

PUBLISHING

INTRODUCTION

Everyone wants to publish their work, and not only for ‘career progression’; what’s the point of doing your research if no-one reads it? By the same token, you want to publish your work in places and formats that will reach the widest audiences. But if this is all publishing was about, then you would just post your work online (on a site such as academia.edu or on your own webpage or site) and let people come to it.

In fact, publishing isn’t just about disseminating your work – it’s about improving it, and about ‘kitemarking’ it (getting marks of quality attached to it that will suggest to potential readers that it’s worth reading).

It is these two additional criteria that cause many historians – especially those just starting out in their publishing career – to submit to journals.

There are other ways of publishing article-length papers – notably as chapters in books.

Ultimately, most historians want to tackle a ‘long-form’ publication similar to their PhD thesis – that is, a book of one’s own.

These are the main forms of publication, but they hardly exhaust the range of outlets – there are many other formats.

If you’re a UK scholar, you’ll also be interested in thinking about how your publications are likely to be assessed for purposes of the REF.

Journals

Journals provide a miraculously free and civic-spirited service that aims to improve your work – peer review.

When you submit a paper to a journal, the editors ought to send it out to at least two peer-reviewers (sometimes several – practices differ). They ought to have some specialist knowledge of your subject. If your subject is controversial, one ought to be ‘on your side’, another perhaps hostile or at least neutral. Ideally, peer-review is ‘double-blind’ – the reviewer doesn’t know your identity, you don’t know theirs. In small specialisms, where everyone knows who their fellow-workers are, this anonymity is difficult to maintain, but it’s an ideal worth preserving, so try (as best you can) to anonymise your own manuscript – don’t refer to other work of yours, or if you do refer to it in the third-person.

You should get reports back within 2-3 months. (Does this seem slow to you? Remember, your referees are doing this as a public service, and they probably have more than full-time jobs, so they will fit such tasks in when time allows. Anyway, what’s the rush? History moves slowly.) They ought to provide feedback not only on whether the paper is publishable, but also on the specific arguments, evidence, style and presentation.

With the reports, the editors will deliver a verdict. They might accept or reject your paper outright. More likely, they’ll ask you to ‘revise and resubmit’. A good editor will steer you towards specific comments in the referees’ reports that you ought to take into account when revising. (If they don’t, and the reports are contradictory, ask for a steer.) Take as much or as little time to revise as you like – the ball is in your court.

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Sometimes editors will send your paper back without peer review. This will normally be because they think it unsuitable for the journal. Try another journal.

For more details on what and how to submit, and where, see [submitting to a journal](#).

Submitting to a journal

What makes a good journal article? First, it must stand on its own. It may be a version of chapter of a PhD dissertation, but it has to be self-contained. Second, it ought to have a strong and distinctive argument. The standard way to demonstrate this is by reference to the historiography – but it's not enough (or even, really, at all persuasive) to say that your subject has been 'neglected' by the historiography. Some subjects are neglected for a good reason – they're not interesting or important. You need to show how the historiography will look different by including your paper – what arguments are called into question, what new light is cast on bigger subjects, what new subjects are being developed that command attention. Sometimes people publish articles that give the *overarching* argument of a PhD thesis; sometimes they pick the richest or most provocative argument (perhaps from a single chapter). Third, you ought to be able to provide convincing evidence in support of your arguments. This isn't easy within the scope of an article – which ought probably to be 8-10,000 words; it's a real skill to learn how to select evidence that will fit within these limits and still carry conviction.

How do you decide which journal to submit to? (You must only submit the same paper to one at a time.) The best course is to ask yourself which journals have published papers in your field that you have admired, or papers that you have disagreed with and want to engage. Go for the highest-quality journal that fits this description – the one that publishes the work you consider to be the best in your field. If your work is accepted by that journal, people like you will also recognise it as standing with the best in your field. If you don't succeed with the first submission, try the next journal down the pecking-order. This is likely to be a more specialised journal.

Before you submit your paper, check your chosen journal's website for their advice to contributors – how to format a submission, how to send it in. It's polite to format the paper to suit the journal's house-style; if theirs is a unusual style, very different from other journals, you can format it in a generic style so that you don't have to keep re-formatting every time you submit to a new journal.

