

How to Become a Millionaire Children's Author

LESSON ELEVEN

by

Scott Thornton

You do not need any previous writing experience!


Use these professional techniques and insider secrets and tips to easily write page-turning stories with the WOW factor, and join the growing legion of millionaire authors.

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Welcome and a huge ‘Thank You’ for purchasing ‘Lesson Eleven’ of the twelve part course, ‘How to Become a Millionaire Children’s Author’.

Let’s continue with the hottest and latest insider tips and techniques you can use to build your own personal wealth from writing for children.

Writing Non-Fiction

Most people, when they say they want to write for children, have fiction in mind. Much the same applies to people who want to write for adults, yet of all the people who earn their living as writers, probably over 90% never write fiction at all, and many of the others write both fiction and non-fiction.

Often the idea for a factual book grows out of the research for a piece of fiction. You discover when you are researching, that you have to consult many different sources for the information you need because there isn't a single book that covers it adequately.

You develop a real interest in the subject and gather more and more material, far more than you need for your story, and then you realise that not only is there a gap in the literature, but that you are able to fill it.

Ready Made Market

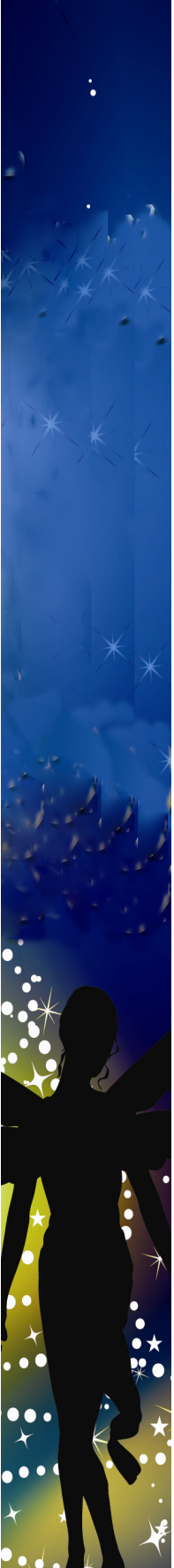
There is nothing publishers like more than to be offered a unique book. Assuming, of course, that there is a market for the subject it is so much easier to sell the only book on any given subject than to compete against several other books.

This doesn't mean that they won't accept a book if there are already others on the same subject. Some subjects attract such a large amount of interest (e.g. dinosaurs) that there is room for several publishers to make a profit. Some publishers even consider it a clear indication that a market exists if they see that another publisher has released a similar title.

They do, however, like to approach any given subject from a different angle to their competitors, and they often do this with series.

For example, consider volcanoes:

'Earthquakes and Volcanoes' by **Basil Booth** is in Cloverleaf's 'Repairing the Damage' series, (which includes 'Pollution', 'Hurricanes & Storms', 'Fires & Floods', 'Snow, Ice & Cold', and 'Famine & Hunger'). It has chapters on the anatomy of volcanoes, 'Fireworks at sea', which covers Krakatoa and how plants and animals re-establish themselves after an eruption, what volcanoes are and how they erupt, signs of volcanism (fumaroles, hot springs and geysers, the hot water cycle), earth movements (tectonics and hot spots), earthquakes in close-up and some personal accounts of big earthquakes.



It also covers energy from the earth (buried heat, metals from magma, building materials), damage and prediction (rescues, diverting lava flows, protective clothing against dust and ash, detection techniques), and foundations for the future (how traditional and modern buildings stand up to earthquakes, search and rescue techniques).

'**Volcano**' by **Susanna Van Rose**, is one of the books in Dorling Kindersley's '**Eyewitness Guide**' series.

This series is very diverse, and includes 'Rock & Mineral', 'Skeleton', 'Weather', 'Fish', and 'Bible lands'. The illustrations are mostly photographs, including photos of old drawings and paintings. The contents include details of how and why volcanoes erupt, with a mention of plate tectonics, the great eruptions of Vesuvius in AD79 and St Pierre in 1902, how volcanoes affect the world's weather, life re-establishing itself, being a volcanologist, and volcanoes on other planets.

