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# Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research: A Book Review

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## Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research: A Book Review

### **Abstract**

As a new doctoral student, I reviewed Allen's (2016) book, *Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research*, to determine how the author crafted an accessible text for beginning qualitative researchers as well as more seasoned researchers. The absence of specialized jargon and appropriately inserted comic relief gives this book an inviting feel. The comprehensive coverage from dissertation to article audiences, selecting journals, through to marketing your book makes this a must-have, "publishing for dummies" guide for qualitative researchers that I would describe as the next best thing to handholding through the various phases of publishing.

### **Keywords**

Qualitative Research, Publishing, Journal Review Process, Book Proposal

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## Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research: A Book Review

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*As a new doctoral student, I reviewed Allen's (2016) book, Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research, to determine how the author crafted an accessible text for beginning qualitative researchers as well as more seasoned researchers. The absence of specialized jargon and appropriately inserted comic relief gives this book an inviting feel. The comprehensive coverage from dissertation to article audiences, selecting journals, through to marketing your book makes this a must-have, "publishing for dummies" guide for qualitative researchers that I would describe as the next best thing to handholding through the various phases of publishing. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Publishing, Journal Review Process, Book Proposal*

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*Essentials of Publishing Qualitative Research* by Mitchell Allen (2016) is one of thirteen titles in a series called Qualitative Essentials, dedicated to providing a comprehensive overview of topics in qualitative inquiry. While books with a focus on academic publishing are numerous: *The Academic's Guide to Publishing* (Kitchin & Fuller, 2005); *Author's Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (Derricourt, 1996); and *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing* (Rocco & Hatcher, 2011). Allen touts his as, "probably the first guide designed specifically for qualitative researchers" (p. 10). The thoughtful and carefully crafted explanations of how the publishing world operates, provides a guide for any scholar to follow in the steps to publication. In this review, I briefly outline Allen's motivation and purpose, followed by my point of view as a Ph.D. student new to qualitative research. I address the extent to which Allen has succeeded in making this book accessible for beginning qualitative researchers including aspects of the Allen's style that make this book a good choice for not just those who have completed the dissertation phase, but beginning researchers as well.

Allen begins the book with a brief overview of what's in the book from chapter to chapter and identifies his focus to inform qualitative researchers of his distinct social networking approach to getting published and shares that, "You can learn the specifics of how to get published if you use the research tools you already know in the service of advancing your career" (p. 10) and refers to the process of getting published as an ethnographic fieldwork experience. The organization of the book is purposeful in first exploring the history of publishing, explaining the jobs within a publishing house and their functions, then the steps to publishing by networking and being able to talk with the right people to get your work accepted. Not only does Allen write each chapter with effortlessly readable language, but his quick wit and sarcastic edge keeps you laughing when you might otherwise cry from the stress of working towards publishing.

This book is equally beneficial for graduate students in any stage of coursework, and even those looking to publish beyond the dissertation stage. This book is geared towards an audience "for whom the process of getting published is both as daunting and as challenging as the research you want to publish" (p. 9). Regardless of your current situation, if there is one lesson everyone should walk away with after reading, it is that academic publishing is socially constructed, meaning you need to conduct ethnographic fieldwork to make friends in the right community, and make nice with the editor, a concept intricately woven into the text from cover to cover.

Through the provision of a brief history of the publishing world and laying out the who's who in a publishing house, I found the first chapter immensely helpful as it leaves you with a general lay of the land and an idea of the people in positions of power in both the journal and book publishing realms, for whom you will want to cozy up with at the next conference. Many new doctoral students may believe acceptance, rejection, or revise and resubmit are par for the course based on your ability (or lack thereof) to write. Despite what you've heard from other guidebooks or conference panels, Allen opines, "it's not always about how good your research and writing are" (p. 11). Allen provides current publishing statistics, and impresses upon the reader that, "there are more articles out there to be published than there are journal issues to fill" (p. 18) and the same goes for books. Allen's nearly 40 years of experience in academic publishing is reason enough for a new doctoral student such as myself to trust he knows what he is talking about. His focus on the social networking angle requires you to go out and create a network of people in the editorial world because "you're more likely to get published if the journal editor is your friend" (p. 11).

