Publishing in graduate school for historians
(Conference papers, book chapters and articles)

Why?
1. Moral obligation to be part of the conversation

2. Get feedback on your own work, and improve it (reciprocity, we all benefit from this)
   
   Your advisors and committee with the best will in the world become familiar with your work, and rapidly lose some outside perspective. Presenting your work to people who are totally unfamiliar with why it's important, and what it's about can quickly reveal what hidden assumptions you have, what literature or sources you don't know about etc.

3. Improve your chances of getting a job
   
   Per above, your work will be improved (indirect effect)
   Get used to presenting your work to other people – job talk!
   Direct networking through conferences, articles or book chapters. This is how people get to know you.

How?
Getting stuff published early in your career is (typically) not a quick thing.

It appears mysterious.

Once you've seen the process it appears much more straightforward.

I was lucky enough that before I came to graduate school I worked as a research assistant for a researcher who had me involved with that process from basically first research question to publication.

My experience was not unique. While there has been a seminar in editing and publishing here, you can't rely on that.

Point is: apprenticeship model is more important in this aspect of learning to be an academic (or whatever you want to be). You learn this by doing it, which is true for graduate school in general, but even more true for this kind of thing. The details about how to get stuff published vary, and it's easier to identify the relevant variables and processes in the particular, before you think about them in general.

One way to apprentice yourself would be to be a research assistant for a professor and try and get them to involve you in the process of their publications in some ways.
You'll have to do it on your own sometime so … here's how you go about it (while in graduate school)

Getting something published is a series of incremental steps, for which you can and should get credit for along the way. In other academic cultures, for example in Britain, there is less encouragement of the attitude that "if something's worth publishing it's worth publishing twice." Taken literally that's unethical. Taken figuratively it means that you should work on something, get it out there, get feedback and consider it, and write something more on it. Once you're knowledgeable about a topic it's often worth pursuing the second paper in that area. The marginal costs of publishing on a given topic are typically declining over the number of publications. You don't have to reformulate the introduction and literature review, even if you do have to collect more data from archives (which is costly).

Now in graduate school you sometimes do papers which you don't get time to revise. You pick a different area for your dissertation topic, and for the most part that should be your priority. But hold onto the material that you collect for papers you don't continue. When you finish graduate school you can pick them up again, and try and get something published outside the topic of your dissertation.

Specifically, now that you're in graduate school research papers you do as directed research, and sometimes term papers are the basis of potential conference papers and articles.

(Aside: I wrote this specifically for a presentation at the University of Minnesota History department. A directed research paper is a course where you basically just spend the whole semester doing research. You don't have many, if any, class periods. You might meet with others to discuss research, but mostly you're off in the library/archives/lab/field doing research. A term paper denotes a typically shorter research paper that you do as part of a class where you spend more time reading other people's articles/books, discussing those in class, and only later in the semester getting to do semi-original research. A term paper might be largely a good summary of the existing literature of some topic. It shouldn't be too necessary to point out that this feeds into your own original research projects just as much as the original research itself. Indeed, there is a market in academic journals for publishing literature reviews, so if you do a really comprehensive job you could publish that).

If you do a good research paper, think about presenting it a conference. Ask the instructor for more constructive critical feedback – they don't give you as much feedback as you need straight away. It's the end of semester, and they don't have the time to think about every term paper as a potential publication. You have to show commitment. Ask them if they think it's worth taking to a conference. Be upfront about it – do they think it could be worked into a published paper, or is too much work required.

Stock-taking point: It's a sequential process, you're not committed to publishing something the moment you start a research project (but that should be a goal) and at various points you should evaluate "how much do I have to do next to make this a conference paper or article submission?"

Early on in this process of learning how to publish, I think a conference presentation of your research is a good first step. You get different feedback and comments than from your normal circle of commenters.

As you get more advanced you will develop a network of colleagues who can provide comments without the time and expense of going to conferences. Don't get into the trap of doing too many conference papers! A few are good, their value declines after that.

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Same goes for book reviews. One or two are OK to show you can write a book review, but after that no-one is going to interview you because you had 10 book reviews rather than two.