For more details on what happens after your paper has been accepted, see [publishing in a journal](#).

Publishing in a journal

Once a journal has accepted your work, you still have some time to polish it up (e.g. by adding references to the most recently published work, or by tinkering with your prose, or by addressing lesser criticisms in your readers' reports). Most journals now process accepted manuscripts through a software system that will let you upload your final manuscript and will subsequently lead you through the publication process.

If you are a UK author, you are now also required to upload your paper – the version that was accepted by the journal – into your institution's online repository *within three months of acceptance*. You can still change the paper before the submission of the final manuscript to the publisher, and you may if you wish upload the later versions, but you *must* upload the version that the journal first accepted (what's called the 'accepted author manuscript') within three months. This will make it eligible for the REF – but it doesn't mean that it will be freely available ('open access') immediately. Your repository ought to allow you to impose an 'embargo period', during

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which the paper remains inaccessible to others, of up to two years, depending on your journal's policy. This embargo period allows your journal to recoup a moderate subscription charge from readers who will have early access to your work; after the embargo period, your paper will be freely available to be read through the repository (the version that people need to cite will still only be available through the journal). Different open-access requirements apply if your research has been funded by a research council (e.g. AHRC, ESRC). For more information on the technical requirements for research-council-funded research, see the RHS's [Information Sheet on Open Access for RCUK-Funded Historians](#). The same sheet has information about the different open-access licences that you may be offered; these licences determine which of your rights as author you are willing to give up in order to extend use of your work by others.

Each journal has its own procedures for dealing with the final version of your paper after you've uploaded it. Normally they will 'copy-edit' it – a professional copy-editor will suggest changes for clarity, consistency, and conformity with the journal's house style – and you will have an opportunity to respond to these suggested changes. They will, separately, ask you to 'proofread' it after it has been formatted for publication – at this stage, you should limit the changes you make to corrections of typographical errors and other small errors. Most journals are still paginated and more extensive correction messes up pagination.

It may take up to a year between acceptance and publication, although many journals now put the final copy-edited, formatted and proofed texts on their websites in advance of the formal publication date. Again, this may appear to be slow to you – but at each stage, your paper is getting better.

And [after publication](#)?

After publication

Nothing at all may happen.

If you're lucky, a few readers may write to you – expressing interest, asking questions about your sources and methods, perhaps disagreeing with you. Mostly, though, readers read and digest on their own. *Very* occasionally, someone will be so moved to disagree that they write a response. If the journal decides to publish the response, they will normally give you a chance to supply a 'rejoinder'. Though it is never nice to be disagreed with so vehemently, you should take it as a compliment – and a sign that your ambition to say something important has succeeded. No-one ever writes a response to an insignificant paper.

Nowadays, journals know how many readers your article is getting (it's an 'article' now that it's been published, no longer a 'paper' or a 'manuscript'), because they collect download statistics (from their own site, and from 'archive sites' like JSTOR which may start holding your article after a few years). You will probably never know this yourself. But you *will* know something about the impact that your article is having from the number of times it is cited by others in their own articles and books. Unlike in some of the sciences, the assessment of impact by citation is a very imprecise matter. In history, research doesn't cluster around a set of 'hot' issues; there is no clear 'cutting edge' of research. We work across a much wider range of themes, driven by our own curiosity and imagination as well as by the historiography, and sometimes it takes many, many years for others to wake up to the value of our research. For example, one estimate by the British Academy is that while half the reader-downloads of biomedical articles take place within two and a half years of publication, half the reader-downloads of historical articles take place within five years. Furthermore, we make much more use of archive sites like JSTOR than do the sciences, and it takes *twenty years* for the average historical article to receive half its reader-downloads on JSTOR. In other words, just because only a few people have read your article within the first couple

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of years of publication (and perhaps no-one at all has cited it!), doesn't mean that it won't be widely read (and cited) in a decade. Did we mention that history moved slowly?

Chapters in Books

Unlike the practice of many other disciplines, historians publish a lot in collections of essays – normally not all their own essays, but collections 'from divers hands' edited by one or two colleagues. These collections often arise from a conference on a focused topic. (Sometimes a conference can also materialise as a special issue of a journal.) Sometimes they have been put together as a *Festschrift* for a senior or retiring academic by their students. Sometimes they just flow from the conviction of the editor that there is a topic that a lot of people are working on independently, and which would benefit from being brought together in one package.

