept is a start.

You have an idea for a book. It is brilliant! It is unique! It will change the world! Now what?

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

Henry David Thoreau

As Thoreau observed, your dreams need practical foundations. You’ll need to put some substance to your airy thoughts before you can discuss a book idea with an acquisitions editor, and before you begin a formal book proposal. Let’s start with a few questions:

Brilliant?
What is the basis for your book? Original research or theorization? Or will you draw from professional experiences, your own observations? How will you develop this content into a book? What type of book? What publisher(s) offers books of this kind?

Unique?
Have others covered your topic, if so, how? What will distinguish your book from others on the market?

Change the world?
Who cares? Who is interested in your topic, and the type of book you want to write? Academics and students, professionals, practitioners, or the general public? Readers within a specific field or discipline, or across disciplines? What publisher(s) markets to your target audience?

Do some research on your topic and related books. Here are a few preliminary steps:

• Peruse publisher’s websites and bookstores. Make a list of books on similar topics, as well as successful books aimed at your target audience.
• Look on Google preview, find them in a library, and/or download sample chapters. Look at the table of contents, writing style, and book features. Compare and contrast existing books with your concept.
• Identify a need existing books missed, and that your book can fill.
• Make a list of publishers represented in your list of competing books. Look on their websites for information and guidelines for authors. What is their first step? Note that some publishers want you to speak with an acquisitions editor before submitting anything, while others want a preliminary proposal, full proposal, and/or chapters.
Two questions are fundamental to market research:

- How to find the most suitable publisher given the topic and audience?
- How can I sell my proposal to editors in a flooded market of similar works? Is it enough to address a different topic or to take a slightly different methodological approach?

Academic writers have an advantage: we know how to do research! Market research is not unlike a literature review for a research proposal. As with a lit review, you are trying to see what else has been studied and written about your topic, and to demonstrate that your approach will be a unique contribution.

First: Define your project

Try to answer some fundamental questions:

1. What type of book do I want to publish?
2. What is the central focus on this book?
3. Who are my readers, or primary market? Who else might be interested that could be described as a secondary market?
4. What approach will I take, in terms of style or features?

Second: Organize your research

Create a simple table you can use to make notes, so you can see at a glance where your book will fit, in terms of publisher and market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Target Market</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Here is a table you can download and adapt for your research.

[Market-Research-and-Analysis-table]
Third: Find the Competition

Start looking! Search bookstores and libraries. Look at reference lists. Ask your friends and colleagues. If you are thinking about a textbook, look at syllabi (and explore beyond your primary discipline.) Peruse the websites of publishers recognized in your field. Include the titles in press.

Search online and off. While searching online is probably your fruitful method, looking at actual books is helpful too. If you have access to a physical library, make a visit. Talk with reference librarians if you are planning a research handbook or other reference book. When I was considering an idea for a new book, I happened to be at a conference. I went to every publisher’s booth in the vendor area to see what they had. I also asked booth staff about their interest in this topic. Often acquisitions editors are present at conferences. In this case, I ended up with two publishers who were interested in the potential book!

Fourth: Study Close Competitors

Once you’ve found books that you feel are similar in some way to the one you want to propose, look more closely. Look at the table of contents. If you don’t have a physical book, look on the publisher’s website for a sample chapter or search for it on Google book preview. Make some notes.

Here is an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher &amp; Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Target Market</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Longitudinal Methods: Researching Implementation and Change</td>
<td>SAGE 2018</td>
<td>Short book, probably supple-mental, not primary text</td>
<td>128 pages</td>
<td>Researchers, grad students, program evaluators</td>
<td>Qualitative ”researching change and its impact on organizations and individuals resulting from the implementation of programs and policies”</td>
<td>No book site or ancillary materials</td>
<td>First-person, friendly style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Longitudinal Methods An Introduction to Diary and Experience Sampling Research</td>
<td>Guilford 2013</td>
<td>Core or supple-mental text</td>
<td>256 pages</td>
<td>Researchers, grad students</td>
<td>Quantitative Social psychology</td>
<td>Companion site, datasets, outputs w/stats programs</td>
<td>No social media presence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fifth: Identify Your Unique Contribution

Keep in mind that publishers are in the business to sell books. How will you and your book offer something new and relevant? How is your proposed book different from those you reviewed? Who will benefit from your book? What impact could it make?

- Different type?
- Different length?
- Different target audience? Broader, multidisciplinary audience?
- Different level of online/social media following aligned with target audience?
- Different focus (discipline, methodology, theoretical, applied)?
- Different writing style?
- Different features or resources?
- Different potential for impact?

Sixth: Study Potential Publishers

Publishers have reputations for certain kinds of books. What publishers are most respected in the topic area or approach you want for your book? What publishers aim for the market you want to reach?

