

# Publishing your research

By Emma Hegarty

## Why publish?

If you want to have an academic career, one of the best things in your favour is a list of publications on your cv. It makes you sound hard working and productive, not to mention knowledgeable. Universities value higher degree research students and academics who publish because the universities get rewarded for it in research funding. Increasingly, it is not the quantity but the quality of publications that matters; but both count. Publications are also helpful in building a reputation in your field, in getting a scholarship if you are not yet in a PhD program, and in competing for research grants.

## How to begin

Thesis chapters are handy for turning into articles, conference presentations and chapters for edited books. Conference papers, although not taken as seriously as other types of outputs, help an early career researcher because you get feedback and an opportunity to network. Submitting an abstract to a conference can be a helpful motivator, because you are then obliged to deliver a paper with a deadline, and that paper can easily be turned into an article or chapter, a more respected avenue of publication than conference proceedings.

If you are pushed for time but can manage a chapter, band together with other researchers who work in your field, and produce an edited book. If you are set on writing your own book, you can save yourself a lot of time and bother by producing a book proposal first (see below). Also investigate whether your school or faculty can provide you with some funding, possibly subsistence income while you write the book, some teaching relief, or perhaps assistance with publication costs, which is always a sweetener for publishers, and positively demanded by some of them.

## Book publishing

The publishing industry is divided into education, trade, and scholarly and reference. For the most part you are aiming at scholarly publishers, but there is an area of crossover into trade, and a small number of publishers do both, such as Allen & Unwin in Australia.

The most important thing to understand about publishing is that it is a business. It is not a particularly profitable industry, and the scholarly publishing sector is down there with poetry as an enterprise that generates little or no profit. When a publisher undertakes to publish a book, they are taking a risk. It is not uncommon for privately-owned scholarly presses to ask their authors to bear some of the risk by arranging and paying for the copy-editing and layout, which has to be carried out in accordance with the publisher's guidelines. Although most university presses are underwritten in some way, by their universities, by a subsidiary business, or by endowments, they still have overheads they have to cover. Therefore, when any scholarly publisher chooses whether to take on a new book, they have two major things to consider: can we make money out of it, and is it of a quality consummate with the reputation we want to keep/cultivate?

## What are publishers looking for?

In short, books that are original, well written and have broad appeal. Each of these is difficult to achieve. The most difficult for those with an academic background is good writing. This means no jargon, as few academic terms as possible, plain English, and

a structure that engages the reader. In addition, scholarly publishers almost certainly want their authors to contribute something new to the discipline.

### **What are publishers not looking for?**

Your thesis (more on this later). Publishers will not consider your thesis, so don't get yourself a reputation by asking them to look at it. Nor do they want to know about conference papers, huge books, lavish illustration, or complex copyright issues.

### **How to approach publishers**

1. Identify the most appropriate publisher for your book. This might be an Asian Studies specialist, or a discipline specialist. For instance, many small university presses have esteemed series in a particular area, such as women's studies, musicology, linguistics or politics. These publishers have established, effective methods for marketing and distribution in their fields that a more general publisher or area specialist may not have. Methods of identifying potential publishers include looking at your field in the bookshop and the library, and asking your supervisor.
2. When you have selected several publishers, look at what their websites say about how to approach them (see websites for NIAS, Allen & Unwin, Hawaii).
3. Think carefully about whether to send your book to one publisher at a time, or several at once. By sending your manuscript or book proposal to a few publishers at once you will not be breaking any unwritten code of etiquette, but you will be maximising your opportunities. On the other hand, scholarly publishers will send your manuscript to two or three referees, and if an academic is asked by several publishers to review the same book, they will be unimpressed with you. This is more likely to occur if your topic is highly specialised.
4. Do you send a manuscript or a book proposal? See what the publishers' websites say. Most will prefer a book proposal. This is better for you too. It means you only have to convert/write about two sample chapters rather than an entire manuscript before finding out what your chances are.
5. What is a book proposal? This is a document designed to persuade a publisher that they want to publish the book you propose to write. To be successful, a proposal should demonstrate that the book is well conceived, will be well written, and has a market. Publishers will often give an outline of how they want a book proposal to be structured and presented. The following are fairly standard inclusions:
  - About the author. What is your background in relation to your proposed book? Persuade publishers that you are the best person to write it. If the book is related to your thesis, you are probably a leading expert on the subject.
  - About the book. Supply a brief summary of the book. Provide chapter outlines or abstracts if possible. This does not refer to your thesis chapters. A book will probably have quite a different structure, with much less material, and perhaps some areas expanded (see point 6 below).
  - Competition review. What else has been published on this topic? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the competition? Why is your book different, or better? Publishers are quite likely to be well informed on this subject, so you will be demonstrating to them your honesty and judgement.
  - Market review. Who would read your book and why? Have you written a book on a popular subject, or something that attracts media attention.

