Pathways to Publishing: Publishing a monograph – the typical journey

There are three main phases you will work through when publishing your monograph, each containing several key steps. This detailed guide explains what happens at each step, including timescales; your likely point of contact at the publishing company; when you’ll be expected to take action, and when you’ll be waiting for others in the process to take action.

This guide forms part of the Library’s Pathways to Publishing service. You can access other information and resources related to this service via the website:

* [Pathways to Publishing](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/next-steps/)

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# Phase 1: Submission

## Proposal

The publisher will want to understand your initial idea and the outline for your writing project. You may need to complete a proposal form, like the proposal guidelines document used by Manchester University Press and [available via MUP’s website](http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/resources/publishing-your-book-with-mup/). The publisher needs to understand your planned content and style of writing, and so is likely to want to see:

* A plan for the flow of your book
* Synopses or abstracts for each chapter
* A sample chapter

Your contact at this point in the process is usually a Commissioning Editor.

## Publisher considers proposal

This is the first time the publisher will consider your proposed book in detail. You may have discussed the work informally prior to submitting a proposal, but at this point the publisher may decide the project is not what they were expecting. This could be because of concerns about quality of content or writing; because the scope seems too narrow; or because the topic seems too far removed from the publisher’s focus.

Publishers, especially academic presses, are likely to offer advice and not reject the work outright if they see potential in the work. You may wish to rethink, and submit a revised proposal at a later date.

If the Commissioning Editor is impressed with your proposal, they will move forward by sending your proposal out for peer review.

Your contact at this point in the process is usually a Commissioning Editor. If you’re submitting a proposal for a work within a series, the Series Editor and Commissioning Editor will discuss the work, but the Commissioning Editor will be your principle contact.

## Proposal peer review

The Commissioning Editor will send your proposal to two peer reviewers, asking them to provide a report within 6-8 weeks (or a month if your proposal relates to a shorter work, such as a chapter in an edited volume). The publisher usually expects a 2 page report from each reviewer. The publisher is looking to understand:

* Is this an important topic?
* Is the proposed methodology right?
* Does it look like the author has read the most important and relevant literature to inform the content of the book?
* Is this a topic that people will be interested in, i.e. will this book sell? (Remember all publishers need to sell books to be sustainable)
* How long do you think this research will be of interest for? (To get a sense of the potential shelf life or longevity of the work)

Each peer reviewer’s report will include their recommendation, which is likely to be either:

* Recommend proceed with publication
* Recommend publication after some changes are made
* Do not recommend publication

The publisher needs two positive reviews to proceed with publication. A positive review can include one recommending changes. If one of the reviewers is positive, but the other recommends rejecting the work, the Commissioning Editor may seek a third review to inform their decision.

The Commissioning Editor will send all reviews to the author.

The most common outcome at this stage is a recommendation to publish subject to some changes or more work. The Commissioning Editor will help you interpret the reviewers’ feedback and work to guide you in plans for making proposed revisions.

If the reviews are negative and a decision has been taken not to proceed with publication, the Commissioning Editor will explain why it is not possible to take the project forward. The Commissioning Editor may suggest possible improvements to enable you to submit your work elsewhere, or may suggest the possibility of a future collaboration – this very much depends on the outcome of the reviews.

Your contact at this point in the process will be a Commissioning Editor, who may liaise with a Series Editor if your proposal is related to a series.

## Respond to proposal peer reviews

You, the author, will now consider and write a response to comments, critiques and suggestions made by your reviewers. These could be minor, requiring only a short response acknowledging or agreeing to act upon a comment. If the comments are more conceptual, a more detailed response may be appropriate.

State clearly if you agree that a comment, and you’re happy to incorporate the suggestion; or justify why it’s not possible to act on the comment, even if you agree it is a valid point. For example, you might explain that it won’t be possible for you to incorporate a reviewer’s suggestion as this would involve writing an additional 50,000 words.

If you can present a good, reasonable argument why it’s not possible to take on a reviewer’s suggestion, the publisher will probably accept your decision. You don’t need to go into detail about every point, but you do have to positively engage with all the points raised.

If you are so unhappy with your reviewers’ comments that you feel you cannot engage with their reports, it won’t be possible for the publisher to take the project forward. You may decide to withdraw the work at this stage.

Your contact at this point in the process will be the Commissioning Editor you’ve been working with throughout the proposal process.

## Commissioning Meeting

If you’ve been able to positively engage with the comments and suggestions of your reviewers, and the Commissioning Editor is happy with your written response to the reviewers’ reports, they will prepare to pitch your work at the publisher’s next Commissioning Meeting. This involves the Commissioning Editor preparing financial models, taking into account parameters such as:

* The length of your proposed book
* If the book will contain images
* The proposed publishing model, including consideration of the intended market, i.e. hardback monograph; textbook; trade book, etc
* A projection of how much the book will cost to publish
* How many copies the publisher can expect to sell within 2 years, based on the topic and the Commissioning Editor’s knowledge of the field

These considerations are compiled into a pack, which will include a Profit and Loss report; your book proposal; the reviewers’ reports and your authorial response, to be presented at the Commissioning Meeting.

Present at the Commissioning Meeting are likely to be:

* The publisher or press CEO
* The Editorial Director
* All Commissioning Editors
* The editorial committee, composed of academics
* Members of the publisher’s marketing team

The role of the academics who make up the editorial committee, is to sign off on the publishing process. This will include; how the peer review process was handled, and if the author’s response to reviewers’ reports was appropriate. They’re not there to be experts on the content of proposed books, even if a work falls within their discipline.

