The Edited Collection

Deborah Simonton
Starting the project

Why do it?
- Coherent volumes can become important summaries of a field
- Potential longer shelf life—chapters carry others along
- Useful to Undergraduates
- Chance to focus on particular subject and develop it collaboratively
- Provide different opportunities for writing/expression; sometimes can be more creative
- PGs, PGRs, ECRs: can be valuable experience

Where do they come from?
- Outcome of a conference or workshop
- You have a bright idea, perhaps with colleagues.
- An outcome from a project, network or grant
Building the team

- Use your networks
- Take advice
- Consider a co-editor: don’t underestimate the amount of work that may be involved
- Ensure an author’s work belongs in the volume
- Aim for mix of experience and new scholars
- choose your chapters wisely: if there are any glaring gaps or biases, commission further essays
- Avoid hostages to fortune
- As a potential author—let people know you are interested, use your networks, join panels etc.
Building the concept

- It needs to answer the ‘so what?’ question
- Make sure you have a coherent theme and approach
- Define an overall purpose for the volume. The book as a whole must amount to more than the sum of its chapters
- Balance between narrow and diverse
- Be prepared to reframe the theme once you have a set of proposed chapters
- Know your audience

Deborah Simonton
Publishers look for:

- **coherence** (how well does it all fit together as a book?)

- **contribution** (what is this book going to do, as a collection, and why does that matter?)

- **coverage** (is it as broad or as focused as it needs to be to do that job well?)

- **contributors** (who’s in it?)
What are you looking for?

- Aim for chapters that:
  - are focused & complete in themselves
  - are shaped with the volume in mind
  - meet the criteria for length & formatting
  - are coherent, well-argued, good English
  - have something to say

- Stick to your theme, but be prepared to adjust if you think it appropriate
Stages

- **Identify a publisher & Prepare proposal**: see publisher guidelines (see next slide)
- **Set timescale** for authors: allow for
  - drafts;
  - reading and editing time for you;
  - Revisions
- Introduction, front and back matter, images
- **Final proofread**, check and ensure you have done everything necessary; documentation
- **Consistency is important.**
- Submit
Identify a potential publisher

- Take advice from tutors, supervisors and colleagues
- Know the key presses that are important for your subfield
- Consider a number of options
- Don’t be shy about approaching editors (especially at conferences; always willing to chat)
Working with contributors

- develop a good working relationship with the contributors
- treat their work with respect during the editing process,
- respond quickly to queries,
- keep them informed about the status of the project.
- Ask questions rather than being proscriptive
- Support them when needed
- Honour author requests where possible
Editing the chapters

- First reading stage: it may become clear that an essay has not gone in the direction originally proposed or is not fully realized.
- Authors should be given the opportunity to revise if necessary (it usually is!)
- You should also be honest about the amount of revision needed.
- Be clear from the outset that a chapter would not be formally accepted until the final draft.
- In the end you must decide if the chapters and the volume work.
- Accept that this is a task that it is like herding cats; don’t panic!

Deborah Simonton
Writing for an edited collection: what can you offer?

**BEWARE** of chapters that

- try to sum up your entire thesis
- are unrevised thesis chapters or conference papers
- do not speak to the volume brief

**DO** aim for chapters that

- are focused & complete in themselves
- are shaped with the volume in mind
- are of the right length, etc.
- Show you have thoroughly understood the book’s coverage & scope.

Deborah Simonton
Preparing a Chapter

- Write your chapter, or revise your thesis chapter or conference paper, with the volume and its theme in mind.
- READ the editors’ advice to authors.
- FOLLOW manuscript submission guidelines, especially re: word limits, British/American usages, referencing conventions and presentation of final document for double-blind reviewing.
- Revise, revise, edit, proofread ➔ SUBMIT!
- Be prepared to revise, and listen to editorial comments.

Deborah Simonton
Writing the chapter

- Create a chapter outline. Some edited collections will have a ‘template’ to work to
- Chapter titles and headings should be clear: check what flexibility you have
- Expand your story with main points.
- Develop ideas and arguments well-supported by evidence
- Provide a conclusion
- Edit and proofread your work:
  
  CONTENT,
  
  ✓ to ensure that it is introduced, paragraphed and concluded to best effect

  STYLE,
  
  ✓ to eliminate errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and
  
  ✓ to rid the text of awkward expressions, ambiguities, clichés and unnecessary words and phrases.

Deborah Simonton
Introductions & Conclusions

Introductions

PURPOSE:
- sets the stage
- clarifies the assignment
- indicates your approach
- set the theme and tone

VALUE:
- signpost to the reader
- shows your understanding
- helps structure the piece

Conclusions

- summary of main ideas
- firm or tentative answer to your hypothesis
- indicates wider implications
- does not present new information
CHECK LIST—
Make sure you have:

- Done what you proposed to do
- Remained relevant throughout
- Kept to the word limit
- Kept to a logical arrangement in presenting ideas
- Provided enough examples and illustrations
- Acknowledged sources
- Presented a convincing case, with a logical conclusion
- Produced a neat and clear presentation
Reviewing and editing: as authors or editors

- Expect to be asked to revise
- As editors you may need to make hard decisions
- Be fair and clear on revision guidance
  - Ask for clarity if you aren’t sure.
- Work with the publisher or editors: they want to get the best out of the process, and so do you.