In many respects chapters in books function just like journal articles. You'll get asked to submit your paper to the editor, who will decide whether it does indeed fit into the theme of the volume. You may have been supplied in advance with a proposal for the volume, which sets out a minimum common programme, to which your chapter should seek to conform. Some degree of peer review will be applied. It may be that the editor has had the proposal for the volume peer-reviewed by the publisher (in which only an abstract of your chapter has been included); more rarely, the publisher will want to peer-review the whole volume, once all the manuscripts have been submitted. Once the editor and the publisher have accepted the final text, your chapter will be copy-edited and proofread much as a journal article is. When it's published, you will probably receive one free copy of the book.

But chapters in books have additional pluses – and minuses. Put plainly, standards are not so high for edited collections, so it's easier to get into them, especially as an early-career scholar. It can be gratifying to be solicited for publication, rather than having to undergo gruelling anonymous peer-review on a competitive basis for a journal. It seems like an easy way to build a publication record from scratch. But that's why standards are not so high – the peer-review tends to be light and non-competitive, a pretty basic minimum standard only being applied. Collections of essays tend also not to get wide readerships. They're not (at present) much available online, and they will likely sell only 150-350 copies at very high prices to a select group of libraries. Of course, we all know chapters in books that have revolutionized our fields, and collections on specialist topics can be very innovative, even pioneering. On average, though, they're not. So by all means be flattered by a solicitation – take the opportunity to publish – but tread carefully, and don't make a habit of publishing exclusively through these outlets.

A Book of One's Own

For good reasons, a book of your own – now sometimes called a 'monograph', although this really only means a specialist work by a single author (and so technically could apply to a journal article) – is widely seen as the gold standard of historiography. Because history is an evidence-intensive subject, and also substantively extensive – that is, it aspires to both breadth and depth – there are many intellectual projects that can only be achieved at book-length. This is why the professional qualification for academic historians – the Ph.D. – is achieved by writing a book-length dissertation, and it's why hiring and promotion decisions are largely based on the publication of books.

Books are quite like Ph.D. dissertations – they tend to range from 80-120,000 words and often cover a similar stretch of ground. Why then don't we just publish our Ph.D. dissertations (as is the case in some disciplines and in some countries)? There are a number of reasons for this. First, the tradition has been to consider the Ph.D.

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dissertation the first draft of a book. It gets examined and critiqued and the author can then go away and develop or transform it. As we've said before, history is slow – the work matures over several iterations, with time to breathe and contemplate in between. It's hard to teach someone how to write a book; it's the kind of thing you learn by doing; and this takes time (so be sure to get friends, colleagues, mentors to read successive drafts of chapters, to help you make sure you're on the right track). Second, the tendency in recent years has been to tightly control the time spent writing the Ph.D. and therefore to limit its scope. If it's going to be published, it needs to regain the wider horizons that only extra time (and sometimes some extra words) can supply. Many book versions of Ph.D.s involve extra chapters that take on entirely new extensions of the original conception, or more comparative or methodological reflections. Increasingly, postdoctoral fellowships are designed to give early-career researchers time to convert their dissertation into a book, rather than to launch a new project already. This may mean that there is a gap of 2-6 years (or more) between completion of the Ph.D. and publication of the monograph.

It's impossible to describe the ideal-type book. Sometimes they range over centuries and continents. Sometimes they are tightly focused on a micro-history, especially one which affords rich sources. Some historical monographs are more like books in other disciplines – loosely-connected collections of case-studies, where the chapters read like stand-alone articles. Others are dominated by a cohesive thesis which plays itself out systematically through every page of the book. You'll have your own tastes and ideas, probably honed further by writing the Ph.D. But how do you get a book published?

Publishing a Book (I)

Book publishing remains fairly traditional, not as affected by the digital revolution as journal publishing. As with journals, however, there are a range of book publishers that you can probably array in a quality sequence depending on your own experience of your own field. Generally, though, they break down into three types: i) university presses; ii) big commercial presses; iii) boutique commercial presses.