Here is an example from my work. I write for SAGE, yet a recent book is from Stylus. Once you have worked with a publisher, you have real incentives to continue with them: you know the people, you know the system, you can promote new and earlier books together. Why did I stray? Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn is aimed at a different market. Unlike SAGE, Stylus focuses on professional books for faculty and administrators in higher education, and that is the primary target for this book. Stylus was a better match for this book, while SAGE will continue to be my publisher for research-oriented books.

Seventh: Make Contact

You have done your homework and chosen the top publishers you want to consider- now, look on their websites to see what they want in terms of first contact. Some want to talk with you first, while others want a description or draft proposal. In any case, keep in mind that acquisitions editors are busy people, and respect their time and preferences.
**Eighth: Develop Your Proposal**

Book proposals include a detailed explanation of the book concept and table of contents. If you have sample chapters, you can include them, but most non-fiction publishers do not want to see an entire manuscript at the initial review stage. Publishers want to know that the book has potential for sales and/or adoption as a textbook. Summarize your competitive market analysis for the book and describe the target audience. Many publishers also want to see whether you have a network, an online presence, or a reputation that will help to bring attention to the book.

Some publishers will prefer that you make an initial contact with the acquisitions or commissioning editor before you send in the book proposal. This is worth doing even if the publisher doesn’t encourage it, to find out whether they already have a similar book in the pipeline. If they do, they are very unlikely to want to publish yours, and knowing that up front can save you spending days on a pointless proposal. Information about publishers’ submission processes and associated requirements will be posted on their websites and, as you can see from the table below, the steps may vary somewhat.

If the acquisitions or commissioning editor is interested in your proposal, that is a good start but still no guarantee of success. A proposal usually goes through several more steps before formal acceptance and may go through a peer review process as well. For textbooks, publishers may ask faculty members who teach in the appropriate field to look at the proposal and describe whether or not it would meet their own instructional needs.
Pedagogy of Book and Chapter Organization

Does the organization of the textbook relate to pedagogical approaches used to teach with it? What pedagogical perspectives are represented by the organizational style we choose for a book and its chapters? When thinking about the organization of text and academic books, I reflect on ways people read books today and how they use books to learn.

As a case in point audience for one of my recent books about the design of collaborative learning includes instructors or instructional designers across disciplines, as well as students in education courses. In other words, some might be reading it for their own professional purposes, while others might be reading it as assigned for a course. How might they use the book, and what can I do as a writer to facilitate meaningful learning? What questions do you need to ask when thinking about the audience for your proposed book?

Constructivism and Book Organization

My educational philosophy is based in constructivism. I was groomed in the thinking of Ausubel and Novak, who emphasized the need to build a cognitive bridge from the place where the student begins to a new level of knowledge (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1978, pp. 17, 31; Novak & Gowin, 1984). From this perspective students are responsible for constructing their own understandings of the subject matter, however, the instructor has an important bridge-building role. As an instructor, we need to help students link new concepts to previous knowledge and make sense of it. Jerome Bruner explained the process this way:

Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us to go further more easily.
...The best way to create interest in the subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained usable in one’s thinking beyond the situation in which the learning has occurred. (Bruner, 1977)

Constructivist theorists discussed the development of knowledge as central to learning. To dig more deeply into the meaning of knowledge, I turned to the updated version of the classic Bloom’s
Taxonomy. In this school of thought, there are four types of knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive (Anderson, Bloom, Krathwohl, & Airasian, 2000). Based on Bruner’s comments, we might say that knowledge becomes “usable” differently if the focus is on providing factual foundations, conceptual theories and principles, how-to steps for application, or reflective metacognition.

Can we apply these theories of teaching and learning to our work as textbook authors, given that our books might provide the subject matter? How can we organize books that will help in the process of building cognitive bridges and developing types of knowledge beneficial to the reader?

**Helping Readers to Build Bridges**

Unlike the teacher in the classroom, we don’t have the advantage of meeting our readers. We don’t know their respective starting points or level of prior knowledge on the topic of our book. This is even more challenging when your book is written to attract diverse audiences with potentially varied levels of prior knowledge and understanding. In my case, the reader might be the professor or the student. One way I tried to address this constructivist principle is by inclusion of multiple cases, problems, or exemplars that might help the reader connect ideas being presented with situations that resemble those in their own experience. I often introduce cases then develop them through each stage of the process in each chapter in the book. I create text boxes with questions that I hope will help readers think about the principles of the chapter in the context of their own frames of reference. The chapters are organized such that these cases, examples, and thought-provoking questions are interspersed throughout. This contrasts with a more traditional approach that entails presenting principles and content before showing how ideas are applied and listing questions in an easy-to-ignore place at the end of the chapter.

**Writing to Foster Development of New Knowledge**

Readers may have varying degrees of interest or urgency for using what they learn in new situations. With the example of the recent book project I am using as an example, some readers might have an immediate, practical need while others are acquiring foundational concepts as the basis for further advanced coursework. They may not be thinking about application of these concepts until after they graduate and begin their careers.

