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# Political Science Publications: Charting Your Own Path

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## Introduction

The political science discipline includes a broad diversity of publication types that scholars may contribute to as a part of their professional career. Each type has unique benefits and challenges for the scholar and most scholars will likely publish in more than one type of outlet at some point. Understanding the array of options can allow academics to craft a research agenda that is more personally fulfilling while still achieving their career goals. You may find certain types of scholarship more personally fulfilling than others and can carve out a larger share of your research portfolio for that type of work. You may also find that your personality and research skills are more relevant to one type than another. This chapter will briefly describe each while reflecting on some of the advantages and disadvantages they offer.

When considering publication types, it is important to have explicit conversations with your department about the specific expectations for publications within your research portfolio. When possible, look for opportunities to expand the work you are doing to multiple publication types. If there are findings within that program evaluation you conducted for a local non-profit that are potentially interesting for a broader academic audience, consider translating the work into a peer-reviewed publication. If there are specific findings from your published academic work that would be useful to practitioners, consider publishing a report or book that highlights the most important findings for those in practice. If your recent academic research touches on a currently relevant political debate, consider translating your findings to a popular press text or blog post. Within the parameters of your institution's expectations, experiment with multiple publication types to find what works best for you and your goals as a scholar.

## Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Considered the cornerstone of research for most political scientists, *peer-reviewed journal articles* are the predominant publication type within the discipline. Peer-reviewed journal articles can be categorized as *field-focused* or *on the scholarship of teaching and learning* (SOTL).

Most graduate programs focus extensively on preparing students to author peer-reviewed single study papers that focus on the questions most pressing or relevant within their chosen subfields. Seminar paper assignments often mirror the expectations of these papers, which typically require an original contribution to a field of study. The contribution could be qualitative or quantitative, theoretical, descriptive, or empirical, single authored or co-authored, but will be written with an academic audience in mind and designed primarily to advance the current state of knowledge on a particular research question. Historically, most of this research has utilized a single study approach, but, increasingly, standalone

literature reviews and meta-analyses are published as well.

Literature reviews provide an overview of the state of the discipline or research on a specific question. They often trace the development of the field or history of research on a specific question including theoretical approaches, methods, and substantive findings. Paternotte (2018) provides a good example of this approach. These literature reviews are sometimes accompanied by bibliometric analyses which evaluate the influence of specific studies within the discipline. Similarly, meta-analyses attempt to synthesize the findings on a specific question by statistically analyzing the results of multiple empirical studies to identify patterns, reveal biases, and estimate effects. Watkins and Gerrish (2018) provides a good example.

Finally, peer-reviewed journal publications also include SOTL research. Recognizing the importance of teaching within the discipline, SOTL authors apply the methodological tools they use to answer questions within their fields to evaluate the effectiveness of their pedagogy. This research may evaluate the impact of a single exercise, an entire course, or outcomes across a curriculum. The *Journal of Political Science Education*, APSA's primary publication for SOTL research, includes many excellent examples (see chapter 30 in this volume for more on APSA's Education Section). Graduate students are often well-placed to conduct meaningful SOTL research as they are still experimenting with their approach to their classes. Students interested in eventually working at institutions which are primarily teaching focused can utilize their SOTL publications to demonstrate both their research skills and their interest in evidenced based pedagogies.

While peer-reviewed journal articles are undoubtedly the primary currency for promotion within the discipline, increasing competition within publication outlets means authors can struggle to place good research in a timely manner. Articles are also most likely to be read by other academics, rather than policy makers or agency leaders. Thus, if it is important to you for your work to have public or policy impact, you may need additional outlets.

## Chapters in Edited Volumes

Chapters in edited volumes often mirror journal articles in topic, approach, and method, though there is substantial variation in length and expectations. Many edited volumes also include a peer-review process. Some edited volumes are designed explicitly to be used as a resource for a course, such as Michael Nelson's *The Presidency and the Political System* (2021). Others are designed to capture a broad conversation about a particular area of research such as Daniel Cole and Elinor Ostrom's *Property in Land and Other Resources* (2012). Typically, edited volumes are populated through a solicitation process where the editor distributes a call for contributions from authors. This process provides an author a high level of confidence the work will be published if it is completed and also some assurance that it will be accompanied by other research that fits into a coherent structure on the topic. A benefit of this type of publication is potentially increased visibility of the piece to readers interested in the topic. However, many institutions do not place the same value on book chapters as they do journal articles, so it is important to know ahead of time how your work will be counted toward hiring, tenure, promotion, etc.

## Applied Research and Technical Reports

While they often answer similar questions and use similar methodological approaches as journal articles, technical reports differ in many important respects. First, most applied research is designed to answer a question posed by an external stakeholder. This could be a state agency evaluating the effectiveness of a policy change, a non-profit agency evaluating programs, or a local government that needs to access public perspectives on performance. Public and non-profit agencies regularly issue grants and contracts to answer important questions about their agencies. Some of this work is done by for-profit research entities, but political scientists are also important contributors. This means the author may have less control over the exact question that is being addressed. Second, most technical reports do not undergo peer-review. While they are often published and can be replicated by other scholars, there is no independent review process of the scholarship before it is finalized. Finally, in most cases this research

comes with funding to buy out course loads (i.e., reduce your required teaching), provide summer funding for researchers, or provide support for undergraduate and graduate research assistants. Applied research can be personally rewarding, as it is likely to be read by the decision makers that sponsored it and can lead to real-world policy or program changes. However, depending on the institution, it may not be given full or even any weight as research toward tenure and promotion and can instead be considered a part of public service.

