



Revisions Checklist for Doctoral Dissertations

Dissertations and theses tend to exhibit discursive habits which commonly materialize during post-graduate study. Revising dissertations and theses into manuscripts for publication almost always requires authors to make wholesale changes to correct these features. Since Baylor University Press takes a selective approach to publishing dissertations, acquiring only around five each year, our editorial team pays special attention to the quality of written prose when assessing manuscripts. We recommend that authors seeking to publish their dissertations with BUP revise their manuscripts *before* submitting written materials for our in-house evaluation and peer review processes. While the following list is by no means exhaustive, it highlights stylistic concerns we frequently encounter when assessing unrevised dissertations.

- **Passive Voice:** Since we mainly use active voice when we speak, the proliferation of passive voice in published works renders them difficult to read. While passive voice is appropriate in academic prose, we recommend that authors use it sparingly.
- **Discursive and Cross-Reference Footnotes:** Long footnotes are commonplace in academic prose, of course. But dissertations, due to their use in examination, tend to exhibit numerous discursive notes (i.e., notes providing information that is auxiliary to the main text) and cross-reference notes (i.e., notes directing the reader to other sources not directly cited or referenced in the main text). We recommend that authors eliminate such annotations whenever possible during the revisions phase.
- **Dissertation Formalities:** Dissertations prepared for defense always include conventions which become unnecessary when revised for publication. These include the title page, declaration, and abstract. Additionally, in most cases it is necessary for the author to rewrite the entire introduction for a wider readership, eliminating extensive commentary on methodology and sources. Finally, the author should change self-references from “this dissertation” and “this thesis” to “this book,” “this work,” etc.
- **Signposting:** Almost all dissertations prepared for defense exhibit a proliferation of signposting prose. Introductions typically contain a “roadmap” of the work, providing examiners with a brief summary of the dissertation’s structure. Also, chapters often begin and conclude with passages “telling them what you plan to tell them” and “telling them what you told them,” respectively. We recommend eliminating such signposting altogether, or at least minimizing its presence. As a rule of thumb, we encourage authors to use illustrations at the beginnings of chapters to introduce topics under discussion. Where signposting (or road-mapping) is essential, remember that, in the published book, you are inviting the reader to discover the salient points of your argument, rather than performing the argument for them (as in a dissertation prepared for defense). Simple future, first-person verbs (“In this chapter, *I will...*”) suggest performance. Try instead to use verbal phrases that include the reader in the discussion at hand: “In what follows, *we encounter...*” etc.
- **Exposition vs. Illustration:** Dissertations tend to be heavily expository and didactic in tone. While that is to be expected, the predominance of exposition in a published book can exasperate the reader. We recommend that authors use illustrative prose (e.g., specific illustrations illuminating the main point of the argument at hand) throughout the manuscript.

Also, many dissertations include chapters or units devoted to reviewing pertinent literature. We encourage authors to cut literature reviews from the manuscript during revision.

Publishing a doctoral dissertation as a book signifies a shift in readership from supervisors and examiners to a wider academic audience. It is with this transition in readership in mind that we recommend the revisions described above. Ultimately, the author must use their own discretion to determine how much revising needs to be undertaken before submission.

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