The final quarter of this book is on earthquakes. The text on any given page is about one quarter basic explanation, and the rest is detailed captions to the illustrations.

Other books in the '**Eyewitness Guide**' series include: '**Viking**', '**Weather**', '**Whale**', '**Flying Machine**', '**Food**', '**Great Scientists**' and it goes on.

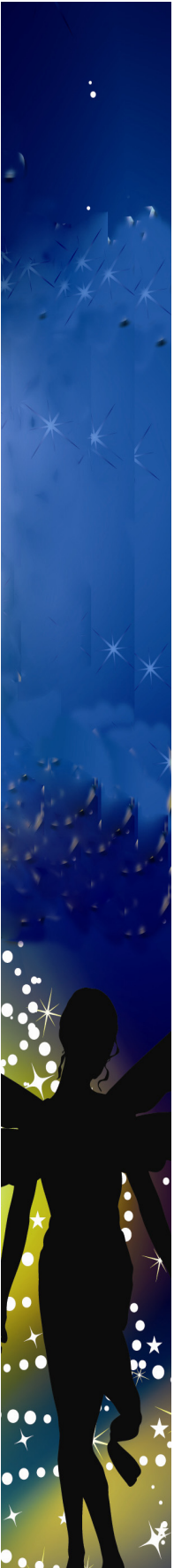
Children's non-fiction books fall into three basic categories:

- **School text-books and educational support books**, which have to conform rigidly to syllabus requirement.
- **Other information books** that cover material allied to syllabus requirements, but in a less rigidly structured way. These are the books which children turn to when they are working on projects. The books on volcanoes mentioned above would come into this category, and children would consult them for geography projects. Biographies also come into this category.
- **Books which children read for their own personal interest and pleasure.** These would include books on hobbies, sports, pop stars, and such subjects as those perennial favourites, dinosaurs.

Let's have a closer look at these categories, which you might write for, and how to set about it.

Educational Books

You will find it impossible to persuade an educational publisher that you could produce a good book for this market, unless you (or a co-writer whom you intend to work with), are or have been a teacher on the subject. If you are a teacher, you will be aware of the gaps in the coverage of your subject, both from your own class work and the comments of your colleagues.



A small group of publishers dominate the field of educational publishing. Some general publishers do have educational divisions or subsidiaries, such as John Murray, but most of these books come from publishers who do nothing else, like Stanley Thornes.

You are unlikely to find educational books in the average book-shop, so you must start your market research by going through The Writer's and Artist's Yearbook, then telephoning to ask for catalogues. These tend to be separated into subjects, and you will find in some of these that they are actively seeking new books (e.g. John Murray's Science and Technology catalogues both ask for proposals).

The catalogues are very detailed, most showing sample pages from the books, and specifying to which part of the national curriculum they apply.

Other Information Books

Although schools often use these books (the law allows teachers to choose the books they use in class) the publishers are also aiming at a more general market.

A typical publisher who produces this type of book is Wayland, who section their catalogue by subject and show national curriculum key stages.

Almost all of Wayland's books are in series. They too have books on volcanoes; one in their '**Natural Disasters**' series for seven year old readers, (the other titles in this series are Flood Damage, Power of Earthquakes, and A Storm Rages); and one in their '**Violent Earth**' series for nine to eleven year old readers. The other titles in this series are Earthquake, Storm, and Flood.

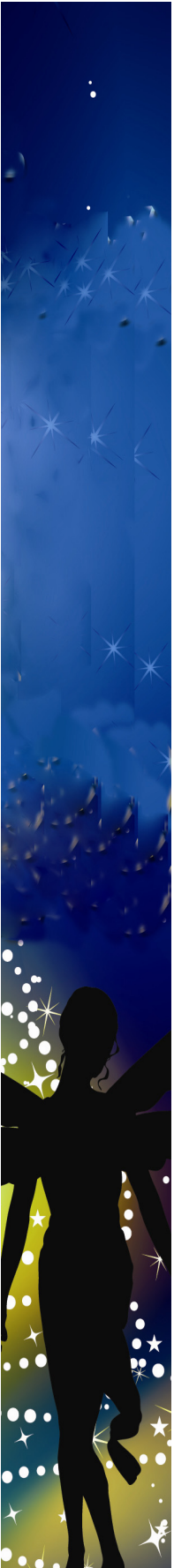
Both series use identical illustrations and layout, but the series for younger readers has shorter, simplified, text.

