Notes on How to Rework a Ph.D. Dissertation for Publication as a Book

1) Search publishers and select which would be appropriate with regard to the theme/topic of the dissertation
2) The average length of time of the publication of a book in the U.S. from submission to book in hand is 1.5-2 years
3) Prospectuses can be sent to several publishers: in your cover letter state that you are sending the prospectus to several publishers, but that you do/did not submit the full manuscript to any one of them until invited and in which case only one publisher receives the full manuscript
4) Address in cover letter to publisher by name of editor, acquisition editor, series editor, etc., or whomever you submit the manuscript to
5) Some publishers work with full manuscripts only: in such a case state in cover letter submission is only to them
6) Do not — ever — submit a full manuscript to more than one publisher at the same time
7) Submit to university presses: start with a "star" publisher and work your way down
8) Take into account that some publishers require subvention: explore subsidy from your institution and/or government funding agencies
9) Have a title for the manuscript according to publisher's practice: check titles of books on publisher's list
10) Adjust content, for example: get rid of excessive surveys of secondary literature and gratuitous quoting; wordy and circuitous openings, recapitulations of what has been already covered; disclaimers as to what has not been covered; stress clarity, concreteness, pace, and include a solid conclusion; do not mention in the manuscript that it is from a dissertation; avoid jargon unless you define your terms/notions in the text
11) Format the manuscript according to the style guide of the publisher: while this is time consuming, most publishers appreciate such detail and hence would likely be "friendly": you should also state in your cover letter that the manuscript is already in the style of the publisher
12) If the manuscript is accepted, prior to signing the contract negotiate that articles (revised) can be published from the manuscript without payment to publisher with regard to copyright
13) If you publish excerpt(s) from a dissertation prior to or after the submission of the manuscript, notify publisher; if after submission, ask for permission
14) Compile up to five names with addresses incl. email and phone number of scholars who would be able to evaluate your manuscript: some publishers — if/when decide that the manuscript would be of interest in principle — ask for a list of potential reviewers
15) Note that in the humanities a book sells in the U.S. at best an average of 200-250 copies

Sources to consult


