

## Preparing a Journal Article

by Dr. Samer Abboud

Some general approaches to writing a paper:

1. Think of the reading, writing, and revising process in circular, not linear terms.
2. Make sure that your paper is only about \*one\* thing. Know what question you are asking. Know how you are answering that question.
3. Know your key concept(s), know your key theory(ies). Think depth, not breadth.
4. Find people who are willing to talk ideas out with you. And be ready to reciprocate.
5. Share your work, either in presentations or in drafts. Pre-empt the review process.
6. Focus your energy on a small number of projects, preferably just one.
7. Know your audience. Write for that audience. Know which journal you are submitting to and why.
8. Write and revise as often as you can.
9. Once you have a rump of a paper ready, Read Wendy Belcher's *Writing a Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*. Follow that plan.
10. Revise. Format. Submit.

The life cycle of *Reconciling Fighters, Settling Civilians*

### *Conceptualizing the Paper*

- This project developed out of an interest in the question of how the Syrian regime was engaging in counterinsurgency and attempting to resolve the conflict through a form of exclusionary peace. I was specifically interested in the question of authoritarian counterinsurgency and how the non-violent (i.e. legal) elements of counterinsurgency subjected Syrian citizens to conditions of social death, i.e. the inability to live in Syria as citizens. **Tip →** work through your research interests on paper and with colleagues and friends. Talk out your ideas. Determine what \*one\* thing you are interested in and what you want to know about it. Write a lot of notes. Don't worry about coherency.

### *Writing the Paper*

- I wrote and presented a rough paper in November 2018 on authoritarian counterinsurgency and another at my University in April 2019. In between my ideas changed and I became interested in how the law was emerging as a space for the creation of new subjects. So, the paper moves from being about counterinsurgency to subjectivity. Here, I found my central research question; how is the Syrian regime enacting forms of post-conflict subjectivity through new legal regimes of citizenship? **Tip →** Present your work. Talk it out with others. Be willing to shift your ideas to gain clarity in what you are interested in and what you are arguing.
- I spent the summer of 2019 writing this paper. I presented it at a Department brown bag in early September 2019. I received feedback and submitted to *Citizenship Studies* two weeks later. Why this journal? Four people who I had spoken with about this paper recommended it. I sent a draft to a colleague who is an editor at a journal, and they recommended it. The paper was about citizenship. I drew on a lot of material from the journal. It really made sense. **Tip →** Write for a specific audience.

### *Submitting the Paper*

- Pay careful attention to all formatting requirements and take them seriously. Do not go over the word count. Do proper citations.
- Write a cover letter telling the journal why they should be interested in this paper. Get them excited about it before they read it. Tell them what you are arguing, why it is relevant to the journal, and what contributions you think the article makes.
- Spend as much time on the abstract as you did the first five pages. The abstract is the first thing they will read and will shape their impression of the paper.
- Know your keywords.
- **Tip →** Not doing the above may suggest to the editors that you are not serious about submitting the paper. It is sort of like applying for a job at one university but forgetting to change the name of the university from the cover letter you copied it from. Take the granular stuff seriously.

### *Revising the Paper*

- Expect to spend as much time on the review as you did the paper.
- Take the reviews seriously. Write a serious memo. Tell the reviewers why you did or did not agree with their comments. Be willing to demonstrate that you understood their feedback and took it seriously.
- Seek out support with the revisions. Ask friends and colleagues to help.
- Again, write a serious memo. This could be the difference between a rejection and acceptance.
- **Tip →** Take reviews seriously as opportunities to grow and strengthen your paper. Despite what social media tells you, not all academics are out for blood. Some are compassionate, kind people who are genuinely interested in providing advice and support for scholars.

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## **Book Review Guidelines**

by Dr. Zaynab El Bernoussi

The exercise of trying to address all these questions is helpful to write a book review. If the answer to any of these questions is not significant to the purpose of the book review, skip it.

### *Reviewing the Bibliographic Information:*

- Author(s): What is their authority or credibility? Do they have the expertise to say or write what they did? What is their educational background? What is their career experience?
- Edition or Revision (if applies): Is this book a first edition? If it is a second or multiple edition copy, can you tell how it is different from earlier editions?

### *Doing a Content Analysis:*

- Purpose: Why was this written? What is the intent of the author? Who is the intended audience? Who is the author trying to inform or influence?

[Coherently synthesize the content using relevant themes]-not necessarily following chapters' order because not all chapters are equally important.