Another publisher in this field is Watts Books. They cover the subject of volcanoes in eight different series.

For readers of:

- **5 and 6 year olds** there is the '**First Start**' series.
- **7 to 9 years old**, there is the '**Picture Library**' series; the '**All Ways of Looking At**' series (with paintings and diagrams), the '**Journey to the Centre of the Earth**' and the '**Fantastic Journey**' series.
- **9 and upwards**, there is the '**Natural Disaster**' series, the '**Earth Sciences Library**' series, the '**New View**' series, and the '**Hands On Geography**' series.

Watts Books catalogue is particularly useful as it lists all the bookshops that stock their titles. These shops will also stock other publisher's educational



books, and therefore are good places for you to do your market research.

The reason I have gone into so much detail on volcanoes is to show how you can tackle one subject **in many different ways** and for many different age groups. When you start comparing the contents of each of the available series, you will notice that the associated subjects which appear in one publisher's catalogue do not appear in another's. This is a clear indication of gaps waiting for an enterprising writer to fill them.

Other Non-Fiction Books

This category covers all the other non-fiction books:

- Hobbies.
- Encyclopaedias and factual.
- Crafts.
- Sports.
- Music.
- Religious.
- Computer.

From your point of view, the field is wide open and publishers will be glad to hear from you if you have original ideas. The only thing that you need to keep in mind, in all three categories, is that almost all non-fiction books for children and teenagers are very heavily illustrated. **This means that the subjects you suggest must be capable of heavy illustration.**

Here are some examples of information books:

Messages - a series by **Nicola Edwards** (A & C Black) for young children, which helps to develop reading skills. A clear simple text closely linked to full colour photographs shows children how they can recognise and interpret the symbols, pictures and sounds which surround them in everyday life. Questions within the text help to stimulate discussion and the notes at the back are a useful resource for taking the ideas in each book further.

Titles include **clothes** - what does a uniform tell you about a person, how can you find out what your clothes are made of?; **buildings** - how does a building tell you whether it's a shop, a railway station or a home?; **food** - how does a tomato tell you it's ripe?; **transport** - what does a number plate tell you about a car, how does the pilot of an aeroplane know where to land?

Millipedes - a series for 8-12 year olds by **Brenda Walpole** (A & C Black). Titles include '**Counting**' and '**Temperature**'.

See For Yourself - a series for 6-8 year olds by **Kay Davies and Wendy Oldfield** (A & C Black). Titles include 'Rain', 'Snow and Ice', 'Sun' and 'Wind'.



The History of the World by **Plantagenet Somerset Fry** (Dorling Kindersley). This comprehensive reference book is divided into 20 chronological chapters, each of which contains a world map and detailed illustrated time charts highlighting the events of the period and showing at a glance what happened and where. Feature pages also give special attention to daily life, religion and culture.

Teenage Vegetarian Survival Guide by **Anouchka Grose** (Hutchinson). This book covers school meals, travel, eating out, political arguments - and what to do if your boy-friend's breath reeks of tuna!

Looking at Buildings by **Catherine Gardam** (Julia MacRae) is also for teenagers. A comprehensive and accessible survey of buildings from many centuries and many cultures from great architectural show-pieces to the poorest cottage and tenement.

The Last Green Book on Earth? by **Judy Allen and Martin Brown** (Julia MacRae). 'Green issues won't disappear, nor should they be allowed to,' says the blurb.

The big issues come first - the ozone layer, acid rain, greenhouse effect, then the smaller but equally important matters to do with clothes and food and transport.