Not all books will include all four types of knowledge development, but my new book does. While the intention for the book is practical (Procedural Knowledge), readers need the other forms in order to apply the models presented throughout the book. They need to know how I am defining and re-defining key terms (Factual Knowledge). They might use theoretical frameworks to create coherent plans as well as rationales or proposals necessary for gaining approval or support for program or curricular change (Conceptual Knowledge). Instructors who want to use the approaches
recommended in the book may have to change how they think of themselves and their roles with students (Metacognitive Knowledge.) It was a challenge to balance these types, without getting bogged down in one or seeming too fragmented with too many directions.

One way I tried to accomplish balance was through the organization of chapters. I tried to introduce the book with Factual and Conceptual material. Next, I focused on use of the concepts in practical ways, with explicit procedural steps. Woven into these steps were points that invited readers to look at implementation from a metacognitive stance.

Another way I tried to connect the proverbial dots across chapters was through the use of graphic organizers. These graphic elements wove the Factual definitions and Conceptual constructs through the practical chapters.

**Moving Forward**

Chapter organization is important whether we are writing an entire textbook, editing a book with chapters by other authors, or completing a single chapter. By thinking about the ways readers might use the book to build new knowledge, we can create a text with significance beyond an assigned reading. My bookshelf contains a few important textbooks that I have kept since my undergrad years and still refer to when I need to be reminded of important ideas I am still learning. When you look at your bookshelf, do you see textbooks you haven’t been able to part with? What characteristics make a text a keeper? How can you apply these characteristics in your proposed book?

**References**


Envisioning an Edited Book

One option for producing a book is the sole- or co-authored book, another option is to edit a book that includes work by other writers. If you thinking about editing a book, begin with some fundamental questions:

- Why edit a book?
- What type of edited book?
- How will you contribute—and what will you expect from contributors?
- How will you engage with contributors, taking what roles?

In this section of the guide we will explore these and other considerations for prospective editors. Please use the comment area to contribute any insights you think might be valuable to researchers who are considering this type of publication.

Editing a book is quite different from authoring one.

I have written books as a sole author, and I have edited (and co-edited) books. I’d like to share some lessons learned, as well as my thoughts about how to craft prospective books I plan to edit in the future.

My first experience was as a co-editor for a two-volume, 50-chapter handbook of research (Salmons & Wilson, 2009). The second was a compilation of 12 chapters, each with associated commentaries (Salmons, 2012). I have also gained insight into the what works, or not, as a frequent contributor to others’ edited books.

What do we mean by an edited collection?

An edited collection is a book-length compilation of chapters by different authors. While some editors anthologize previously published materials, we will look at books comprised of new, original chapters. Davis & Blossey (2011) pointed out that edited collections are particularly useful in new or emerging fields of study, because they can provide valuable guidance for new research ideas, experimental designs, or analysis. The suggest that contributors’ varied perspectives, guided by their respective areas of expertise, can create a synergy that stimulates the thinking of an entire field, prompting many to think in new ways about their research and the direction of the field. (Davis & Blossey, 2011, p. 247). Nederman (2005) observed that that at their best, the multi-authored, edited volume can promote fruitful exchange of ideas in a way that would not occur in research monographs or journal articles. When you contemplate your potential edited book, it is important to consider how you will synthesize ideas into a coherent whole and seed new thinking in your field.
How should you frame the purpose for your edited book?

The purpose can be defined by a common concept, theory, or practice. Once you have specified a theme, you will need to think about how contributors will address it. Do you want multiple views on one central topic or diverse views on multiple, related topics? Another way to frame the purpose is by the intended use. Who will read the book? Why? Will it serve as a reference book, textbook, scholarly book, or practical guide? Will it be assigned for course readings, or chosen by graduate students or professionals motivated by an interest in the topic or desire to build skills?

The books I edited exemplified these options. For the first book, the theme was broadly defined (Salmons & Wilson, 2009). This research handbook encompassed multiple perspectives on diverse interpretations of electronic collaboration. Viewpoints represented in the chapters included internal collaboration, that is, within an organization, team, or classroom, and external collaboration, that is, between organizations. Diverse viewpoints were represented in studies of collaboration in within and across disciplines. This substantial two-volume set was intended as a reference book to be purchased by academic libraries. In contrast, the purpose of the second book was tightly defined. Chapters offered multiple perspectives on one topic: the design and conduct of studies with data collected in online interviews (Salmons, 2012). This book was intended for use as a course textbook or for individual study by practicing researchers.

What will you contribute?

Some editors contribute substantial content to the book. They might write the preface, an introduction, one or more chapter(s), section overviews, a concluding or summary chapter, as well as ancillary materials. Other editors focus on their roles as the coordinator of the book project, and contribute minimally to the content, perhaps only writing a preface or summary.

