



From Dissertation to Book

William P. Germano

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All new Phd's hope that their dissertations can become books. But a dissertation is written for a committee and a book for the larger world. William Germano's *From Dissertation to Book* is the essential guide for academic writers who want to revise a doctoral thesis for publication. The author of *Getting It Published*, Germano draws upon his extensive experience in academic publishing to provide writers with a state-of-the-art view of how to turn a dissertation into a manuscript that publishers will notice.

Acknowledging first that not all theses can become books, Germano shows how some dissertations might have a better life as one or more journal articles or as chapters in a newly conceived book. But even dissertations strong enough to be published as books first need to become book manuscripts, and at the heart of *From Dissertation to Book* is the idea that revising the dissertation is a fundamental process of adapting from one genre of writing to another.

Germano offers clear guidance on how to do just this. Writers will find advice on such topics as rethinking the table of contents, taming runaway footnotes, shaping chapter length, and confronting the limitations of jargon, alongside helpful timetables for light or heavy revision. With crisp directives, engaging examples, and a sympathetic eye for the foibles of academic writing, *From Dissertation to Book* reveals to recent PhD's the process of careful and thoughtful revision—a truly invaluable skill as they grow into their new roles as professional writers.

From Dissertation to Book Details

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Author : William P. Germano

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Siria says

A usefully clear-sighted look at how to revise a dissertation for publication as a monograph. Germano gives some straightforward advice about how to step back from your own writing and how the publishing industry works, some of which I was already aware of, some of which I wasn't. He also helped to put into words some of the things I instinctively knew about my own dissertation, but which my advisor hadn't cared enough to either notice or help remedy. I would have liked some more practical tips, but I suppose in such a short space and in a work aimed at an audience across academic disciplines, that would have been a difficult thing to do. Still, valuable for the inspiration it provides to be ruthless with the scalpel when it comes to attacking the dissertation and turning it into something new.

Mark Jr. says

Don't let the title fool (or scare) you: I'm not planning to turn my own dissertation into a book—in large part because of Germano's advice. From long experience as an editor and an academician (whose own dissertation is sitting safely on a shelf, unpublished), Germano knows that not all dissertations will make good books.

In fact, very few will without major revision. Germano has persuaded me that another of his suggested options is better for my particular work: evisceration. Take the few chapters that really say something and turn them into journal articles or perhaps another book.

Germano provides a great deal of practical advice, including pre-eminently Checklist 1 in the back of the book, a simple run-down of the differences between the audience, voice, structure, and length of a dissertation and of a book, respectively.

Germano writes with a noticeably smooth and engaging voice himself. I thoroughly enjoyed and profited from this book. It's hard to imagine anyone writing from a better perspective.

Geoffrey Long says

It's a slim volume, both in size and in ROI, but that's not to say it isn't a valuable read - Germano's insight into both academia and the publishing industry is a strong dose of reality to the newly-minted Ph.D (or those of us who have written really hefty Master's theses and are figuring out what to do next). Germano not only talks about how the audience and required voice differs between dissertations and books, but he also breaks down the possibilities based on the amount of time the person is willing to spend on revisions and gives some ideas as to how much time is actually appropriate, to help guide the would-be author from falling into the trap of endless revisions and delays. (One of Germano's best visual images is the 40-year-old ABD student huddled in the library over *Just One More Book*, indistinguishable from a bum... There but for the grace of God, etc.)

Perhaps the biggest strike against this text (and a weak strike at that) is how the last third of the book goes

into greater depth about how to focus on audience, voice and so on. This is solid, but also sort of a no-brainer for readers who have studied writing and publishing at all. Those of us who fall into that camp can happily skim through those last pages, but other academics new to the publishing game should find them a compelling read.

In the end, Germano's book should probably be handed out to newly-minted Ph.Ds along with their sheepskins. Those of us who are taking a slightly different road, however, will still find it valuable but perhaps not quite so much of a pageturner.

sdw says

You have finished your dissertation. You have taken the requisite 3-6 month break from the material. What do you do? Well, if you are like me you order every book on amazon that looks like it might provide guidance. I am surrounded by Germano's *Getting It Published*, Emily Toth's *Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*, Beth Luey's *Revising Your Dissertation*, *The Academic Handbook*, and this book, *From Dissertation to Book*.

This is the first guide I have made it all the way through, which says something about its length (concise!) and readability. It is a clear and inspiring revision guide. The first chapter of *Revising Your Dissertation* terrified me about the shrinking state of the academic publishing world, the increasing availability of electronic dissertations, and the need for marketability. It filled me with fear and panic. It made me feel that only those with realistic aspirations towards academic rock start status could expect to have their first book published.

In contrast, Germano's *From Dissertation to Book* left me feeling that my dissertation could become a book, a good public. I felt ready to print out my manuscript and attack it with a red pen. "Reading with an Editor's Eye" helped me think about my prose in a practical way. "Planning and Doing" helped me plot a realistic time-line for revisions and address the scope of revisions for which I'll aim. "Getting Into Shape" included several pages addressing the creation of a strong Table of Contents not just for a superficial change but in gaining clarity about the narrative connections between parts. "Making Prose Speak" attacks the common refrain to remove the "dissertation speak" from the manuscript by outlining the steps to do so.

The book ends with three handy check-lists to review prior to sending out your manuscript. The first, Dissertation v. Book, deserves a place taped to the wall over my desk.

What this book doesn't do: Tell you how to get your book published. I do not know how to write a query letter. I don't know how to write a book proposal. I was looking for a book that would reinforce the advice I'd received from my advisors as to the steps in finding and securing a publisher. This book isn't it. This book only focuses on the ins and outs of what your manuscript should look like. I have high hopes that Germano's other book *Getting It Published* will address these other queries.