## Books

Political science books fall into four broad categories: original research, textbooks, practitioner-focused, and popular press. While full-length manuscripts are less likely to be required in political science than they are in other academic disciplines, they are still a common form of scholarship, especially in particular subfields. As with other publication types, it is important to know the expectations at your own institution.

Original research manuscripts are typically a close cousin to the PhD Dissertation. They include an introduction, an explanation of methodology, and the development or testing of hypotheses. There are multiple guides available online for recent PhDs on turning their dissertations into a research manuscript including some brief advice from Karen Kelsky on *The Professor Is In* blog (<https://theprofessorisin.com/2016/02/26/how-to-turn-your-dissertation-into-a-book-a-special-request-post/>), a guide from the publisher Palgrave McMillan (<https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book-authors/your-career/early-career-researcher-hub/revising-the-dissertation>), and the more detailed guide by William Germano, *From Dissertation to Book* (2013). Full length research manuscripts provide scholars the opportunity to explain their research contributions in greater depth and with a more comprehensive approach than the typical journal article will allow. The book *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (2009) provides an excellent example of this type of text.

Textbooks are also a common publication form for faculty. Textbooks are written primarily for students and are often motivated by an instructor's frustration with the lack of a suitable text or the sense that they could explain the material in a way that would better resonate with students. Textbooks also offer scholars a way of translating the substantial time they have put into developing their teaching materials into a publication. This may be particularly important for scholars at teaching-heavy institutions that still require some research productivity. Whether textbooks are considered teaching or research varies from institution to institution though, so scholars will want to know how this will fit into their evaluation before spending substantial time on writing one. Writing a textbook may also improve the author's teaching, as it requires the author to prioritize the most important information on the topic and explain it in a way that will resonate with a broad audience. If widely adopted, textbooks may provide authors with a steady stream of revenue in the form of royalties and can be an especially creative outlook for faculty. Daniel Drezner's *Theories of International Relations and Zombies* (2014) provides an example of this.

Practitioner-focused books resemble textbooks in many ways but are designed more for the active practitioner in the field rather than a student in a course. These may be especially relevant for those scholars in public policy and public administration. These texts summarize the academic field of knowledge and apply it to relevant examples that are relatable to those serving in the public and non-profit sectors that may not have an academic background in political science. Dave Ammons and Dale Roenigk's *Tools for Decision Making: A Practical Guide for Local Government* or my own *Planning and Evaluation for Public Safety Leaders: A Toolkit* provide good examples of this type of resource. Practitioner-focused books may also be used as textbooks for more applied degree programs within the discipline. These texts can be especially rewarding to scholars that want to see their research utilized to improve decision making and policy outcomes on the ground, but they may not be given the same weight as original research manuscripts in hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions.

Finally, popular press books (e.g., Penguin Press), written for a broad public audience, have been a way for political scientists to communicate their findings since almost the inception of the discipline. Political Scientists often want their research to go beyond the ivory towers of the academy and shape the

way potential voters and decision makers understand the field. Daniel Levitsky and Steven Ziblatt's book *How Democracy Dies* (2018) provides a good example from the comparative politics subfield. However, the field still wrestles with how to appropriately weigh popular press books. They are typically not peer-reviewed or held to the same research standards as other types of publications. In order to be accessible to as broad an audience as possible, scholars often substantially reduce the nuance and complexity they provide in the text. And yet, these books serve an important purpose in elevating the visibility of our discipline to the public and ensuring our research remains relevant to decision makers. They apply the field's rich theoretical findings to current political debates. If popular, these books can generate substantially more royalty income than more purely academic publications, though increasingly scholars need to be social media savvy or already have a well-established reputation in order to be picked up by a press. Successful publication relies on a skillset that is not typically taught in political science PhD programs. As with other types of publications, it is important that scholars discuss how these publications will be factored into their evaluation before investing substantial time in their development.

## Other Publications

Beyond the categories discussed above, there are many other types of publications that still frequently occur within the discipline but do not fit well into a particular category. Book reviews are short summaries of full-length manuscripts or textbooks that are helpful for other scholars in deciding which of the many books published each year are worth prioritizing. Many political science journals provide space for reflection pieces that offer thoughts on where the field ought to be headed or what scholars have learned through their teaching or research. While not empirical in nature, these reflections may inspire other scholars to empirically test or systematically evaluate the ideas presented and are an important part of the scholarly conversation. Blogs and even tweet threads have become a popular way for political scientists to communicate their expertise to the public without developing a full manuscript. The widely known Monkey Cage and 538 are both blogs started by political scientists that have gained national media attention to the methods and findings of the discipline. While few scholars will be able to populate their entire research agenda with these publications, they are a creative and productive supplement to more traditional types of research and can increase the impact of your work.

## Concluding Thoughts

Some publication types are more common in specific subfields. For example, books are more common within comparative politics, and technical papers are more common for those within public policy and public administration. Institutions also value different types of publications in widely varying ways. At some institutions, SOTL studies and technical papers are given equal weight to peer-reviewed articles, at others, they are given only partial weight or counted as a part of teaching/service rather than research. As you begin to understand your skillset as a scholar, it is also worth evaluating how you might incorporate that into successful co-authored publications. If you are particularly adept at statistical analysis and writing up empirical results but find it more difficult to craft successful literature reviews, find reliable co-authors with opposite strengths and nurture those collaborations into a productive research agenda.

In short, do not fall into the trap of assuming there is only one type of research in the discipline or one role you can play as a scholar. Explore the multiple publication types and investigate how institutions value each type. This may even be one important factor you consider in deciding the type of institution you want to work for. Once you find the best fit for you and your institution, you may find your time spent on research more fulfilling than you thought possible.

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