The university presses tend to carry the most prestige – because they do the most thorough peer-review, and thus the most thorough quality control. Their mission is to publish academic books (and so are not under such pressure to rack up big sales or require 'crossover' appeal). The big commercial presses need higher sales; they'll only be interested in an academic book if it can be dressed up with 'crossover' appeal, either stylistically or substantively (sex, violence, war, or some other kind of rich human interest). Boutique commercial presses have burgeoned in recent years, as more academics want to publish more books than the university presses can accommodate. They rely on the fact that they can make a small profit with modern technology by selling only 150-350 copies of an academic monograph at a high price to a small number of libraries.

All of these presses still have editors who go around universities and conferences prospecting for authors. You can often meet them at book displays at conferences. Mostly, however, you will have to approach an editor yourself. The best way to do this is to ask a senior colleague or a mentor for an introduction, or at least for permission to use their name when you email an editor with a query. As with journals, the best way to choose a press is to identify which press publishes books in your field that you admire and wish to emulate.

Publishers differ in their practices, but many presses will accept an initial submission in the form of a proposal. This could be a 5-20 page summary of the work, which tells the editor what the book is about, why it is new and special, what kind of research it's based on, and something about the structure of the book (a chapter outline with abstracts of each chapter). It's better to accompany the proposal with a sample chapter, which you're already pretty happy with. The university presses will almost certainly require you to go through peer review on

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the basis of a complete manuscript. They may issue you a contract but it will include a clause reserving the right to accept or reject the final manuscript on the basis of peer review.

Publishing a Book (II)

If an editor has agreed to review a proposal on its own, you may get a response in a month or so, as a short proposal doesn't receive a lot of scrutiny from reviewers. If you've submitted a complete manuscript, six months is not unusual. It takes a long time for a peer-reviewer to find the space to give a full book manuscript the attention it deserves. If you've waited that long, however, you ought to get some decent feedback – several pages from each of 1-3 referees. Unlike journal submissions, a book manuscript won't typically be reviewed double-blind; you won't know the reviewers' identities, but they'll, inevitably, know yours. Like a journal submission, the editor will then either decline your manuscript, accept it outright (while encouraging you to address the referees' comments in developing your final version), or give you the equivalent of 'revise and resubmit' – encourage you to go away and re-think the manuscript in light of the referees' comments. This latter verdict is not as common as in journal submissions – it is asking a lot to get an author to rewrite a whole book.

As with a journal submission, once accepted your manuscript will go through copy-editing and proofreading. A good publisher will proofread your book themselves and expect you to do it too. As with journal submissions, you have to confine your major changes to the copy-editing stage. And there's an additional stage as well – indexing. Most first authors do their own index, at the same time as they are proofreading. There are good software packages that make this easy.

Some journal articles have illustrations, and it's the author's job to source (and pay for permissions for) illustrations. All the publisher does is provide the technical specifications (nowadays, what kind of image file is required). This task is more onerous for books, which often have a lot of illustrations. Only the wealthier publishers will even offer to help with sourcing and paying for illustrations. There are charitable trusts that you can apply to for subsidy – ask your publisher for advice. Most books will require at least a cover illustration – again, probably your responsibility. You'll also be asked to supply jacket copy – including the 'blurb' describing and touting the book – although normally publishers themselves secure endorsement blurbs from senior scholars (often by asking those who refereed your manuscript or even excerpting the report).

After Publication

Unlike with journal articles, you are almost guaranteed to get some feedback, at least within the first year, in the form of book reviews. Your publisher will ask you for a list of journals that are relevant to your book – you're entitled to give them a reasonably long list, though make sure that they really are relevant and do publish book reviews. Include online book review sites. You're entitled to check up to ensure that the publishers have sent copies of your book to at least a healthy selection of the journals that you've specified.

Most book reviews are pretty anodyne. They'll tell the reader what the book is about and give it a general recommendation. Sometimes they'll be more, or less, enthusiastic. You may well feel that some reviewers have been unfair, perhaps protecting their turf or their own interpretation. That's the luck of the draw. You have to hope that across the spread of reviews you get justice. It is almost never a good idea to write to a negative reviewer (or to the journal) to claim a right-to-reply. There is no such thing, unless you can prove malice, in which case you ought to be in court.