I contributed significant content to both of books I edited. I collaborated on introductory and concluding chapters with my co-editor, and wrote a chapter based on my own research, for the first book. For the second book, I wrote an introductory chapter that laid out the conceptual framework used as the organizing principle for the book. I then applied the framework in commentaries for each respective chapter. I also created a metasynthesis of the approaches used across chapters for the final segment of the book.
Should you edit a book?

When deciding whether to edit a book, you will want to reflect on the characteristics and expectations of an editor in light of your own strengths and weaknesses. As a sole author, you are responsible for the vision, plan, and for writing all the book’s content. For an edited book, you are responsible for the vision, plan, and management of others’ content. You are responsible for finding contributors, coordinating contributions, and ensuring quality. The editor stands between the publisher and the contributors: editors must set up systems and processes for addressing the publisher’s requirements while at the same time managing writers’ needs or procrastinations.

References

Proposing an Edited Book

You have a concept for an edited book, now what?

What steps are needed to move the project forward? One important step involves agreeing to a book contract with a publisher, another involves finding contributors. The sequence of those steps is not consistent from one publisher to the next. In this post I will share lessons learned from two books I edited: *A Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration* (2009), and *Cases in Online Interview Research* (2012, and thoughts about a book I want to edit in the future. I will also draw on what I’ve learned from researching variations and practices in the field.

To find a suitable publisher, think about the purpose and intended audience for the book. Do you want to create a reference book, scholarly book, or practical guide? Are you planning a textbook that will be assigned for course readings? Or a professional book graduate students or professionals read to learn more or develop skills? Typically, publishers focus on one or two of these markets. Not all publishers offer edited collections, or perhaps not for the type of book you want to edit. For example, the publisher might include edited reference books in their catalog, but not edited textbooks. Look at the publishers of books in your field or discipline; do they offer edited books of the type you want to develop? Once you have selected potential publishers, look at their protocols for acquisition of edited volumes.

How do I progress from a concept to a proposal for the book?

To create a viable proposal, you will want to create a detailed plan for the book’s content. “Coherence” is the buzzword most frequently mentioned in discussions of edited collections. How will you pull the different pieces together to create a coherent whole book? You will need to decide how tightly, or broadly, you want to focus your collection. The more clarity you have at this point, the easier it will be for potential publishers to buy-in to the project and for writers to propose suitable chapters.

You could start by identifying themes for sections of the book, and the material that should be covered within each one. You can identify selection criteria for the book generally, or for each section in particular. For example, if you want to edit a book about research methods, you could outline sections about designing studies, addressing ethical issues, collecting data and perhaps you want to leave it fairly open to see what potential authors propose. Or, you might want spell out specific types of content. Perhaps within the section on qualitative ways for collecting data, you want some chapters that discuss practical aspects of interviewing or observing participants, and others that delve into theoretical foundations.
I used different strategies in two edited book projects. For the Handbook of Research my co-editor and I defined three broad disciplinary areas: business, education, and government/nonprofit. Within each discipline, we asked for chapters that explored one of two categories: intra-organizational collaboration, or Inter-organizational collaboration. Otherwise, we just asked that prospective authors follow the publisher’s guidelines for format and style. For the Cases book, I took a more circumscribed approach. Because it was meant to be a collection of cases about online research, I defined key terms to spell out the kinds of studies I hoped to include. I created a template for authors to follow, because I wanted readers to be able to compare apples to apples when studying the various cases. Thinking ahead to my next edited book, I will use a similar approach, and provide guidelines to contributors to ensure that some common topics are covered in each chapter. For example, I will ask that each author include theoretical and foundations and empirical research findings, as well as practical examples and steps.

Authors who contributed to Cases in Online Interview Research had to accept my vision for a set of coherent cases and be willing to create chapters that followed fairly strict guidelines. Authors who contributed to the first had more flexibility, within thematic categories, to develop chapters as they wanted. If, as an editor, you are not sure what you want or do not communicate your ideas clearly, a lot of time will be needed to respond to queries from potential contributors and review chapter proposals that are outside the desired topic area for the book.

Which comes first, the contract or the contributors?

A review of publishers’ guidelines revealed two main approaches: select contributors first—before agreement on a contract, or agree to the book concept before selection of contributions.

The first type of publisher expects you to develop your vision and plan, select most of the contributions, and create your table of contents—all before you submit a proposal. In this case, you would decide on the kinds of chapters you want in your book and either invite contributions or put out a call for chapters. You might ask potential authors to submit abstracts at this stage, so you can put together a detailed table of contents that communicates the substance of the book.

The second type of publisher wants to see a clear concept, including a description of the main topics to be covered. They will want to know what you plan to contribute, in terms of an introduction, summary, or chapter(s). They will want a well-researched description of the book’s uses and readers, and a plan for soliciting and selecting proposals. The acquisitions editor might want to discuss your proposal, and perhaps refine the ideas. Once you have come to an agreement, you will proceed with inviting or soliciting proposals.