- Relevance: Is the material appropriate and useful for the study of international relations theories (or other discipline(s))? Why?

*Scope and Coverage of Material:* Can you tell if the author intends to provide comprehensive coverage of a subject or topic? What are the limitations of the information? What time period is covered?

*Objectivity:* Do you see any evidence of bias, propaganda, or a strong persuasive argument? Is the material viewed from more than one point of view? Does it contain substantiated fact?

*Evaluate Sources:* Where did the author get their information? Is there a bibliography? Are there footnotes? Does the author refer to primary or secondary material?

*Writing Quality:* Is it clear to you what the author intends to share and express? Is there evidence of clear organization and writing? Has it been well researched? Are there any obvious pieces of information missing?

*Conclusion:* Now that you have assessed your book in more detail, do you still think it is useful? Explain why or why not. If you intend to use it, name the chapters or sections that you think will be most useful for the study of international relations theories (or other discipline(s)) and explain why.

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### **Going from Dissertation to Book**

by Dr. Aili Mari Tripp

First thing you need to do is decide whether the dissertation is worth revising, or how much of it should be revised or cut.

- Do not resuscitate. Start an entirely new project.
- If it is not book material, pull out the best and write one or two articles.
- Or maybe salvage half of it for a book and cut the rest out and rewrite sections.

#### *Difference between Dissertation and Book*

Rarely if ever are dissertations ready to be published as books. It is for this reason that publishers are reluctant to even look at an unrevised dissertation, let alone publish one, unless it has undergone major revisions from its dissertation mode.

Find a book or two that you can use as a model and use it as a blueprint for how you would like your manuscript to look like when you are done. It is helpful to have something to help you visualize where you are heading.

#### *Purpose*

Purpose of dissertation: fulfill academic requirement.

Purpose of book: give voice to ideas.

### *Voice*

Dissertation: Hides authoritative voice.

Book: Asserts authoritative voice.

I think the biggest difference between a dissertation and the book is the author's voice. Where a dissertation may be tentative, the author of a book should have command of their topic and should not be afraid to make bold statements and assertions. The author's voice should come through clearly and should be an authoritative one.

Dissertation: dependent on quotations, often in blocks.

Book: Quotes others judiciously.

Some dissertators feel they have to quote and footnote everything because of a lack of authoritativeness. Some think that they can disarm their dissertation committee by citing and quoting other important scholars. But a lot of this means that it is hard to tell where your ideas begin and where those of others end. When a book author feels more confident about their claims they don't need to justify everything with a citation of someone else's work. Take control of the manuscript and engage the ideas of others without being excessively deferential to them through too much quoting and citing.

A dissertation is to prove that the author knows how to do original research.

A book is written by someone who knows how to do basic research and therefore can command a stronger voice.

### *Audience*

Dissertation: audience is dissertation committee.

Book: audience is broader.

### *Scope of Claims*

Some dissertations make small contributions, tinkering at the fringes of contributions by a major contribution of a luminary. A book needs to be written on a larger canvas. Integrate new conceptual frameworks, situate in larger perspectives of the field.

People often submit too early. They have not considered what needs to be done to situate themselves in a more comparative, historical, global, or broader theoretical canvas.

### *Innovation*

Dissertation is supposed to make a contribution to new knowledge but rarely does this in a big way other than through opening up new empirical ground. The book does not have to claim to offer up a new paradigm. But it does need to offer something fresh, new and/or innovative and the reader needs to be able to identify what it is, otherwise why bother reading the book? A book can examine a new set of ideas, it can synthesize existing ideas and perspectives, it can look at old ideas or history in a new way, it can provide new empirical insights into something that was not fully understood, it can provide nuance to something that was only understood in general terms. But it needs to be clear about what the contribution is.

Dissertators sometimes overstate their contributions because they aspire to come up with some new

contribution to knowledge. But a book needs to deliver accurately on what it promises. Central claims should be backed and one's contributions should not be overstated as they often are in the dissertation. The book should deliver exactly what it promises.

### *Structure*

Dissertation: Structure demonstrates analytical skills.

Book: Structure demonstrates the narrative, the thread, the plot, the story.

### *Ruthless Revising*

You may need to rethink the structure, splitting chapters apart, adding new chapters. One way to think of this is as a plot: what is the narrative structure of the book that leads you to the end point. To give an outward impression of order, you have to do this internally in the book, to each chapter and each paragraph.