Michelle says

Very helpful advice.

Misha says

When I picked up this book, I was expecting some more along the lines of Wendy Laura Belcher's "Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks", which I absolutely loved and still find useful. Germano's book is much less a practical guide with concrete steps and tasks and much more a look inside the mind of a book editor. I found a lot of it to be repetitive and would have liked less metaphorical illustrations and more concrete advice. (NOTE: I'm not a STEM person here--I'm an ethnographer, so I have a pretty high tolerance for storytelling and the like--that's just not what I was looking for from this book). People who received little advice or feedback specifically on scholarly writing in grad school will probably gain more from this book than I did (I was fortunate to have an advisor who was a former editor and put me through my paces). I thought the useful bits made up maybe 30 pages out of the 160 pages of prose here. Luckily, "From Dissertation to Book" is a pretty quick read.

Nonetheless, I will say that the book did get me pumped up to go back to my diss and do something with it after having set it aside for almost two years (writing a dissertation is traumatic). I thought the final chapter ("What Happens Next") also did a fine job of explaining and affirming the role of writing in the scholar's life.

Elizabeth says

I read this both because it's time for me to get started thinking about turning my own dissertation into a book and in preparation to help a colleague who is more ambitious (or at least less busy) than me do the same. Germano's advice about the differences between dissertations and books, though sometimes mystifying, seemed largely correct. But, if you are looking for a prescriptive advice manual, this is not it. In the end, Germano places the onus on the writer to (1) decide whether their dissertation is worth revising and (2) assess what requires revision. Where he is prescriptive, his advice (on prose style, especially) is useful and easy to follow. But these are the easy fixes. It's the harder ones, including the decision whether to revise at all, that continue will only feel more apparent when you've finished this volume. Nonetheless, Germano forces writers to think about the things that matter as far as this goes. Bottom line: well worth reading, but while its utility may partially spring from its allusiveness, the same allusiveness will not be a comfort.

Beatrice Lapa says

I am halfway through this book while in the process of revising my dissertation for publication purposes and I am so happy with what I have read so far. All those things that I have always wanted to do with my dissertation...well, it feels like I can do it now. At first I felt like did not ever want to go back to my dissertation (I said goodbye to it after graduation), but certain work-related conferences (I belong to the game development industry) make me feel like I really should publish and talk about women in the video games industry. I'm still stuck at the "framework" chapter of my dissertation, though. That's the most difficult part to translate into digestible bits. I'm still figuring out how to rename the chapter title and make the content sound less dissertation-y. That being said, I love how this book made me breeze through the first few chapters of my own work. Highly recommended!

Corey Wrenn says

While I certainly picked up a few helpful tips (make sure those first 50 pages shine; steer clear of passive voice, etc.), I found a lot of this book to be fluffed up, abstract discussions of writing. Not as much concrete advice as I had hoped (should the methodology section be included? If so, to what extent? etc.). It isn't a long book and is easy enough to skim through, so it would be worth borrowing, but not purchasing.

Judy says

"The dissertation is the Ugly Duckling of the publishing world." So says Germano, compelling recent PhD grads to confront the limitations of their greatest work to date. But the point of the fairy tale is that the Ugly Duckling turns into a Beautiful Swan. Just how this transformation can be brought about is the substance of this book, whose author has one foot in the academic world and another in the publishing world—and who is thus perfectly situated to identify the challenges for budding academics and advise them on how to package their research in a way which will arrest the attention of editors and readers.

Good ideas and the jewels of research that are buried in a study described with dry-sounding titles/headings will not get past an editor's first glance (if they get that far), nor will these gems shine to best advantage in sleep-inducing prose. So how does one go about reworking their dissertation, which, after all was good enough for the examining committee? What needs to be adjusted? Germano sets out straightforward, practical strategies for rethinking/restructuring the manuscript—some of which will have occurred doctoral candidates with an eye to future publication, but some of which will not have—and he is particularly insightful on how to revise the thesis at different levels in order to i) generate greater reader interest and target a wider readership (crucial, as editors need to be confident of a return for the expenses of production) and to ii) project a forward thrust through the presentation so as to draw the reader along by making them feel they are heading somewhere. Even a scholarly audience, with a determination to read, prefers a compelling ride to a hard slog.

In addition, Germano takes a critical look at academic prose, exposing the pitfalls. There are several, but they are overlooked by recent grads (I plead guilty - oh all those passives for which I now blush!) as they tend to be overlooked by dissertation supervisors and examiners who are concerned less with style than with research strength and rigour of analysis. The good news is that these pitfalls are easily avoided, and there are ready ways to cultivate an engaging style.

Short and highly readable, this book not only instructs but also inspires. Its advice is concrete and can be put into practice readily, helping to build confidence in aspiring writers, few of whom feel like 'natural writers' but all of whom have the potential to be successful writers. Highly recommended.

Camilo says

A short and helpful read for anyone interested in turning PhD work into a publishable manuscript. It was easy and quick to read and has some sensible advice!

Raymond says

Revision, revision, revision. Germano states that the manuscript a writer submits to a publisher must be a significant revision of the dissertation. This book is very helpful in this regard. I really liked when Germano said in the beginning that the book would not provide you THE answer but will provide you with answers on what to do next with your dissertation. It has definitely given me answers on how to proceed. This is a book that should be read by all new PhDs after they defend their dissertations.

Eric Black says

There are books you read because you want to and books you read because you have to. This is definitely a “have to” book.

I read the second edition.

If Germano is correct, the need for this book is ample; however, the need for this book to be this length and this repetitive is not demonstrated within its pages.

Jeremy says

Read the second edition instead?

Elisa Goudriaan says

Germano uses a lot of words to say what he wants to say, but the things he wants to make clear are rather useful.