The second approach was used with both of the books I edited. For the Handbook of Research, we had the concept, but no contributors on board at the time we signed the agreement. I had a core of invited contributors on board, perhaps a third of the authors, when I signed the contract for Cases on
Online Interview Research. For both, I stayed in communication with the acquisitions editors throughout the process of chapter selection, and sent them completed tables of contents once I had completed the book plans. Thinking ahead, I will look for a publisher that will sign a contract based on a proposal that includes a detailed book concept and titles for chapters by a few invited writers. I’d prefer to develop a detailed table of contents with chapter titles and authors after I have a contract and named publisher.

If your selected publisher requests a proposal that includes a list of contributors and a table of contents, you will need to overcome an obvious challenge. You are asking people to commit to a chapter proposal before you are certain the book can become a reality. You will need to project credibility, since you cannot rely on the publisher’s name or reputation to build trust with potential authors. In this situation, you might want to begin with your own collegial network or professional association.

What next?

An edited book is inherently a collaborative venture. As editor, you stand between the publisher on one side, and writers on the other. To succeed, you must rely on trust and cooperation from both sides. The strength, clarity, and organization of your project plan will allow you to start your new book with a common set of goals and understandings. A vague description can be misinterpreted, and require more time and effort to develop into a valuable book.
Selecting Book Chapters for an Edited Book

An edited collection is a book-length compilation of chapters by different authors. To pull together this kind of book you need to find contributing authors, and select suitable chapter proposals. You also need to consider what role to take as the book’s editor, and who else you might need to help carry out tasks essential to the completion of the book.

Finding authors

The first and most important step is to find the researchers and writers who can produce the kind of content you want for your book. Be mindful of the fact that you are asking busy academics and professionals to do one more thing on top of a busy schedule. Success depends largely on your ability to communicate an appealing vision for the book and to convey a sense of your own competence for managing the project. Information to provide prospective authors can include:

- Descriptive overview of the book
- Objective or purpose
- Target audience, anticipated readers or uses (text, professional guide, practical handbook)
- Recommended topics or suggested chapter titles
- Chapter length and format
- Submission procedure
- Review procedures
- Timeline
- Publisher and status in regard to an agreement for publishing the book
- Contact information for the editor(s)

Decide in advance precisely what you need from prospective authors. Proposals are typically 1-2 pages, and include elements such as:

- An abstract
- A description of the chapter’s central argument including an explanation of how the proposed chapter will align with the book’s objective and help to fulfill the purpose of the book
- A description of the research or professional foundations of the chapter
- 3-5 key words/phrases

Two common strategies for finding authors are: 1) inviting contributors, or 2) distributing a call for chapters. If you are part of a professional society or have your own network, you might already know people in your field whose contributions you would like to include. If so, you can reach out to them
individually to discuss your vision and plan for the book. You will need to decide in advance whether you want them to submit an abstract or a full proposal, and how you will review them. When you want to reach writers from a wider range of backgrounds and disciplines, distribute a call for chapters. Succinctly spell out detailed information and announce it through email lists or social media, professional groups, as well as through the publisher’s channels. Consider establishing a blog or website for your book project. Include book overview and proposal information, then link to your page when posting on social media or in newsletters where you have length restrictions. As the project progresses, this site can become a place for communicating with contributors and interested readers.

**Selecting Chapters**

You can’t wait until your inbox is full of proposals to decide how to pick the ones you will accept. Chapter selection protocols should be part of your initial conversation with the acquisitions editor. As noted in the [Proposing an Edited Book](#) post, some publishers want to see a robust table of contents with a description of chapters before signing the book contract, while others will want to come to an agreement on the book concept before you determine the specific chapters to include. You will also discover that some publishers have established review guidelines or manuscript submission platforms, while others leave chapter selection decisions to the editor. In other words, depending on the publisher, you may be expected to select chapters before, or after, you have finalized the contract, using the publisher’s protocols or the one you devise.

In either case, the review process typically occurs in three broad stages. The first stage involves pre-screening to make sure the proposal is complete, and that it fits with the purpose of the book. In the second stage reviewers, evaluate proposals and select which authors will be asked to submit a fully-developed chapter. The third stage entails reviewing completed chapters to determine whether revisions are needed and to make the final acceptance for publication.

Choose the type of review that works best for the book you are producing. If you are planning a scholarly or academic book, then you will probably want to use double-blind peer review for the initial selection of chapter proposals. For other types of books, you could choose a single-blind or editorial review process. Some editors ask authors to serve as reviewers, while others recruit independent reviewers. Another option is to form an editorial review board, and ask members to review chapter proposals. Expert members of the editorial review board could use either a double-blind or single-blind protocol. A third option relies on the editor to evaluate and select proposals. With any review type, as the editor, you should have the final say on which proposals to accept so you can look at the prospective collection as a whole and analyze whether chapters will fit together to achieve the book’s objectives.
Double-blind means neither the authors’ nor the reviewers’ identities are disclosed to the other (Ware, 2013). Double-blind peer review is considered the most objective approach. You will need to develop clear review criteria, find appropriate reviewers, and organize a process that obscures identities.

