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Elevate Your Research. Publish with Confidence.

THE AUTHOR'S HANDBOOK TO ACADEMIC PUBLISHING



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PUBLISHING WALES AND THE WORLD SINCE 1922



PENN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS



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ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

The journey to publishing a research book can be rewarding and enable you to share your unique findings and insights with a broad intellectual audience. However, the process to publication tends to be long, winding, and full of unforeseen challenges.

In order to bring some clarity and direction to this process, we asked acquisition editors from leading academic commercial and university publishers to offer their insights and personal recommendations on the main issues that impact the submission and publication process. We compiled their responses into the handbook, which will address:

- Identifying a target publisher for your manuscript
- Tips to compile a winning book proposal
- Understanding Open-Access publishing

This handbook seeks to support authors who want to publish their impactful and innovative research and offer a bridge to acquisitions editors who are eager to work with you.

Wishing you much success in your publication journey.

Avi Staiman, Founder and CEO at Academic Language Experts



A THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

This compilation would not have been possible without the enthusiastic interest we received from contributing editors and the time they invested in crafting thoughtful responses. We are grateful for your dedication and commitment to creating more transparent and accessible opportunities to book publication.

Elana Lubka, Marketing Manager at Academic Language Experts



Section I:

How to find a respected publisher for your manuscript



The first step to publication is identifying your target publisher or press in order to increase your chances of success. Frequently, authors wonder how to best go about researching their target publishers and appropriately promote themselves to acquisition editors. Hear what the experts have to say on these topics. This section features insight from:

- Dr. Kate Hammond, Brill
- Dr. Myrto Aspioti, De Gruyter
- Prof. Helen Fulton, University of Bristol
- Dr. Jermev N. A. Matthews, MIT Press



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Look at the Leading Research in Your Field

When choosing your target publisher, **make sure you do plenty of research** into all the options. Think about the books and book series that are important in your field of study and that you frequently reference. Who is publishing them? The content that you are using in your own research will be a good indicator of where your research should be published.

Many academic presses work with book series. These may look at a specific discipline or theme, a specific area, a specific time period, or some combination of all of these. **Look at the leading book series in your field**, look at the volumes already published in the series, and look at who is on the editorial board: would your research be a good fit? Acquisitions editors are happy to advise on this but if you already have a good idea, that will help you better target your approach.

Speak to friends, colleagues, and academic acquaintances to get their feedback and advice. Where have they had positive experiences? What have they found valuable when working with certain publishers? What would they do differently? What questions do they recommend you ask when approaching the publisher?

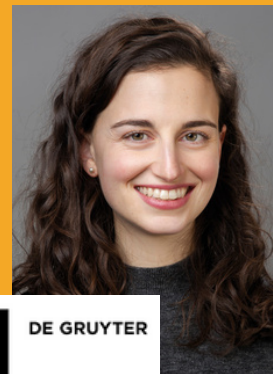


Having said that, **think about factors that are important for you in your publishing venture, and what type of publisher would best fit your research.** For instance, does the publisher have an international reach and reputation? Maybe this will be important to you, or maybe not – for instance, if your research is primarily of local interest, then you may be better off choosing a local publisher.

Does the publisher produce the type of book you are working on? For example, if you are preparing a text edition or a festschrift, be aware that not all publishers will accept these. If your research requires a lot of illustrative material, check if the publisher produces books with color images and has high standards of print production. What is the publisher's peer review policy? If Open Access is important to you, does it offer this option? Think about the promotion of your future book as well – is the publisher actively marketing its books on social media? Does the publisher attend important conferences in your fields with a book table?

Dr. Myrto Aspioti

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Critical Questions to Consider When Identifying Your Target Publisher

The first thing you need to do when looking to publish your research is, ironically, some more research! You are more likely to find the right publisher for your book if you invest some time early on to get the lay of the (publishing) land. Here are three questions to help you determine what presses to consider:

What books have been most helpful to you in your own research, and where were they published?

Identifying similar books to yours will help you get a better sense of the context you're writing in and find presses that are not only willing to consider your book but can also ensure it reaches the right kind of readership when the time comes.


Where have your peers/supervisors/conference acquaintances/colleagues published their books?

Ask your contacts about their own publishing experience. You don't need a reference from an existing author to land yourself a contract with a publisher, but a



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recommendation can help you get a faster response from an acquisitions or commissioning editor at the press of your choice.

What does a publisher's website look like?

Publishers have their 'niches'; their lists address specific communities. What will make (or break) a publishing deal is how good a fit your project is for the publisher's existing list. Browsing the websites of interesting presses should give you an overview of their strengths and of the kinds of services and products they offer, from paperback editions, eBooks, and peer review to Open Access publishing.