The beauty of qualitative research is its innate capacity to attract a wide audience. Chapter two concentrates on the big picture of publishing research by using one study, namely your dissertation, to write multiple articles with "each publication addressed to a different audience in a format that that audience will best understand" (p. 28). Allen gives sage advice recommending that junior scholars "churn out a couple articles from your dissertation" (p. 33) rather than immediately attempting to rework it into a book. He believes there is greater benefit to building a larger audience, gathering insight about how the outside world views your work, adding more lines to your CV (helps with promotion and tenure) while building a case for why your dissertation is book worthy! I found it immensely helpful to know ahead of time that all those chapters my dissertation committee will require me to condense will need to be expanded again when attempting to rework into a book. (Note to self: keep all those wordy drafts somewhere safe.)

A major reason for new researchers to buy this book is the focus on finding the right journal and insider information for the write, review, revise process featured in chapters three and four. Allen recommends you write the title and abstract first, shaping it to the intended audience and letting it guide your writing with a very strategic keyword approach including the most important aspects and results of your study. Allen (2016) makes a clear connection between determining which articles are cited most in your article and of those articles, who they cite. (Basically, do your research on the community.) This is just the beginning, his book is packed with insider tips gleaned from years of experience with journals including how to avoid backlog issues, unprofessional editorial teams, and finding journals that will be receptive to your manuscript. When it comes to finding the right book publisher in chapter five, the answer is abbreviated because the process is identical to that of finding the right journal described in chapter three. True to his focus, Allen insists you dedicate major time to networking through friends, colleagues, mentors, the editorial board, others who have published before you- talk to these people, ask the right questions (all of which he outlines for you). Allen holds your hand throughout the write, review, resubmit phases and even encourages celebratory ice cream, martinis, and wine. His advice for communication with the editorial board are thoughts that may not occur to a new doctoral student with little experience, however, I'm sure the ice cream and spirits are a no-brainer.

Newer doctoral students and researchers alike will find Allen's "systematic way of finding the publisher who might be right for your book" (p. 59) particularly useful, including the table on pages 60-61 because it demonstrates the difference between the three different types of publishers who handle trade, text, and academic/professional books. Chapters five and six focus on what part of the publishing world you need to begin your ethnographic fieldwork in because the trade, text, and academic/professional publishers run in different

circles. You need to know where to build relationships and where you invest your time. The insider tips offered in these chapters are a “must read” for anyone who wants to know the pitfalls of shopping an edited volume, knowing how to carefully compare your book to the closest competing book on the market, learning to prioritize your book goals, and being more prepared and less stressed in the process. It was refreshing to see Allen’s referral to accomplished writers including Laurel Richardson, Harry Wolcott, Bud Goodall, and Howie Becker when he addressed “Writing the Damn Thing” (p. 89). He also defers to Valerie Janesick for creative ways to get and keep the readers’ attention and plugs Carolyn Ellis for those storytelling skills. Allen includes references to the aforementioned qualitative researchers’ more recent works at the end of his book. Equally as helpful are the sections geared towards the technical and legal aspects of publishing contracts, the production process, and the home stretch of marketing your work. Yes- you need to know how to market your own work. (Who knew?)

I would categorize this book as one you need to add to your collection, also one you may not even realize you need until you’ve read it. Consequently, it is the very essence of ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’. As a new doctoral student or novice researcher, the advice you receive on the topic of publishing is typically from professors, colleagues who’ve already published, and sometimes even your own previous experiences with publishing- but chances are you’ve not heard what Mitchell Allen has to say, nor have you heard it delivered with his flair for comedic writing. What I connected to most was the inviting tone and choice of words. It is easy for beginning doctoral students and/or novice researchers to be intimidated by texts densely packed with specialized terminology. Instead, Allen offers clear cut justification for his advice with a vocabulary to reach a wide audience of qualitative researchers. For more information about this book go to <https://www.routledge.com/products/9781629583594>

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