In a single-blind peer review, authors’ names are known to the reviewers, but reviewers’ names are withheld from the authors (Ware, 2013). This type of review is appropriate when proposals were invited from a select group of writers, or when the field is a narrow one meaning experts are well-known to reviewers. Alternatively, an editor can decide to invite or collect proposals, and make the decision about which chapters to include. The editor’s and authors’ identities are known to each other. When the editor, or the editorial review board, choose chapters using a single-blind or editorial review their decisions can be informed by professional reputations or other published writings by known authors.

Once completed chapters have been submitted, the next stage will require a slightly different skill set on the part of reviewers. At this point, you need reviewers who can provide some level of guidance on usage, grammar, style and format, as well is content.

**Lessons Learned**

I used two different selection and review approaches for the books I edited. For the *Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration* (J. E. Salmons & Wilson, 2009), we wanted chapters that represented multiple perspectives from multiple disciplines, so we widely broadcasted a call for chapters. We conducted a double-blind peer review to choose chapter proposals that met our criteria. Reviewers included authors as well as others in the field. The co-editors conducted the second stage review of submitted chapters. Revisions were required for most of the chapters, particularly since for many of the authors English was not the first language.

For the much shorter *Cases in Online Interview Research* (J. Salmons, 2012), I wanted multiple perspectives on a tightly-focused topic. I invited researchers whose work I knew and respected to contribute to the book. I also put out a targeted call for chapters, and created a page about the book that allowed me to link to the submission guidelines. As editor, I selected the proposals for chapters that best fit my vision for the book. I communicated one-one with authors to make sure they understood the structure and purpose. I was also responsible for reviewing completed chapters. This editor-centric approach worked with a book of ten chapters, but would not be realistic for a more substantial anthology.

Lessons learned from these experiences, as well as from contributing chapters and serving on editorial boards include:
• Offer specific information about review stages, and timelines.
• Be clear about the writing style and general approach for chapters, including expectations for features such as definitions of terms, discussion questions or assignment ideas.
• Articulate and communicate review criteria from the beginning. Explain how criteria align with the book’s purpose.

References

Relating to Contributors when Editing a Book

Chapters by different authors define the edited book. Once you have selected the chapters to include, you will need to think about how you will work with contributing authors to make sure that the book project proceeds as planned.

Whenever we are dependent on other people, we must realize that communication and coordination will be essential to success. This is certainly true for edited books! In the time that passes between acceptance of the initial proposal and the deadline for the final iteration for the chapter, many other projects have undoubtedly emerged to compete for our authors’ attention. The need for timely completion of each stage of the process means we need to lay out clear expectations. We want to avoid being in a situation where our role involves haranguing authors to complete the chapter and make revisions that could have been avoided. The way we convey our expectations may vary greatly depending on the type of book, prior relationships with authors, and/or our own personal styles.

Work and Communication Styles

Based on my own experience as an editor and chapter author, I have observed two general ways editors can relate to contributors. On one end of the spectrum we have the administrative style, on the other end a collaborative style. While the first kind of editor takes ownership of the book, the second kind tries to build a sense of shared ownership. The administrative, transactional editor strictly follows the publisher’s guidelines and review protocols. Communication with authors is formal, and focuses on requirements and due dates for submissions. No channels are offered for communication between contributing authors.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have supportive, collaborative editorial styles. Edwards (2012) observed that edited volumes can break through the isolationism inherent in the sole-authored publishing.

She noted:

Ideas are able to circulate and debates take place in between the conferences. Significantly, communities of scholars with like interests can also emerge from the collaboration generated by collaborative edited volumes. The global networks of each individual author can be brought into the new community of contributors and shared. (Edwards, 2012, p. 63)

A relational editor can bring Edwards’ points to life, by developing a sense of community of practice and fostering collegial relationships among contributors. This kind of editor may offer coaching to authors beyond formal review comments.
I present these styles on a continuum, because they are not strictly either/or, that is, we may need to use different styles throughout the project. We might project a more formal role prior to selection of chapter proposals, particularly when a double-blind peer review process is used, and take a more informal, collaborative approach as the book is assembled.

Editorial Styles for Relating to Contributors

Publishers and editors have a spectrum of styles and ways of working!

Supportive/Collaborative
- Communicate frequently, with a friendly tone.
- Share vision for the book, and descriptions of the other contributions. May provide the editor’s introduction to set the tone.
- Answer questions, provide coaching to new authors.

Administrative
- Communicate formally.
- Focus on deadlines and requirements.

Once again, I used two different review approaches for the books I edited. The *Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration* (J. E. Salmons & Wilson, 2009) was my first experience as an editor. The publisher required a double-blind peer review, which set up a formal style of communication with contributing authors from the outset. This large project included 50 chapters from authors from 26 countries, so there was little time to develop personal rapport with each contributor. I observed the limitations of this formal approach, because I had little opportunity to lay the groundwork for projects or publications beyond the book at hand. While most of the authors cooperated, and sent in their drafts and revisions on time, a considerable effort was required to track down missing chapters.