## Contract

If your book is approved at the Commissioning Meeting, the Commissioning Editor will draw up a contract. This will include:

* Title of the work
* Total word count
* Total number of images
* Agreed delivery date
* Royalty rate
* Licence, if the book is to be published Open Access

You’ll probably have discussed all of these considerations with your Commissioning Editor previously, except for the royalty rate. Most elements of the contract can be negotiated later, but it may not be possible for the publisher to be flexible on the title or word count, as this could affect the profit margin of the work.

The contract will be sent to you by a Contract Administrator, along with the publisher’s style guidelines. If you’re happy with the terms of the contract, you will sign and return this to the Contract Administrator, checking in with your Commissioning Editor if you require any additional information or support.

You’ve now completed phase 1 of the publication process, and will begin phase 2: Writing your monograph.

# Phase 2: Writing

## Writing your monograph

You will have agreed a timescale to write your monograph with your Commissioning Editor, and the publisher will now leave you to get on with it! You may not decide to contact the publisher for 6, 12 or 18 months, until you’re approaching the agreed submission date, though you are able to get in touch to ask questions or suggest changes to your plans if you need to.

Your Commissioning Editor is likely to make contact with you a few months before the submission date agreed on your contract to check in and see how your writing is going. In reality, many authors end up submitting their manuscript later than the agreed submission date, and there’s usually some leeway on this as long as you communicate effectively with the publisher.

However, if an author keeps delaying and requesting extensions, the publisher may determine that the author has broken the agreed contract, and may decide to cancel the project, as the planned work may have lost its moment. If this happens, the author is at liberty to take their monograph project elsewhere to seek publication.

Whilst you’re writing your monograph, your contact will be the Commissioning Editor you’ve worked with so far.

## Submission, peer review, and revision of manuscript

Once you’ve completed your full manuscript, you’ll submit this to the publisher via your Commissioning Editor, ideally by the deadline agreed in your contract (though there may be some flexibility here if needed).

The publisher will then send your manuscript out for peer review, to just one reviewer this time. Publishers prefer to send the manuscript to one of the reviewers who had sight of your original proposal, if possible, and will ask [similar questions](#_Proposal_peer_review). The reviewer receives payment from the publisher, either monetary or in the form of books, for this substantial piece of work. Find out more about the peer review process via our [My Research Essentials Peer review online resource](https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mre/peer-review/story_html5.html).

Once the peer review has been completed the publisher will send the review to you as the author, requesting comments on any points raised. Your authorial response does not need to be as detailed as when you responded to your proposal peer reviews, but you must respond – even briefly – to the reviewer’s points.

If your reviewer highlights only the need for minor changes or corrections such as typos, your submission will likely be approved straight away.

It is best practice for authors not to be exposed directly to harsh reviews: if a review is heavily critical, the Commissioning Editor or Series Editor will usually attempt to mediate. The publisher has invested a lot in your project at this point, so even if the review is negative, this won’t necessarily mean automatic cancellation of the contract. The publisher will try to work with you to agree a plan of action, which could involve resubmitting a revised manuscript. If significant changes, or a resubmission are required, the Commissioning Editor will discuss timescales with you. The publisher will be keen to avoid the project dragging on for too long.

Once you provide a revised manuscript, the Commissioning Editor will undertake a quick check of this and then pass to an Assistant Editor for a detailed appraisal, including checks of:

* Formatting
* Referencing
* Images (must be in the required high-quality format)
* Third party permissions

Once all these checks have been completed, the Assistant Editor will pass your manuscript to the publisher’s production department.

This section of the process, from submitting your first manuscript draft, through review to resubmission if needed, usually takes between 3 – 5 months.

# Phase 3: Production

## Production

The production process for an academic monograph usually takes around 9.5 months.

The production department may reject a submitted manuscript if it’s perceived as not ready or messy, and if significant formatting changes are required. However, this shouldn’t happen if the Assistant Editor has undertaken a thorough check at the [end of the submission process](#_Submission,_peer_review,).

During production, your manuscript will go through the publisher’s populating and typesetting processes, which are managed by the Production Editor. The Commissioning Editor you’ve been working with is likely to still be “in charge” of your book, and the Production Editor may liaise with the Commissioning Editor if any issues arise during the production process, such as proposed changes to the length or format of the work.

At the end of the production process, your book will be sent to the printer.

## Publication

Once your book has been printed to the print run agreed with the publisher, it will be published! This will be probably feel like a great achievement and cause for celebration! Be sure to [record your new publication on your research profile](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/pure/researchers/help/publication/).

## Promotion

The publisher’s Marketing department will be aware that your book is in the publication pipeline, but will only become active on your output once publication occurs. At this point, the Marketing team will work with you as the author to promote the monograph, including sending copies of your book to journals for review.

Misunderstandings and misconceptions sometimes occur between the author and the publisher when it comes to promotion of a newly published monograph, so it’s important to ask the publisher about what’s feasible, and be realistic about promotional efforts. For example, authors may expect the publisher to arrange a book launch event, but this may not be considered appropriate for an academic monograph.

It is important to take an active role in promoting your monograph. The publisher’s Marketing team will encourage and support you in self-directed promotion of your work, including via social media. The Library can offer tailored guidance on reaching academic and non-academic audiences with your important work, so make sure you take advantage of all support available.

* See [You’re published! What next?](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/next-steps/)