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Steps to Finding Your Target Publisher or Press

Firstly, have courage! Publishers need books to publish or they go out of business. So they are always looking for good-quality manuscripts that fit with the type of book they publish.

To start with, do your homework. You need to identify two or three publishers whom you judge would be interested in your book. Look at their web pages. Many publishers include 'information for authors' on their websites, which will tell you how to write a proposal and how to contact them. Networking at conferences is also useful – many publishers attend large conferences and are keen to speak to researchers about their work so do approach them on the book stands.


Think about specific book series published by academic publishers. It is often easier to place a book within a series rather than have it published as a stand-alone monograph. Each series will have a web page where the scope of the series is described and the general editor(s) and editorial board are listed.

It is absolutely fine to 'cold call' editors to tell them about your book, even before preparing a proposal. The best approach is



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via email, either to the general editor of a book series, or to the commissioning editor of a press.

If it is a large press, you will need to find the editor in charge of your particular discipline. If there is only a general inquiries email, send your message to that address and it will be forwarded to the right person.

In your message, use a clear subject line such as ‘Author inquiry’. Say a little about yourself and then describe your book very briefly, in a couple of sentences.

End by asking if they would be interested in seeing a formal proposal (which is the next stage). If the answer is a polite ‘no’, move on to another publisher. Academic etiquette demands that you deal only with one publisher at a time.

Finally, do not be intimidated, and keep trying. Publishers want to see new work. As the editor of two book series, I am delighted when researchers contact me to tell me about their work. It makes my job much easier!

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The MIT Press

Leveraging Online Content to Attract Acquisitions Editors

If you want to attract an acquisitions editor, consider “showing your work” by creating or sharing free content online. By utilizing digital platforms such as blogs, podcasts, email newsletters, social networks, and live audio rooms to create, share, or otherwise publicize your work, you can build an audience of potential readers and even attract the attention of potential editors.

First, you need to be creating content consistently and with the intent to provide value to your intended audience (as opposed to shameless self-promotion). Next, choose content formats that you’re comfortable with; the options range from long-form content (blog posts, email newsletters, podcasts, YouTube videos), to short-form content (text, images, or video on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, or LinkedIn), to live audio rooms (Clubhouse, Twitter Spaces, LinkedIn Audio Events).



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Long-form content allows you to demonstrate your ability to think critically and to write or present accessibly and concisely about your work. Short-form content is more shareable, and can either be repurposed portions of your long-form content or timely contributions (in the form of comments or reshares) to provocative online conversations. Audio chat rooms often resemble pop-up professional conference sessions: You can either organize your own or contribute to one as an expert on a relevant topic.

Although many acquisitions editors are unlikely to participate in or consume all of this content, **we will notice, and we'll be impressed by your ability - and willingness - to communicate to a nonexpert audience.** Either way, you'll be honing skills that will come in handy when you're preparing your manuscript and, ultimately, promoting your book.



Section II:

How to compile a winning book proposal



A strong and compelling book proposal is a key first step to seeing your research get published. Hear from the experts on:

- Key characteristics of a winning proposal
- Which sections of the book proposal you should invest extra time in and
- The appropriate timing to submit your book proposal

This section features insight from:

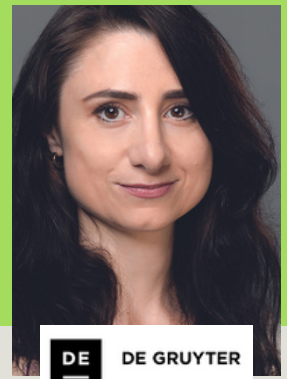
- Rabea Rittgerodt, De Gruyter
- Nicolette van der Hoek, Brill
- Katie Chin, Brill



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Writing a Winning Book Proposal

Every author wanting to publish a book must first think about, write, and send a book proposal to the press they want to work with. It is the first point of contact between author and press, so it is important to make sure it sends the right message. And the right message is the one that makes the editor at the press reach out to you wanting to read/know more!


In general, an author must know that the first person reading that proposal is very likely not an expert in their field, so clarity regarding the subject matter of the book, the new angle, and your motivation behind its creation is crucial! Show the press that your decision to submit to them specifically is well-founded and that your proposal aligns with their interests. Do not just send in a generic proposal and use the proposal form from the publisher on their website.

Start the proposal with a pitch, so go immediately into the USPs of your book – what is it about and what makes it unique? What sets it apart from other studies that have been done in the field? In short, concise, thought-provoking sentences, let the publisher know why it was important to write this book the way you did.