In contrast, I already knew many of the contributors to *Cases in Online Interview Research* (J. Salmons, 2012). I interviewed several of them for background research on a previous book, so I was very familiar with their work. The style of this book involved commentaries by authors on other’s chapters, which meant it was important to set a collaborative tone for the project. It also meant I needed an accessible way to share completed chapters with the entire team of writers. I created a private wiki that allow for easy exchange. When I think about a future edited book, I intend to use this collaborative style again. I would like contributing writers to feel invested in the success of the book
and proud to be a part of the project. I intend to invite experienced experts on the subject to contribute, and to engage them in the thought-process and key decisions for the book as a whole.

**Should you edit a book?**

After considering these key questions and options, are you inclined to edit a book?

- Are you prepared to take responsibility for the vision and plan for an edited book?
- Do you want to provide a comprehensive overview on a topic, or form a new synthesis of findings from multiple sources?
- Do you want to create a collection of related writings on a new important area of research or inquiry?
- Are you ready to contribute some of the book’s content, including an introduction and summary to link your vision with key ideas from contributor’s chapters?
- Do you have fantastic organizational skills and enjoy working with other researchers and writers?
- Are you prepared to take the responsibility for finding contributors, selecting and coordinating contributions, and ensuring quality?
Collaborative Writing & Editing

• How is the process different when you co-author a book versus writing it yourself?
• How is the process different for edited books where every chapter is by a different author?

These questions point to the need for two different skill sets: 1) writing together, and 2) organizing and managing projects. In general, co-authoring is more about collaborative writing and co-editing is more about managing a book project. However, there are a lot of overlaps, because co-authors might need to allocate time to the management of the project and co-editors might write introductions or contribute chapters. As it happens, I am completing two different co-authored books and have also co-edited books, so would like to discuss the practical side of collaboration constructs.

Each of us is a part of many groups, the term I will use broadly to include the many identities and affiliations that characterize who we are, and how we work. These can include:

• **Discipline:** Such as education, business, sociology, humanities.

• **Field or Profession:** the kind of work we do within (or across) disciplines. Within the discipline of education, for example, we have a wide range of fields and professions, from grade-school teachers to university professors, superintendents to college presidents, instructional designers to educational technologists.

• **Culture:** In addition to national and ethnic cultures, we are part of organizational, institutional, disciplinary, or professional cultures.

When we collaborate within familiar groups, we can rely on common understandings and ways of doing things. We speak the same language, and we use the same acronyms. We can refer to familiar literature or knowledge frameworks. If we are in the same institution, we might have access to the
same software and technology tools we all know how to use. In such a small, intragroup collaboration, we can just jump in and get to work on the project at hand.

When we start crossing boundaries, the just-jump-in approach might not be enough. We’ll need:

- Time to define our goals and the purpose of the project,
- Time to determine our roles and expectations,
- Consideration for leadership or shared leadership,
- Agreements about the logistics of the work, including:
  - meetings, live or online,
  - communication forms and timing,
  - external communication with the editors, and others associated with book publication,
  - decision-making,
  - meanings for discipline-specific terminology,
  - use of tools such as shared folders or team platforms,
  - styles and formats for drafts,
  - review protocols to ensure respectful feedback, and
  - checkpoints to make sure the project is proceeding as planned.
From Dissertation or Thesis to Book: Q & A

Many book authors begin with their dissertations or theses. Here are a few questions to consider.

Q. In the process of turning a dissertation into a published book, how much structural change can I expect to make from the original piece?

A. You can expect to make extensive changes in structure and writing style when moving from a dissertation or thesis to a book. Keep in mind that a dissertation or thesis is written to satisfy requirements of supervisors, committee members, and the institution. These doctoral works typically follow a 5- or 6- chapter format detailing the problem being studied, foundations in the literature, theoretical frameworks, methodologies and methods, findings, and discussion of the results and implications.

You might decide to write a book on any of these topics, or on all of them. Perhaps you framed the problem in a unique way, or adapted methods in a way that others might find useful. However, the way you present these topics will most likely be quite different from the dissertation or thesis. You will most likely need to do more writing, and depending on how long since the dissertation was published, you will probably need to update the literature.

Learn from others.
First, think about the type of book you want to write. Will it be a textbook, scholarly, or professional book? Then, look at other books of this type from your discipline. Peruse the table of contents, and read a chapter or two. How are they organized? What is the writing style? How does the structure and style of your dissertation or thesis compare to leading books in your field?

Look critically at your work.
Think beyond the dissertation or thesis document. What other writings or presentations can you draw on? Did you write some particularly well-researched papers, or give presentations? Do you have background notes on your research that didn’t fit the dissertation or thesis, but might add insights into your discussions about the study?