Some people say, and they're probably right, don't do more than two book reviews a year. Don't do book reviews for the sake of a free book. You're getting less than minimum wage. Try to do book reviews of books you might read or purchase anyway.

**Before you can even get to presenting and publishing your research you've got to have research that is presentable and publishable.**

Some of this is a lot easier for Americanists.

(Aside: As this was a presentation for historians in the United States at a major research university with substantial library and archive holdings, in a metropolitan area with substantial other American history sources, "Americanists" denotes people with potentially easier access to material for original research. Generalize as you like to your own area.)

**In part, that's a process of selecting a research topic that others will find interesting, because you've asked and answered an interesting question with interesting sources.**

**How to do this?**

- Think about questions for research when you're reading monographs or articles. Keep a list. You won't get to it all, but some of it might become your dissertation. Some of it will become the idea for your "second project" you'll need to have at a job interview. (Aside: This mostly applies to all fields. The "second project" is more specific to history departments in the United States at the research level, where they often want you to something quite different than your dissertation for your next research project)
- Replicate research done in another place. A lot of history, even history that claims to be national or regional is actually quite local. When people make claims about "American history" they often actually mean they looked at the east coast and Chicago, or they looked at some very general high-level pronouncements on the topic. Similarly, grand claims about "Western Europe" often mean "France" or "Germany." It might well have been different in Sweden. It might have been different in Leeds than it was in London. You can generalize to your own interests, and other continents.
  - Especially for modern history (19th century onwards) there's still an amazing amount of unused archival sources.
  (Aside: The above is specific to history, but I suspect it might be true in other social sciences and humanities … You should be able to generalize to your own area.
- By looking at the same topic other people have looked at you'll be part of a conversation. Responding to someone else's work and qualifying it or constructively criticizing it will be more likely to grab people's attention than something that is hard to tie into the existing scholarly literature.
- Start small and work up to the article. Think about it this way
  1. Read about and write a paper on the historiography of your topic in a seminar
  2. Do some original research as a directed research / Masters paper / early draft of dissertation chapter
  3. Put it aside for a little while, and then revise based on comments of your advisor and some graduate school colleagues (Form writing groups for reviewing essays)
4. Go to a conference.
5. Get feedback on paper from people who don't care as much about your topic as your advisors and friends and you have to.
6. Evaluate how much work is needed to submit to a journal.
7. Revise for a journal.
8. Get a revise-and-resubmit from the journal
9. Respond to suggestions and criticism
10. Send it back in a timely fashion
11. Deal with page proofs (much easier these days)
12. List on your CV.

- If you want to submit to journals, at this point in your career, aim for good second-tier journals. That is, don't bet the farm on getting published in the American Historical Review in graduate school. Try and get something in the Journal of Social History, or Social Science History, or the Journal of Women's History.
  (Aside: This might be more specific to history, but I think the advice could be true in general. Basically you might want to try and find the journals that are well-regarded, but do not have a really long queue of other submissions. If the journal publishes statistics on its time to publication, that can be useful information in choosing where to submit. Basically, if you're looking for the job you want to be able to send offprints, not pre-prints or a CV with "accepted" on it. The latter seems much less published than the offprint of the published article. On the other hand, if you have something really and truly important to your field to say, by all means submit it to the top journal. But this would be a point to take advice from other, more experienced, people.)
- The acceptance rates at specialist academic journals in history are quite favorable because there is an over-production of books in history. (This is definitely more specific to history: tenure requirements in history departments in the United States often require a book over an article … The merits of this over-production of books in history are for another day)
- Don't publish in public history journals in the hopes it will get you an academic job, by which I mean journals like Minnesota History. There are good reasons to publish in these forums—giving something back to the community you researched in, for example, but this won't get you an academic job. (Generalize to public interest journals in your own field. In some social sciences, journals for "practitioners" as opposed to academics might have a similarly low weighting in academic advancement.)
- Never write something you can't use twice. The introduction to a journal article, for example, is often a concise statement of your research question. You can re-use this in your dissertation introduction. The article is a chapter. Etc … (This is most assuredly something for everyone to keep in mind.)