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Provide the press with a chapter outline, as detailed as possible. Provide short summaries of each chapter. If there are sample chapters you can send, do so. Information about length and number of images is important for calculations. Do not forget to also include personal information about yourself.

Competing titles are books your title can be compared to. Books similar in scope, with a similar audience to what you envision for yours. Name books that are where you want to see yours and are read by the people you think would be interested in reading yours, too.

If possible, do not send out proposals to more than one press at a time, and if you do – be transparent about it.





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Think About the Authors & Reviewers

When writing your proposal, think about who will be reading it. In the first place, it will be the acquisitions editor at the publisher you approach, who may or may not be a subject specialist. You will therefore want to include some general information on the field, explaining how your research fits into the bigger picture and what it contributes.

Think about the questions that the acquisitions editor will ask him or herself. Is this book a good fit for our publishing program? Will it complement our existing publications? Are the format and practical requirements of the book (such as length, illustrations, any unusual scripts, and timeframe) compatible with our policies?

Your proposal should also appeal to the subject experts the publisher will send it out to. These may be editorial board members of a particular book series, or if the publisher does not work with the book series, it may be the publisher's own board of reviewers, or external reviewers specifically chosen to assess your proposal.



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To this end, you will need to include a detailed discussion of the academic aims, arguments, and value of your book. How does it interact with recent scholarship? How are the arguments developed through the book, and what does each chapter contribute? What does it uniquely add to the field?

You should aim to sell your book, but it's also important to be realistic. In the long-run, this will help you find the right fit for your work sooner. If your book is going to be very long, then say so. If it's on a very focused and scholarly topic, then do not expect that it will appeal to the general public. Academic presses are used to working with these sorts of issues; do not fear that being up front about potentially tricky requirements or niche scholarship will harm your chances of acceptance. If the press sees the value and fit offered by your book, they will be able to make it work.

You can submit a proposal at any stage in the process. Many authors choose to send in a proposal when the research and writing process is well underway, but it's also common for authors to send informal enquiries at the starting point of a new project, or even when they already have a complete manuscript. The publisher's website should offer useful resources, such as proposal guidelines, and a listing of acquisitions editors and their subject areas. If you are not sure who to approach, send your proposal to multiple editors at the same publishing house and they will discuss it between them, or speak with a publishing representative at a conference.



Katie Chin
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Language Editing and Translation in the Publishing Process

Publishing your research with a renowned publisher can be a complex – and perhaps daunting – undertaking, regardless of whether you are a first-time or experienced author. Often authors are uncertain about the most relevant publishers in their field, when they should reach out to publishers, or how to make initial contact. **Focusing on your target audience can help you identify the best publisher and directly influence the manuscript’s style, tone, and scope.** You can reach out to a potential publisher anytime in between the research proposal stage and manuscript completion, which will largely determine the next steps.

When you prepare your book proposal, make sure it contains a prospectus, a planned table of contents, your intended audience, and a schedule of when the project will be ready. An abstract is generally three to four sentences about your topic, while a synopsis provides more detail about your project and its original contribution to your field. Brevity is key in both.



When you present your proposal, article, or manuscript to a publisher for peer review, language editing is not required prior to submission. **However, your language and presentation should be polished enough for a reviewer to follow the content without grammatical or structural issues detracting from your argument.** Once your paper has been accepted for publication in the peer review process and all revisions have been made, copy editing is necessary. This is where professional support can significantly elevate the presentation of your work.

If you're a prospective ESL author, you might be wondering about publishing in a different language. Submitting in English will likely help us to send the project to the largest pool of potential reviewers and speed up the process. That being said, Brill has peer reviewers for languages such as French, Hebrew, and German in fields like Ancient Near East or Jewish Studies, where knowledge of these languages is expected.

If you want to publish a translation of a book previously published in another language, you could either approach a publisher to consider translating it or translate it first and then present the English version to the publisher. Translations tend to be costly and publishing individual volumes and monographs can be challenging since some publishers only focus translation budgets on larger reference works. In such cases, the English translation of the manuscript would still be reviewed upon completion to ensure that the translation is accurate.



