Intensive Course in Research Writing

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Summer 2016

Intensive Course in Research Writing: Session 13 (14 July 2016)

Today

- Presentation/discussion: writing and publishing books
- Presentation/discussion: presenting science to the public
- Panel discussion: advice from journal editors and peer reviewers
- Group photo

Writing and Publishing a Book

Notes

- Mainly a US perspective, but probably largely applicable elsewhere
- May interest book readers as well as prospective book authors
- Draws on my experience
  - Writing books and chapters
  - Peer reviewing book proposals and book manuscripts
  - Serving on a university press advisory committee

Some Reasons to Publish Books

- Specialized monographs: aid fellow scholars
- Handbooks: assist specialists and those applying specialized knowledge
- Textbooks: help students
- Popular nonfiction: interest and enlighten general readers

Converting a Dissertation to a Book Manuscript

- A point to remember:
  - A dissertation is intended in part to prove that you have mastered knowledge in your field.
  - A book, however, is intended to serve your readers.
  - Therefore, converting a dissertation to a book is likely to include streamlining the content, gearing the content to the readers' knowledge and interests, and making the style more engaging.

Dissertation versus Book

(Source of table: *From Dissertation to Book,* by William Germano)

Dissertation	Book
Fulfills an academic requirement	Fulfills a desire to speak broadly
Audience: one's dissertation committee	Audience: thousands of people you don't know
Rehearses scholarship in the field	Has absorbed scholarship in the field, and builds on it
Length: unlimited	Length: strategically controlled for marketability
Dependent on quotations, often in blocks	Quotes others judiciously
Hides the authorial voice	Creates and sustains an authorial voice
Structure demonstrates analytic skills	Structure demonstrates the throughline

Dissertation versus Book (cont)

(Source: *From Dissertation to Book,* by William Germano)

Dissertation	Book
Examples are numerous, repetitive	Examples are well chosen and move story forward
Few, long chapters	Several chapters of readable length
Stops	Concludes

Discussion Question

- How might you identify potentially suitable publishers for your book?

Finding a Publisher

- Look for publishers with books on topics related to yours.
- In general, seek university presses or commercial scholarly publishers.
- Assess the quality of books from the publisher.
- If feasible, consult authors of books from the publisher.
- Beware of predatory publishers.

Some Types of Book Editors

- Acquisitions editor
  - Seeks authors
  - Oversees evaluation of book proposals (both invited and unsolicited)
  - Oversees evaluation of manuscripts
- Production editor
- Manuscript editor (copyeditor)

(Analogous to types of editors at journals)

Book Proposal

- Common components:
  - Annotated table of contents
  - Description of market
  - Sample chapter
  - Resume or curriculum vitae
- The publisher may send the proposal for peer review.
- If a proposal seems promising, the publisher will do a financial analysis.

Advance Contract—Some Items Often Specified

- Length of manuscript
- Maximum number of tables and figures
- Deadline
- Royalties paid to the author
- Electronic rights

Preparing a Book Manuscript

- Break the project into manageable chunks.
- Follow the author guidelines from the publisher. (Suggestion: Prepare a sheet listing the main points to remember.)
- Set aside times to write.
- Before resuming writing, reread or edit a section you've already written, to help maintain a consistent voice and style.

Obtaining Permissions

- If you want your book to include material for which you do not hold copyright, you generally must obtain written permission.
- You may also need to pay fees.
- Start early. (Permissions sometimes take a long time to obtain.)

Revising Your Manuscript

- Once the manuscript is complete, review it for consistency and refine it.
- Obtain peer review—through the publisher, on your own, or both.
- Make required or advisable changes. Perhaps discuss alternatives with the editor.

Book Production

- Manuscript editing
  - Includes posing queries, for example about ambiguities or inconsistencies
- Page design
- Cover design
- Checking of proofs
- Indexing
- Printing

Helping to Market the Book

- Completing an author questionnaire—for example, identifying
  - Relevant organizations through which to publicize the book
  - Conferences at which to publicize the book
  - Relevant journals publishing book reviews
- Giving presentations, being interviewed, producing podcasts, publicizing the book through social media, etc

And then . . .

- Maybe starting to think about the next edition
- Maybe starting to think about the next book

Some Resources

(Suggested by Texas A&M University Press)

- *From Dissertation to Book,* by William Germano (University of Chicago Press, 2005)
- *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books,* 3rd edition, by William Germano (University of Chicago Press, 2016)
- *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published,* by Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato (W. W. Norton & Company, 2002)
- *Handbook for Academic Authors,* 5th edition, by Beth Luey (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Note

I'm already working on the next edition of *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper.* If you have suggestions, please provide them. I want the book to be as useful as possible.

Thanks very much!

Announcements etc

- Reading for tomorrow
- Writing for tomorrow
  - Compilation of the sections of your paper into a single document
  - List of items to do before submitting your paper to a journal
- End-of-course dinner

Presenting Science to the Public

(Note: If we don't have time to finish this material today, we can continue it tomorrow or you can read it yourself.)

Preliminary Questions

- Do you have experience communicating information in your field to the public? If so, what kind(s) of experience?
- What are some of the means through which one can communicate with the public about material in specialized fields?

Some Means of Public Communication of Specialized Information

- Print media: newspapers, magazines, etc
- Broadcast media: radio and television
- Internet: websites, social media, etc
- Museums and science centers
- Science festivals
- Lectures, science cafés, etc
- One-on-one discussions
- Other

Public Communication: Some Reasons

Discussion Question

- Why communicate specialized information (for example, in your fields) to the public?

