

*Edited books may not pick up citations in Google Scholar but **Pat Thomson***

(http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Pat_Thomson) writes that they do different work than journal articles or blogs and are often the first point of call for teachers, students and practitioners. It would be silly to think that writing a book chapter is a waste of time, but they must also be handled with caution.



Just this week Dorothy Bishop (@deevybee) published a blog post (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/08/29/how-to-bury-your-academic-writing/>) which suggested that writing book chapters was a recipe for 'burying your work'. Through an examination of her own work on Google Scholar, she had ascertained that it was her refereed journal papers that were most cited. This was not because her chapters were not as rigorous or scholarly, she suggested, but rather it was/is a problem of access. Getting at a chapter is just much more difficult than getting to journal articles, particularly as these appear more and more in various open access repositories. Dorothy is a professor of developmental neuropsychology and was clear that this was a problem in her field. She did speculate that it might be a problem that also applied to other disciplines.

The discipline specificity of the what-to-publish-problem is why it is so difficult to offer generic advice. So I want to preface my two pennies worth on the question by acknowledging that what I say here applies to my own field of education and some other social sciences and humanities disciplines.

I'm happy to write book chapters. I will, of course, only write chapters for books where there is a decent publisher and someone I know to be a credible editor. And sometimes I just don't have time or the interest in the project. But I don't have a rule which says no book chapters.

In my field, edited books do different work than refereed journal articles, books and less formal writing, like blogs and reviews. These various forms of writing don't necessarily substitute for each other.

In my field, edited books are often used by undergraduate and postgraduate students to get a feel for a topic and something of its scope and debates. Handbooks in particular lay out a field and its various permutations. As a supervisor, if I want to help someone get on top of a topic like identity or visual culture or policy sociology, I may well point them to a handbook to start with.

Other edited books gather together perspectives on something which perhaps has hitherto been scattered. They provide focus on a topic or approach. They lay down a marker in an area. Again, these kinds of texts are often used by students, but in my field, these kinds of texts also get used by practitioners.

Chapters from edited books also often get used for teaching purposes as, of course, do journal articles. But unless the writer belongs to the Society of Authors (<http://www.societyofauthors.org/>), or something similar – a body which can collect copyright payments on behalf of authors – they won't necessarily know this to be the case. Use of chapters for teaching purposes doesn't always (or perhaps even often) result in citations in Google Scholar and other citation indices, even though the material may well be used extensively in essays and dissertations.

Finally, in my field, edited books often end up in libraries in countries which cannot afford a lot of English language journals. A handbook or a seminal edited text is cheaper than a set of ongoing journal subscriptions. It provides a base level resource which can then support internet searches for open access sources, working outwards from the chapter authors and their own citations.

So having said all of this, would I advise an early career or doctoral scholar in my field to write book chapters? Well, probably not as the main genre that they try to publish. One or two book chapters, maybe, if the book looks like it will have a readership. It's not a case of do-as-I-do. The sad fact is that for employment, promotion and those elusive bids, books and refereed journal articles count more than chapters. However, one or two chapters in a good edited collection can signify to an employment panel or bid referee that your work has been sought out by a senior scholar, that you are in a key network or two, and that you can produce something to a deadline and word length.

So in my field then, and some others like it, book chapters are not (yet) a waste of time although they are to be handled with caution. Invitations to contribute a book chapter to an edited collection must **always** be scrutinised for their potential benefits such as – use for teaching purposes, influence in a wider field of practice, co-location with key scholars in the area and potential for opening up further opportunities. If these are important to you at this time in your career, then a chapter may well be worth doing. And there's nothing really to stop chapters being put up on some kind of academic publication repository in some kind of penultimate version.

Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

This article was originally posted by Pat on her personal blog, Patter (<http://patthomson.wordpress.com/>), where commentators are continuing the discussion.

Related posts:

1. How to bury your academic writing (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/08/29/how-to-bury-your-academic-writing/>)
2. Book Review: The Publish or Perish Book (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/01/14/book-review-the-publish-or-perish-book/>)
3. Paper books in a digital era: How conservative publishers and authors almost killed off books in university social science (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/02/paper-books-in-a-digital-era/>)
4. Professional digital practice in academia: From online networking to building apps (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/24/professional-digital-practice-academia/>)
5. The road to academic success is paved with stylish academic writing (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/14/stylish-academic-writing/>)