Making a Nest by **Paul Bennett** (Wayland) is for Infant to Junior school children.

Lewis and Clark; Exploring North America by **Clint Twist** (Evans 'Beyond the Horizon' series) is for Middle to Secondary school children.

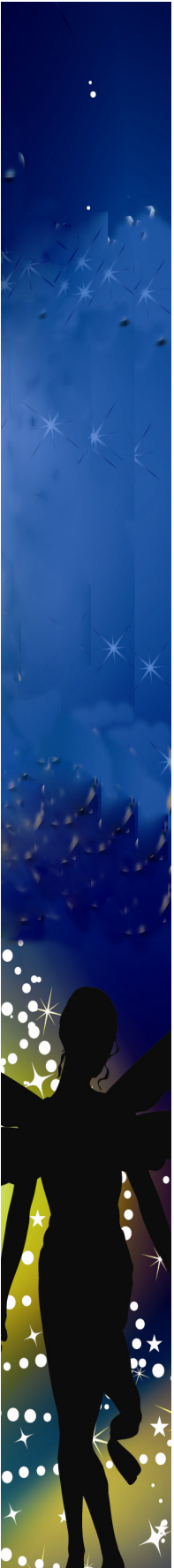
The Rise of the Dinosaurs and **The Triumph of the Dinosaurs** by **Steve Parker** (Dragon's World) are for dino-enthusiasts of any age.

Winter Survival: Nature's Way of Coping With The Cold by **Mari Friend** (Blandford) is for Secondary school children.

Pond and Stream and **Wasteland** by **Colin Milkins** (Wayland 'Starting Ecology' series). These are for Junior to Middle school children.

The highest percentage of illustration to text is in information books. Probably the most successful publisher of these books is Dorling Kindersley. Typically between half and three-quarters of all their books are illustrations, with the text slotted in as expanded captions.

Often cited as 'the perfect information book', their '**The Way Things Work**' by **David Macauley** has **sold over 2,200,000 copies in book form**, and is also available in multi-media form on CD ROM. Aimed at readers of eleven and upwards, it features a delightful mammoth demonstrating how all the scientific



and engineering principles work as well as more formal diagrams.

I have to admit, that when researching for a children's project, I nearly always buy or borrow children's reference books rather than anything written for adults.

Usborne are another publishing house with many non-fiction titles. Some of these includes the '**Spotter's Guides**' with the same subjects in '**Spotter's Sticker Books**'. For example: '**Spotter's Guide TREES**' and '**Spotter's Sticker Book TREES**'.

They also publish '**Internet-linked First Encyclopedias**' for Age 5+.

Information Books Format

An information book should be packed with facts, and those facts should be presented in a way that is immediately accessible on all levels.

For this, the illustrations are every bit as important as the text, and you will find the writing process is one of close collaboration with the illustrators, the picture librarians and the designers, rather than delivering your text and waiting for the illustrations to be added.

You must plan each double page spread and the publishers will give you a precise wordage to work to for each spread. Even then, you should not be surprised if you find that your words have been re-written to conform to the house style.

Payment

For books of this type you are more likely to be offered a flat fee than a royalty, but this will not prevent you from claiming your share of Public Lending Right (PLR). Just be sure that your contract specifies exactly what percentage your contribution is, and that the other members of the team will co-operate with your PLR registration.

Information books tend to have very long shelf-life in libraries (children love to collect facts about things that interest them) and you should continue to receive PLR for many years.

The long-term PLR payments are only one of the advantages of writing non-fiction. The major advantage, especially with your first few books, is that you don't have to write the whole book before you get a contract and an advance payment.

It is standard practice in non-fiction publishing to commission a book on the strength of a proposal, an outline, and one to three sample chapters. In fact, doing it this way, with very rare exceptions, is the only way you will get a non-fiction book published.



Working with a Team

It is team effort that produces this type of book, and at an early stage you must consider the contributions of other team members.