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The economics of book publishing are not changing as fast as they might. Most academic monographs are now selling under 400 copies each. They will sit in a limited number of libraries, where they will not be read by many (if any) people. This is partly because a lot of monographs are being produced more for hiring and promotion purposes than out of intellectual necessity, and partly because monographs are the part of the publishing landscape least accessible to online users. It may be that the spread of e-books and the development of open-access options for monographs (still only in their infancy) may address this latter deficiency.

Regardless, you can take heart from the knowledge that, as with journal articles, their shelf-life is very long indeed. If anything you write is still read at all 100 years from now, it's likely to be a book.

Other formats

A very large majority of the work published by historians appears in one of these three formats – journal articles, chapters in books, books. These formats allow for the evidence-intensive and subject-extensive treatment that history favours.

But there are lots of other ways to publish, especially online, and these alternative formats tend to cater to other needs than the simple presentation of research.

Some early-career scholars find that their first published words take the form of *book reviews*. Journals receive lots of miscellaneous books for review and are often delighted to find someone – anyone – who knows enough about the subject to review them. There is a case to be made for only reviewing books after you've written one yourself – an experience that imposes a proper degree of modesty. (It also shows that, minimally, you know what you're talking about.) If you don't have a track record, be extra careful not to raise unrealistic expectations or to be too territorial. Normally you should be given the chance to proofread the book review. And of course you get 'payment' in the form of the book.

Forums and roundtables are increasingly popular formats in journals and on blogs. They are excellent formats for stimulating discussion (of controversial issues or influential books) and for broadening the range of voices. They're normally by invitation only. But you can be the host, if you can find a journal editor willing to entrust you with the task of putting together a forum. Often roundtables in print originate as live roundtables at conferences. They're chattier, usually shorter than full-size journal articles (say 3-4 contributions of 1-4,000 words each?), and don't require the full scholarly apparatus, as they tend to be more argumentative and less loaded with evidence.

Online formats. Some traditional publications (like book reviews) now often appear in online-only formats. There's no reason why you can't include them in your CV, just as you might print book reviews. But be conservative. If there is really no difference between the online version and its print equivalent – if you were commissioned by a reputable book-review site, and you submitted a full-length review with a stable URL – then surely it's the functional equivalent of the print version. But if it's just a blog post, or some other more casual form of contribution, without apparatus, un-peer-reviewed. . .it really has no place on your list of publications; it will just look like padding. A CV is an accounting of your scholarly qualifications, not an advertisement.

REF

If you're a UK scholar, or seeking employment in the UK, you will need to pay some minimal attention to the REF (the Research Excellence Framework, the current name for the periodic assessment of academic research undertaken by the UK funding bodies).

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



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The rules of the REF change from cycle to cycle, but the bottom line is: if you are publishing high-quality research with reasonable regularity, then you are doing all you need to be doing, so far as the publication portion of the REF is concerned.

All publishing formats are eligible for submission to the REF. It doesn't matter whether your research appears in a journal (still less a 'highly-rated' journal) or in a collection of essays or in a monograph or online. When your research is assessed by the REF panel, it will be read in full by an assessor, who will make a judgement based on what is read, not where it appeared. (You will be told otherwise – perhaps by managers, or scholars in other fields, where practices differ – but the truth is that all publications submitted to the REF are read by assessors and judged on that basis alone.)

Therefore, all that matters is the quality of what you produce. We are not always the best judges of the quality of our own work. So peer-review is a helpful guide to the REF outcome (which is simply peer-review itself). That is why submitting to a 'highly-rated' journal is a good idea – because your work will get searching peer review and acceptance in a competition is itself an indicator of quality. But a first-rate chapter in a book will still get equal treatment by the REF panel. As we say above in the section on book chapters, peer-review tends not to be so rigorous for collections of essays. In addition, editors of collections often try to pack too many items into a single book – to please more colleagues! – and so you may be confined to 6-8,000 words whereas a journal article may run to 8-10,000 words; and you are likely to be able to say more, to demonstrate more rigour, significance and originality in a journal article, than in a short book chapter. This is also the reason why books tend to do better in the REF – not because they are favoured on principle, but because historians tend to put their best work into their books, at the length needed to demonstrate the depth of the research and the validity of the argument.