Develop a strategy.
Keep in mind that you might have material from your doctoral work that could become the basis for more than one publication. For example, you could decide to expand on your findings in a book proposal, but discuss methods used to conduct the study in a journal article. You could create a blog post or podcast, or a book chapter. Which types will reach your target audience, and create the impact you hope to achieve?
More Resources for Prospective Book Authors and Editors

Abstract, the Textbook and Academic Authors Association (TAA) open access blog, offers advice for writers who want to cultivate a positive relationship with their editors and publisher. The expert advice on contracts can help you understand this important part of the book-publishing process. Here are some posts of interest to academic and textbook authors:

5 Things to consider when negotiating your textbook contract audit clause
One of the most important provisions in your textbook publishing contract is the audit clause, which will specify the conditions for how and when you can request and conduct an audit.

Analog contracts in a digital world
College level textbooks and their publishers have been in the news a lot lately, with all of the major higher education publishers emphasizing a shift to a digital first market strategy. The vast majority of publishing agreements for established textbooks were written in a world where print books were the dominating market offering. As the world shifts, there are certain contractual provisions to be mindful of when evaluating one’s royalty statements and in negotiations over amendments.

Anatomy of a textbook contract
During her 2018 Textbook & Academic Authoring Conference presentation, “The Anatomy of a Textbook Contract”, intellectual property attorney Brenda Ulrich walked participants through a standard textbook publishing contract clause by clause to dissect and explain what the language means, what is significant, what to look for, what is worth trying to change and what is not. This post includes key points from the presentation covering the first four contract elements: grant or transfer of rights, manuscript preparation and delivery, acceptability of manuscript/acceptance, and failure to deliver.

College textbook publishing: Royalties, risk, and reward
Regardless of their motives, every textbook author must grapple with the same question: How can I achieve the best return on the time I spend writing a textbook, and how much risk should I accept in exchange for my sweat equity? To this end, there are several considerations authors should keep in mind regarding royalties as they negotiate a publishing agreement.

Cultivating a relationship with a publisher; sooner rather than later
Most academics and authors want to have a productive relationship with a publisher or publishers. It eases the road ahead and makes the process less mysterious. A good (or dare I say great) relationship with a publisher will also give an academic market knowledge about their chosen area of authorship and its readers. But how do you go about cultivating such a relationship?
Forming a publisher relationship: 6 Strategies for building rapport
What if you just aren’t ready to take the plunge and submit a proposal yet? You can still take constructive action by building relationships with higher education publishers through working on smaller projects.

Forming a publisher relationship: 3 Steps for submitting your project
How do you successfully connect with higher education publishers and make it easy for them to understand your project’s value?

Intellectual property attorney: First-time textbook author has leverage in contract negotiations
Stephen E. Gillen, author of Writing and Developing Your College Textbook: A Comprehensive Guide, says the first-time textbook author definitely has leverage in contract negotiations, and can negotiate changes in the standard publishing agreement.

Publishers: Getting to know you
Book publishing is the long game. Thinking of publishing in a short-term way will likely either get you discouraged or frustrated.

Printing is not publishing – what to look for in a publisher relationship
Due to an increase in availability of print-on-demand services that provide lower-cost alternatives for converting a manuscript into a printed and bound product, there is growing confusion among new authors about what constitutes the role of a publisher. Although many publishers and printing companies have symbiotic relationships, publishing companies provide much more than simply printing and binding of a manuscript.

Reflections on negotiating a contract 1: Leverage and the power to negotiate
Getting the offer was a great milestone, but it didn’t put an end to the larger process of getting published. The next phase began with the question of whether to accept the offered contract and whether and how to negotiate for changes.

- Reflections on negotiating a contract 2: Myriad details
- Reflections on negotiating a contract 3: Emotionally loaded details
- Reflections on negotiating a contract 4: Royalties
Reviewing your author contract: Planning for the future
The life cycle of a successful textbook reaches well past the life of its author, given that copyright law currently extends rights in a work to the life of the author + 70 years. That means not just your children, but even your grandchildren may benefit from the fruits of your labors. At the same time, for books—and in particular textbooks—governed by publishing contracts, it is important for both you and your heirs to understand your, and by extension their, rights and responsibilities.

Textbook contract clauses: Understanding advances and grants
An advance is a pre-payment of royalties to be earned upon the publication of your textbook. ...A grant, conversely, is a payment intended to cover some or all of the out-of-pocket costs of research and/or manuscript preparation.

Tips of the Trade: What is the best way to handle pre-contract communication with a prospective publisher?
TAA Member Kamalani Hurley from Leeward Community College asks: “What is normal in the timeline between an acquisitions editor expressing interest in publishing my material and the written contract?” Textbook author Mike Kennamer, who is director of Workforce Development at Northeast Alabama Community College, and Julia Kostova, an acquisitions editor at Oxford University Press, share their advice in this post.