Section III:

Making sense of Open Access (OA) publishing



Open Access (OA) publishing is celebrated for its contribution to distributing and making more accessible global innovative research. Hear from acquisition editors on how OA is transforming the publishing landscape and important tips you should keep in mind when considering OA funding opportunities and navigating copyright terms. This section features insight from:

- Patrick Alexander, Director, Penn State University Press
- Dr. Sarah Johnson, The White Horse Press



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Understanding Open Access From the Director of a Leading University Press

For OA books, we seek support from colleges or departments within our parent institution, or if a scholar's institution wishes to support OA, we do our best to comply. OA monograph programs like T.O.M.E. (Toward and Open Monograph Ecosystem) moved the needle only slightly. A few publishers are experimenting with new models for funding OA books. MIT Press's D2O, for example, opens books with "generous support from the library community." JSTOR is pushing its OA program, "Path to Open," and that seems to be gaining some traction. Ultimately, though, to move books to OA, small, not-for-profit presses, like university presses, need more funding from the U.S. government or from foundations. As nearly as I can tell, with the latest U.S.'s Office of Science and Technology Policy (the so-called Nelson Memo), HSS researchers, societies, universities, and institutions should seek funding from the most obvious source: Congress.

What are the effects of OA on individual copyright rights?

OA allows the creator to retain copyright while licensing content under a Creative Commons License. This gives the creator more





control on the one hand, but, on the other, the responsibility to record copyright – and thus secure protection – remains also with the creator. We see Faculty Senates embracing OA policies, and yet it is not clear – to me at least – how can an OA mandate compel an individual to give all rights under copyright to an institution? (See the language in Harvard’s model: “Each Faculty member grants to [university name] permission to make available his or her scholarly articles and to exercise the copyright in those articles. More specifically, each Faculty member grants to [university name] a nonexclusive, irrevocable, worldwide license to exercise any and all rights under copyright relating to each of his or her scholarly articles.”

How can OA pose a solution in specific areas such as archaeology more than other fields?

Archaeological reports are chock-full of visual data, such as drawings, transcriptions, photographs, and other renderings of material discoveries, whether bone, glass, pottery, metal, and so on. The book form is not an ideal medium for making that visual material culture available to other researchers. An OA database, with rich metadata, would allow for stronger taxonomies, more comparative analysis, and would expand the value of the recovered material cultures exponentially. The “book” piece would still exist, albeit in a briefer and less expensive form, with narrative, interpretation, and documentation, but the book would be more of a companion to the material discoveries, which, thanks to technology, are seemingly increasing every day.

Do you think OA should be the standard or an ‘add-on’ for specific titles?

Philosophically, OA sounds like it should be a standard. Financially, however, OA faces practical challenges. Costs remain a reality, not just in the creation of content but in maintaining it as well. Who pays for making work available? And while OA offers “access” to research, does OA unfairly favor those who have access to funding to support their work, by that I mean especially Western European and North American researchers?





Dr. Sarah Johnson, Partner, at White Horse Press
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Making the Most of Open Access Publishing

As expressed by Creative Commons, an Open Access (OA) publication is 'digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions'. However, this does not mean that there are no considerations about copyright and licensing!

In conventional publications, copyright is often claimed by the publisher; in OA best-practice, copyright is usually retained by the author and the publisher disseminates the material under an OA licence. OA means free for everyone to read so can be an attractive mode of publication – leading to greater exposure and citation of a work.

Be aware though that, in most cases, any other party can republish the content and may also be free to alter or manipulate it, or use it for commercial purposes. The commonest OA licence is CC BY 4.0, which allows unlimited reuse of content, provided the author is attributed and any modifications are signalled. There are cases where a more restrictive licence might be preferred by publisher, author, or both – for example, the author might be concerned about misrepresentation or faulty translation so might ask for an 'ND' (No Derivatives) licence, meaning that