Some Reasons to Communicate Specialized Information to the Public

- Interest to public
- Usefulness to public
- Chance to foster support of your field
- Chance to attract people to your field
- Obligation if work is publicly funded
- Enjoyment of doing so
- Other

Public Communication of Information in Specialized Fields: Some Principles

A Question to Consider

- What advice do you have for presenting specialized information (for example, in your field) in a way that members of the public will find clear and interesting?

Some Principles

Analyze the audience.

- "The public" isn't uniform. Gear what you say and how you say it to your audience.
- Some questions to consider:
  - What do group members care about?
  - What do they already know?
  - What are their demographics (age, socioeconomic status, educational level, etc)?
  - What other features might be relevant?

Use mainly simple, familiar language.

- In general, use short, simple, familiar terms.
  - Fundamental → Basic
  - Fabricate → Make
  - Utilize → Use
- In general, minimize use of abbreviations.
- In general, avoid specialized scientific terms.
- However, use specialized terms if learning them might help audience members (example: readers of a handout for patients).

Define unfamiliar terms.

- In general, follow unfamiliar terms with (simple, clear) definitions.
- Alternatively, present the concept first and then state the term. (Doing so can help avoid intimidating the audience.)
- Consider putting new terms in *italics* or **boldface** to help them stand out.
- Consider including a glossary or a table of terms.

Relate unfamiliar ideas to familiar ones.

- Build on audience members' existing mental framework.
- For example, use analogies.

Include people.

- Commonly, members of the public care more about other people than about abstract concepts.
- Include the researchers, not just the research.
- Show how things affect people.
- Consider using "I," "we," and "you."
- If appropriate, quote people.
- If appropriate, include stories about people.

Include narrative. (Tell stories.)

- If appropriate, use of the storytelling traditions/preferences of your audience.
- Consider presenting research as a story.
- Include anecdotes (little stories) to support points and enliven what you are saying.
- Of course, if you're talking about patients, either conceal their identities or get their permission.

Consider the visual aspect.

- Consider including visuals when communicating directly with public audiences.
- Have visuals available to journalists
  - For them to use or adapt
  - To aid in their understanding
  - To help them come up with verbal images
- Keep the visuals simple, understandable, and acceptable.

Check with the audience.

- For instance, show drafts to people like the audience or rehearse presentations for them. Then try to elicit their understanding.
- Check whether journalists grasped your points. (More about that later in this talk.)
- If community advisory boards exist, consider consulting them.
- For major communications, consider using focus groups or other research tools.

Working with the Popular Media

Discussion Questions

- Have you ever been interviewed by a reporter (for example, for a newspaper article)? If so, what was your experience?
- What suggestions do have for communicating effectively in such interviews?

Working with the Media: Some Suggestions

Obtain background information.

- The reporter's medium (for example, newspaper or TV; also, quality of the medium)
- The reporter's background (for example, science reporter or general reporter)
- The reporter's task (for example, a brief comment for a story on someone else's work or a long article on your work)
- The reporter's deadline (for example, next month or next hour)

If feasible, provide some written information.

- Now usually easy to provide quickly, for example through email or websites
- Generally should be non-technical
- Helps the journalist
- Helps ensure accuracy
- Promotes effective, efficient interviewing

Present information in a way directly understandable by the public

- Helps the journalist
- Helps avoid the distortion that can occur when information is "translated"

Consider the visual aspect

- If appropriate, provide visual (or audio) materials
  - To aid the reporter's understanding
  - For potential use or adaptation in the story
- If you'll be interviewed on camera, consider
  - The setting (Will it be effective on camera? What message does it convey?)
  - Your clothing and appearance

Perhaps check the reporter's understanding.

- Provides a chance to provide clarifications
- Should be done tactfully

If there's a main point you want to make, find a way to make it.

- Before the interview, identify the key message(s) you want to convey.
- Consider "bridging" from questions on related topics.
- Often journalists ask for final comments; have a possible response ready.

Offer to review a draft for accuracy.

- Be willing and available to review drafts for technical accuracy.
- Realize that
  - Journalists at some popular media are not allowed to obtain such review.
  - Public information staff at institutions often routinely obtain such review.
- In general, comment only on technical accuracy, not writing style.

Perhaps provide feedback after the story is published, posted, or broadcast.

- If there's an important error, perhaps (politely) let the journalist know, so he or she can avoid it in the future.
  - Realize, though, that a story for the popular media cannot be as exact and complete as a journal article.
- If a story is especially good, perhaps compliment the journalist.

A Resource: SciDev.Net Practical Guide: What Journalists Want from Scientists and Why

Writing for General Readerships

Popular Writing: Some Tips and Techniques

- Analyze the target publication.
- Obtain instructions online or from the editor.
- Provide human interest—for example, by including
  - Researchers
  - Doctors or other health professionals
  - Patients or other members of the public
  - Others
- Use some narrative.

Popular Writing: More Tips and Techniques

- Provide overviews before details.
- Relate the unfamiliar to the familiar—for example, through analogies.
- Include examples.
- If appropriate, intersperse "goodies" such as quotes and anecdotes.
- Make relationships clear:
  - Make reasoning explicit.
  - Use transitions effectively.

Writing for the Public (cont)

- Present numbers and sizes effectively:
  - Use familiar units.
  - Compare sizes with those of familiar items.
- Counter misconceptions respectfully.
  - Acknowledge plausibility of the belief.
  - Show the belief's inadequacy.
  - Show the merits of the more scientifically founded view.
- Note sources of further information.

For Further Information: "Writing Accessibly about Science"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT8DMcw-9Zk

Panel Discussion: Advice from Editors and Peer Reviewers

Thank You!

Now It's Time for the Group Photo