For example, let's say your book is on tigers. You have found out about a rare type of tiger that has evolved on a remote island, and the most interesting things about it are that its stripes are horizontal instead of the more usual vertical, and that it produces litters of eight kittens instead of the more usual two. All of this is so fascinating that you have devoted a whole chapter to it - but here is the snag. Although there have been several well-authenticated sightings of these rare animals, there are no photographs or drawings, nor has it ever been seen by anyone with any artistic ability.

So the publisher is left with three options: get an artist to guess at what it looks like and risk looking extremely foolish when someone does come up with photographs that show it as looking completely different; printing that chapter without any illustrations in a book that is otherwise heavily illustrated; or drop that chapter. There are no prizes for guessing that they would decide to drop the chapter.

Proposal and Outline

So, given that you must produce a proposal and an outline, how do you set about it, and how does it differ from the outline for a fiction book? How you go about it is covered later on in this lesson. For now, there are two main differences between an outline for fiction and one for non-fiction. They are:

- Since you are dealing with facts, the publisher will want some **evidence** that you have your facts correct.
- Publishing any non-fiction book calls for a heavy investment in illustrations.

Acquiring the right to use photographs and drawings, and then 'setting-up' these illustrations for printing, costs *from* £150 for each picture. Multiply that by the number of pictures in the type of book you are contemplating and you will see that the publishers have to commit themselves to expenditure of **many thousands of pounds** when they agree to take on a new title.

Besides this direct expenditure, there is also the cost of devoting a design and editorial team to the project for several months.

So, to convince the publishers that all this expenditure will be worthwhile, your proposal has to do a real selling job. Not only do you need to demonstrate that you can produce sufficient information on the subject, and arrange it in a logical order, you also have to produce a compelling argument to convince them that this book will sell in sufficient quantities to justify the cost of publishing it.



Sample Chapters

Your sample chapters are part of your demonstration that you have sufficient material and can arrange it logically. Although many people who write fiction can also write good non-fiction, there are also many who can't.

This is not because they are unable to put comprehensible sentences on paper, but usually because they are not in the habit of organising their material into a linear form. **You need to teach yourself to examine all the facts you have and decide how to connect them to each other.**

A good way to do this is by using a spider diagram like the one we drew in Lesson Six to work out what characters we needed. In this case, your central bubble will be the subject itself, the first layer of bubbles will be the chapter headings, and the outer layer of bubbles will be the contents of the chapters. Then all you have to do is work out the logical order for the chapters.

Golden Insider Tip...

You also need to be able to put yourself in the position of **someone who knows nothing about the subject**. Unless you are writing an educational book which slots into a syllabus so that you know the stage the readers have reached, you have to **assume they are beginners**.

So if your book is on playing chess, it should begin with a diagram of the board set up for a game and a brief statement of what the game is about. It should not start, as one editor reported of a manuscript she received, with the words "Lay out the board and begin play with your pawn."

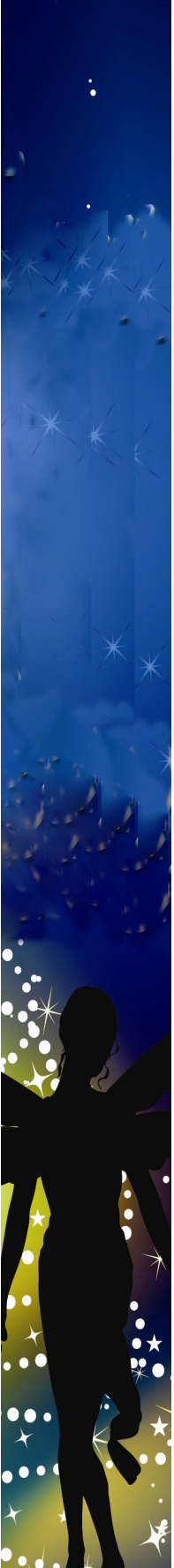
Biographies

Information books consist mainly of statements of fact, or discussions of the latest theories. Other types of non-fiction can involve a mixture of styles. Biographies, in particular, can include anecdotes, interviews, extracts from letters or diaries, and in the case of a biography of a writer, extracts from books.