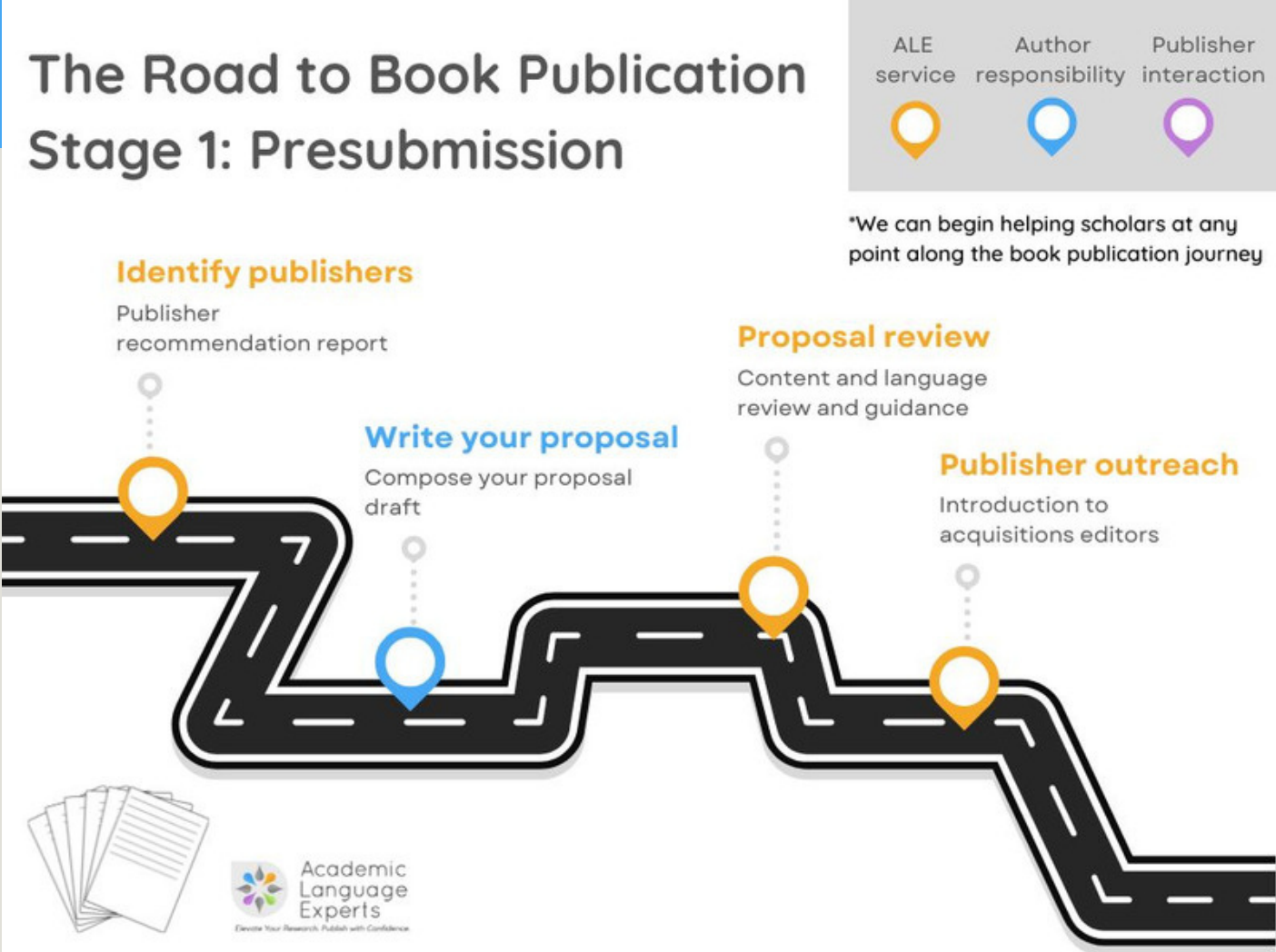
the content cannot be altered; or the publisher might want to retain control over for-profit adaptations, such as audiobooks or translations, so they could ask for an NC-ND licence (Non-commercial, No Derivatives). Discuss with your publisher which licence is right for your work.

It is worth remembering that you may not be able to make all parts of a manuscript OA. Authors must check that any figures and images are available for OA publication (if they were not created by the author, used under a CC-BY licence or otherwise understood to be in the public domain). The plan to publish OA should be made clear when asking third parties for permission to use an image. By negotiation with your publisher, it might be possible to watermark images to indicate that they are excluded from the OA licence.

OA publication is an exciting opportunity for authors – just take some time to ensure you protect yourself and don't infringe anyone else's rights.

Navigating the book publishing journey: 'The Road to Book Publication'

Ready to take strategic steps and see your research get published? We invite you to review ALE's roadmap to book publication which outlines the three key stages and necessary steps involved in seeing your research become a bound and published book.



The Road to Book Publication

Stage 2: Manuscript Review



*We can begin helping scholars at any point along the book publication journey

Publisher communication

Send your proposal in for review

Publisher review

Preliminary manuscript decision is made

Manuscript work

Full manuscript draft is completed

Language services

Including: translation, editing and publication support

Manuscript submission

Manuscript is submitted to the publisher



The Road to Book Publication

Stage 3: Manuscript Submission



*We can begin helping scholars at any point along the book publication journey

Peer review

Feedback and recommendations

Author services (cont.)

Including: editing, formatting and indexing

Publication

Your manuscript is published!

Dissemination

Post-publication services, including: press releases, white papers and executive summaries



**To learn more about how ALE
can help with your book**

**<https://www.aclang.com/services/academic-book/>
info@acalang.com**