You need to think of what is the thread that you can pull through the manuscript that gives it coherence. A central idea. A throughline. Once you have a central idea, you can organize other ideas around this core argument. A person who has read the book can say in a nutshell what is the main point of the book

Logical organization of one's argument. The reader won't understand what comes next unless they are given enough information to work with. Might be historical chronology, might be a series of events, conditions, individuals living at the same time. One way to look at this is to go through the outline of the manuscript.

- The table of contents is more than a descriptive account, it is an announcement of questions: what are the questions addressed by the manuscript; what are the debates.
- Subheadings: If the manuscript looks well organized it will create an impression to the publisher that the ideas are also well organized. Subheadings allow you to take on several discrete but connected points. They help create an inner map to the manuscript and to chapters. Subheadings are an example of signposting, telling the reader where you are heading. Don't overdo it.

### *Literature Review*

One of the clumsiest, most glaring spillovers from the dissertation is the literature review. I can often tell from reading how literatures are handled whether or not a person has really taken seriously revising their dissertation. In a dissertation, you have to prove that you know the literature and are building on it, hence the perfunctory literature review. But a book needs to engage the literature; it needs to cite the relevant literature, not everything that was ever written on the subject. Whatever writings of others and debates are referred to, they need to be working for you to build an argument, to make your case. One should either build on the literature or engage it to establish one's own claims. It should not just be a litany of who said what. This is a cardinal sin of the unrevised dissertation.

Authors also should not be excessively critical of other authors-no reason to put down. dissertators intent on showing how they are different and how their dissertation is better than what has come before.

### *Examples*

Dissertation: examples are numerous and repetitive.  
Book: Examples are well chosen and move the story forward.

### *Title*

Dissertation: Often long and uninteresting.  
Book: Can be snappy but has to capture essence of material: e.g. *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*.

The book should have a different title from the dissertation. I would steer away from well known phrases, humor, and quotations in literature or from the book. Be careful with this because you can easily end up with a very obscure title. People like the familiar. They don't want to be challenged with their own ignorance before they even get going.

### *Length*

Dissertation: Few long chapters.  
Book: Several chapters of readable length.

Keep it manageable. 350 pages much more likely to get published than 500 page manuscript.  
Paragraph rarely more than one screen long. Even that seems too long.

A book is shorter than a dissertation usually. About 200-225 pages not counting bibliography when published. Dissertation should be tightened up for readability and take out any data that got dumped in the dissertation.

Keep chapters manageable. 50 pages is too long.

### *Editing*

- Take out dissertationese: Needs to be cut and tightened up considerably.
- Should be understandable to the average person who is not an academic. Get rid of jargon, wordiness and verbiage.
- Get rid of repetition that some people include to pad their dissertation or to provide signposting in the extreme to satisfy a dissertation advisor. Avoid repetitious statements of intent: "I am going to analyze three elements of Syria's foreign policy." . . . "I have analyzed one element of Syria's foreign policy and will now analyze another before going onto a third. . . "I have demonstrated through my analysis of the three elements of Syria's foreign policy that. . ."
- Get rid of excessive use of "is/are".
- Avoid the royal we, but also don't put yourself there too much with "I".
- Don't be afraid to be interesting, funny, and observant of irony, paradoxes, and other delights.
- Avoid anything that smacks of superficiality.
- Avoid hyperbole ("I have found what nobody before me could", "my book will have revolutionary impact on the field of history," don't have to claim to have found "the Truth").
- Make sure your last chapter is as strong as the rest. Some people write their last chapters of their dissertation in great haste because they have a job offer and need to get it done quick. A book can't have such sloppy chapters.

Put yourself in the shoes of the reader. Ask 2 questions.  
So what? What is the point of what you are doing? Why should I care? Why should I spend several hours of my precious life reading what you have written? You need to be able to answer it. Tell me

more, tell me something interesting about what you have just stated. Not enough to have an idea: you have to test it, defend it, nurture it, and push it forward. Answering that is one of the most important parts of revising.

“Who ever thought otherwise?” Go beyond arguing the obvious. You don’t want to end up with a book proving that colonialism was oppressive or women have agency or indigenous knowledge has value. Speak your mind, tell me something of consequences. What is interesting here?

Not just what you say but effectiveness of what you say.

Revision allows you to get rid of gaps in logic and repetition. Add transition sentences, fix awkward grammatical constructions and long sentences.

Get dissertation committee to submit comments and get them to tell you what the most innovative and creative aspects of the dissertation are and expand upon those.

Present chapters at conferences to get feedback.