



# **Making the Most of Your Thesis or Dissertation**

Publication Strategies for Graduate Students  
and Recent Graduates in Evaluation and the  
Social Sciences

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# Agenda

- Brief presentation
- Discussion and question session
- NOTE: For those interested in more about this topic there is a multi-paper session at this year's AEA conference including presentations by myself (converting a dissertation to a book) as well as the editors of *New Directions for Evaluation*, *American Journal of Evaluation*, and *Evaluation and Program Planning* on November 10<sup>th</sup>



# Aims and Objectives

- The purpose of this Café is to provide useful information and strategies to graduate students and recent graduates on publishing their work, including
  - How to plan in advance for converting a dissertation or thesis into a publishable journal or book manuscript
  - Getting it published
  - And most importantly, getting it and you noticed
- It is NOT a step-by-step guide...merely some practical advice to get you started



# Some Important Facts

- Nearly 90% of papers published in academic journals are never cited
- Approximately 50% are never even read by anyone other than their authors, their referees, and the journal editors
- Historically, nearly 50% of Nobel laureates prize winning works were originally rejected



# Why Publish?

- So, why is this important?
  - If you intend to pursue a career in academia, publications are one of your greatest assets...so start now!
  - If your work is important you need to communicate it...dissemination!
  - Publishing is a good mechanism for starting a career in evaluation and/or the social sciences
  - In some cases, your job depends on it
  - CREDIBILITY



# Getting Started

- First things first...
  1. A thesis and/or dissertation is a **COLLABORATIVE** effort—one between the student and her/his advisor(s)
  2. **MUST** interest you (and your advisor)...this is a long-term commitment!
  3. **SHOULD** be of interest to others...does the work:
    - Respond to or provide a potential solution to a longstanding or emerging problem or issue?
    - Contribute to or advance current knowledge, theory, or practice?



# Identifying a Topic

- Common stages
  - HAVING and THINKING about an idea
  - DISCUSSING the idea with others (preferably experts or persons knowledgeable about the subject area)
  - CHECKING the existing scientific literature to see if it makes sense (e.g., relevant?, doable?, has been done?)
  - DECIDING exactly what goals and objectives are to be achieved
  - DEFINING questions more precisely to formulate hypotheses—if appropriate



# Next Steps

- Your thesis or dissertation prospectus has been approved and you are hard at work, now what?
  - DO get to know (personally if possible) the leaders/key figures in the topic area/field of study (don't rely only on your advisor)
    - Potentially one of your greatest assets
    - Do they believe the work is important?
    - Often, they can draw more attention to your work than you alone





## Next, Next Steps

- DO begin considering where your work is most relevant (i.e., what publication outlet?)...BEFORE the thesis or dissertation is complete
- DO get to know the editors of journals or acquisitions editors of publishers you are considering (e.g., introduce yourself and your work via e-mail, in person at conferences, through work samples)...
  - They should know WHO YOU ARE and WHAT YOU ARE DOING



## Next, Next Steps

- DO review books and/or referee papers for your targeted journal (can be a good strategy to “get you in”)
- DON'T wait to begin preparing your manuscript...start DURING the writing of your thesis or dissertation!
- DON'T underestimate your committee...they are (or should be) known by others in the field



# Journal Publication

- Typical elements of submission
  - Cover letter
    - Take this seriously as it can have an immediate influence on a journal editor's reaction to your manuscript
  - The manuscript
    - Check, double-check, triple-check, and if possible have someone else check (e.g., errors, grammar & syntax, voice, tone, style)
    - Follow the journal's guidelines carefully (e.g., formatting, reference & citation style, blinding, paper or electronic submission)



# Journal Publication

- Interim correspondence
  - Don't pressure editors if the review process seems overly long (for some journals can be up to 6 months or longer)
- Decision
  - Usually a letter from the editor summarizing reviewers' decisions/comments + reviewers' evaluations
    - Accept (ideal scenario)
    - Revise and resubmit (most frequent decision)
    - Reject (don't panic)



# Journal Publication

- Reorganizing after “rejection”
  - Study editor and reviewers’ evaluation carefully
  - Learn from it and use it (often reviewers comments can help improve the quality of your manuscript)
  - Start over?
  - Did you target the right journal?
  - Remember, peer review is the “quality control system” of science (the tyranny of small numbers [e.g., typically 2 – 3 reviewers]...were their judgments accurate?)...AND reviewers are selected by editors (i.e., non-random)



# Book Publication

- Unless a publisher directly solicits you to write a book manuscript this can require dramatically reorganizing (or completely rewriting) a thesis or dissertation
  - Usually, a thesis or dissertation is too narrow in scope to be EASILY reorganized into a book
  - A single study is not adequate for a book in MOST publisher's minds
  - Publishers are in the business to make MONEY...if they don't know you or your work it is likely that they will not even look at a prospectus...NETWORK!



# Book Publication

- The typical elements of a book prospectus
  - Author qualifications and authority on the subject matter
  - Substantive focus
  - Intended audiences
  - Unique characteristics
  - Comparison to existing related texts
  - Proposed outline (i.e., chapters)
  - Sample chapter