

## 10 FAQs About Children's [Book Publishing](#)

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*Here are some common questions and hopefully helpful answers to people who are new to children's book publishing:*

### **1. I have written a children's story (or several children's stories) and want to know [how to get published](#).**

Research by studying contemporary children's books and magazines and learning how your story fits into today's market. Is your story age appropriate? Does it have a compelling plot and characters? Read FROM TYPEWRITER TO PRINTED PAGE and gauge where your story belongs. Study publishers' catalogs and review publications such as Booklist and Hornbook (send off for them or see if the library will share). Network by joining a local chapter of SCBWI and attending meetings and conferences. Obtain publishers' guidelines before submitting (SCBWI publishes an updated market guide each August for their members). Make sure your work is professionally presented. Revise, edit, rewrite, revise some more. Join and stay in a critique group. Polish your work before submitting, and never tell an editor, "This is just a rough draft." Always include a self addressed stamped envelope with enough postage for your work to be returned to you, and never send more than one story to a publisher unless they request otherwise.

Solicited vs Unsolicited manuscript: Solicited means that the editor requested to see the manuscript. Your manuscript can have solicited status either through an agent, an editor you may have met at a conference, or you queried the editor according to their guidelines and got the okay to submit your manuscript. Otherwise, do not submit your work to a publisher who does not accept unsolicited submissions. It will not be read.

Exclusive vs Multiple submission: Exclusive submission means that you will not present your project to any other publisher while this publisher has it. These days, most publishers who still accept unsolicited manuscripts also allow multiple submissions. They just want to be told. Make your submission status very clear in your cover letter.

### **2. What should my query letter say? What should my cover letter say?**

A query letter is what you send to see if there is interest in your project. Most publishers require a query for a non-fiction project or novel. Your query should adhere to the publisher's guidelines; never include more than they request. It should present your project succinctly, much like the preview you read on the inside of a book jacket, along with brief information about your publishing experience, if any. If the publisher requests sample chapters with your query, send the first pages, not your favorite parts. If they ask for chapter outlines, keep them simple.

A cover letter is what you include with your manuscript and should not be more than one page, if that long. If you have already queried the publisher, you can simply remind them that they

requested to read your manuscript and tell them you look forward to their response (and let them know if it is exclusive or multiple). If you did not query first, then your cover letter should be like a query -- with brief information about the project and yourself. Do not include a resume unless it is a non-fiction project and [your resume](#) reflects your expertise in the subject you are writing about. In any case, your writing will speak for itself. Most editors will tell you that they can tell if a project interests them by reading the first three sentences. They do not need to be told that your kids, grandkids, students, or dog loved your story, so don't even go there.

### **3. Should I get someone to illustrate my picture book before I submit it?**

Almost always: no. The editor who purchases your picture book manuscript will ultimately choose the illustrator. Except in rare circumstances, it is seldom a good idea to collaborate with an illustrator. Illustrators are better off researching the market and submitting their portfolios for assignments. Don't illustrate it yourself unless you are a professional. There is also no need to describe the illustrations in your submission. If your manuscript doesn't come to life visually without your explaining it, then the writing probably needs work. If the story is intended to be told by the illustrations, then mention that briefly in your cover letter; don't clutter the manuscript with explanations.

### **4. Okay, I researched and networked and sent out my manuscript. All I'm getting back, if anything, are form rejections. What's wrong?**

Most manuscripts are first reviewed by a reader, who is usually an Associate Editor. If he/she doesn't see any promise in your manuscript for their publishing needs, she will return it with a form rejection letter which usually says something along the lines of, "Not right for our list." Don't be discouraged if you've done your homework. Keep sending it. If you get several rejections, see question #8. Also, don't worry about copyrighting your unpublished work. The law is on your side, and legitimate editors do not steal manuscripts. Besides, you cannot copyright an idea, only your version of that idea. There are no original stories, only original ways to present them.

### **5. A publisher wants to publish my book, but they want me to pay for some of the expenses.**

These are called Vanity Publishers and they are to be avoided. Though they might tell you they will put up 50% of the costs, their "costs" are grossly over-inflated. You are better off publishing the book yourself. You can find excellent resources about how to begin this process, how much it will cost, etc. at the library or bookstore. Two helpful books are *THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING* by Tom and Marilyn Ross (Writer's Digest Books) and *THE SELF PUBLISHING MANUAL* by Dan Poynter (Para Publishing). Also check out Dick Lutz's online column on self-publishing

### **6. An editor wrote that she saw promise in my manuscript but wanted it revised. I think it's perfect the way it is. What should I do?**

"Revision is like wrestling with a demon, for almost anyone can write; but only writers know how to rewrite. It is this ability alone that turns the amateur into a professional." -- William Knott

Unless her comments are so far from your vision you can't see how you could possibly rework the manuscript the way she suggests, then take her comments to heart and get to work. Then, send it back to her and remind her that she has read it before.

### **7. I sent my manuscript to a publisher and haven't heard a word. Should I call or write? Or will that make them mad and they'll send my work back without reading it?**

If you did your homework and only submitted your manuscript to editors who are actively acquiring books such as yours, you should have an idea of how much time the publisher asks to review a manuscript. If they say three months, then by all means after three months have passed, send them a note. Wait another month, and if you don't hear anything, then call. Most editors will contact you if your manuscript is being seriously considered, but not all. The large publishing companies have a lot of hoops an editor must jump through in order to sell your book. These things take time.

### **8. My manuscript has been making the rounds for a year, and still no sale. What now?**

Do not make the common mistake of spending more energy trying to get published than trying to become a good writer. Perhaps it is time to revise again. Hopefully you have been working on new projects and have them out there as well, once they are polished and ready for submission. You have a much better chance of getting published if you prove yourself to be a career writer, not just a flash in the pan. Publishers are more likely to invest in an author who promises to be fresh and prolific. Chances are your newer projects are better than the first! That is what usually happens with time and dedication. You might find that you will first sell your tenth book, then you will go back and revise the previous nine and sell them as well.

### **9. Would it help if I got an agent?**

Though you don't need an agent to submit to many publishers, many others only accept agented material. However, finding a good agent can be as difficult as finding a publisher. Most will not be interested in you until you have a contract. This is a good time to get an agent, to help you through that process. The best way to find a good, reputable agent is to network with other agented authors and see if one will read your manuscript, and if they like it, they might be willing to recommend it to their agent. The best way to do this is to attend conferences and writers' workshops.

### **10. And finally: How much money will I make on my first book?**

Let's put it this way: Don't quit your day job. Writing for the children's book market is seldom as lucrative as writing for the adult market. For a 32 page picture book, you can expect to split 50/50 a \$3,000-\$8,000 advance with the illustrator, then each of you will get 3.5%-5% royalties against your advance (your advance must be earned back before you receive any royalties). Most picture books sell from 5,000-10,000 copies in hardcover and go out of print within fourteen months. Few go into paperback. Easy readers are about the same. The royalties are not split on a novel, so you could receive approximately a \$5,000 advance against 7-10% royalties. Royalties are usually based on the retail price of the book, however some publishers go by "net price"

which is the price of the book after their discounts are figured in, which means, less money. Read your contract very carefully. Compensation for magazine articles varies widely depending on the publication, its circulation and the type of piece being submitted, but payment can often range between \$25 - \$200.

In the end, writers write because they love creating stories and making words sing, and they love to see children enjoy the stories and books and poems and articles they have created. These are the true riches that a writer for children will garner. You don't have to be published to achieve this goal.

*SCBWI-MI thanks Robin for permission to reprint her article and we thank all the RAs who contributed to it.*