Unfortunately one of the things publishers have to take into account is the financial viability of a book. The broader your market, the happier they will be.

- One or two sample chapters. This is to give publishers an idea of your writing style.
6. Converting a thesis into a book proposal or manuscript. Writing a thesis proves you can write a thesis. It does not demonstrate that you can write a book, which is a very different beast. Some universities offer subsidies to a select few PhD graduates to support them for a few months while they convert the thesis to a book. Some post-doctoral appointments can also offer this opportunity. For guidelines on how to convert a thesis or dissertation into a book, I recommend the websites of Monash Asia Institute Press and the University of Texas Press. What needs to be done will vary from thesis to thesis, but will usually involve differences in writing style, structure and content (for instance, the literature review and methodology section will not be going into your book).
  7. It is important to note whether the publishers want the proposal/manuscript sent to them electronically or in hardcopy. They might get irritated and ignore you if you send the wrong one.
  8. Be patient. Your manuscript or proposal will be refereed by at least two experts. These people tend to be academics, who tend to be very busy. Refereeing alone can take months, and is followed by a committee process. It all requires administration. If the wait is driving you mad, it's not impolite to ask how your submission is coming along. This process is genuinely anonymous, so don't be worried about prejudiced or compromised referees. The academic world can be a small one, particularly in a specialist field such as Indonesian Studies. However, publishers try to get genuinely unbiased, uncompromised reviews, and will cast the net internationally.
  9. How to cope with rejection. Rejection by a publisher, especially of a work that has already achieved academic recognition, is almost never about the quality of the research. It might be because your topic is highly specialised, or because there is not room in the market for another book in this field, or because the publisher felt they did not have the right networks to promote it properly. It might be because your writing style is inaccessible. It might be because you hit a referee who came from a different tradition, or whose pet theory you ignored. Scholarly publishers try to find the time to explain rejections, but sometimes they are too busy to go into detail, and sometimes a general explanation really is accurate.

### **Technical aspects: electronic publishing, print, and open access**

In scholarly publishing, both electronic and print production have currency. In general, electronic is more common for journals, whilst traditional off-set printed books are still much more common in the humanities. In terms of academic esteem, a properly refereed scholarly journal should have the same standing as a printed journal. An electronic journal is much more easily searched and accessed, which helps the articles reach both broad and specialised audiences.

There is a little-acknowledged difference between off-set printing and digital printing. Off-set printing means that the type and images are printed in ink by a process that imbeds them in the paper. They are of high quality, and last for centuries. When electronic publications have a printed version, they are usually digitally printed. Digital printing means that the type and images are printed in toner, as in photocopy toner, and are magnetically adhered to the paper. The toner therefore sits on the paper rather than in it. Over time, digital type can fade. Even for brand new books, the production quality is poorer than off-set printing, although they can look the

same. Images such as photographs and graphs (or anything with tones) cannot be digitally reproduced well. Many scholarly publishers use both methods, depending on their budget and their estimation of the book's long-term use.

Open Access is an increasing method of publication for electronic journals, and there are even some attempts to apply it to books. Its essential difference from mainstream publishing is that open access publications are freely available to readers; the costs of publication are covered from income other than sales, usually by the author. This model began in the sciences, where the transition has been smooth, as science researchers have paid for publication costs for many years, and often receive a publications subsidy as part of their research grants. As humanities and social science researchers are unlikely to have publications funds in their budgets, their open access publications may have to be subsidised by their institutions, which will become a contentious funding issue if the practice grows.

**Publishers with a particular interest in Indonesia:**

- Asian Studies Association of Australia Publications (Canberra)
- Equinox Publishing (Jakarta)
- Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)
- International Institute for Asian Studies (Amsterdam)
- KIT Publishers (Amsterdam)
- KITLV Press (Leiden)
- Monash Asia Institute Press (Melbourne)
- Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press (Copenhagen)
- Oxford University Press (Melbourne)
- Singapore University Press
- Southeast Asia Program (Cornell University, Ithaca)
- University of Hawaii Press (Honolulu)
- Yayasan Obor Indonesia (Jakarta)

**Emma Hegarty** is the publisher at the Monash Asia Institute, a small scholarly press that specialises in Asian Studies, and in particular, Southeast Asia.