An example of this is **Chris Powling's** biography of **Roald Dahl** (Evans 'Profiles' series).

Chapter One, the introduction, tells the reader "To help me give the 'feel' of this extraordinary man, I've called on Roald Dahl's own words wherever I can, taking them from his books, from articles about him, from conversations I had with him". He then says that he assumes that you (he addresses the reader directly as 'you' throughout this book) have read Roald Dahl and that if you have not, you should do so.

Chapter Two starts by asking if you remember the scene in 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' when Charlie wins a visit to the Wonka Chocolate Factory.



There is an extract from the book, then a suggestion that perhaps there was a Roald Dahl Fiction Factory, and that you are going to visit it. It takes you to Roald Dahl's house (while he was still alive), describes many of the items in the house, relating them to incidents in his life.

It then takes you to his writing room and describes his chair and the shaped board on which he writes.

Chapter Three deals with the period before he started writing.

Chapter Four is entitled 'After He Became a Writer'.

Chapter Five tells of his writing film scripts, including a James Bond film.

These chapters are a mixture of the author reporting what Roald Dahl told him during interviews and Roald Dahl's own words, with some extracts from his books and scripts.

Chapter Six answers some questions that fans commonly ask in their letters.

The final chapter, entitled 'How Good a Children's Writer Was Roald Dahl?' reverts to the author 'talking' directly to the reader and suggesting how you can answer this question for yourself.

It is a very skilfully crafted mixture of several techniques.

If you were proposing a similar book, you would have to submit sample chapters showing that you can handle such a mixture. **The most difficult of all techniques in children's books is the 'me talking to you' style, because it is so easy to slip into a patronising tone.**

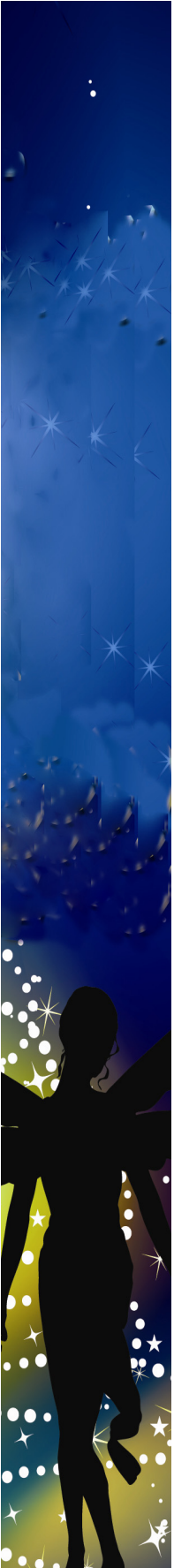
Biographies are a very popular type of book, and several publishers have series of them. **And biographies are one of the few non-fiction books that are not heavily illustrated.**

As an example, here's a breakdown of Chris Powling's book on Roald Dahl:

- The illustrations are line drawings from family photographs and illustrations from Roald Dahl's own books, totalling 25 in 79 pages.
- With a couple of exceptions, including the full-page portrait of Roald Dahl as a young man, they are all half a page or less in size.

This low picture-to-text ratio makes biographies cheaper to produce and therefore an area where publishers will be happy to work with a beginner writer.

When the Roald Dahl book was re-printed in 1993, the '**Profiles**' series



consisted of 28 titles. **The jacket blurb says that the subjects:**

'have been carefully selected to include figures who have not only made a lasting impression on the modern world, but whose life stories make interesting and enjoyable reading'.

The people chosen are a mixed selection, including:

- Two cricketers.
- Three pop stars.
- A few prominent politicians.
- Members of royalty.
- A pope.
- Several of the better known inventors and scientific innovators.

This sort of mixture also applies in other series of biographies, but as you look at the lists of names, you realise that there are gaps.

There is Bob Geldof, but not Jimmy Saville; Ian Botham but not Daly Thompson or Frank Bruno; Thomas Edison but not Alec Issigonis. The reason for this is quite simply that no writer has volunteered to write biographies on these people for these publishers.

If you want to fill the gaps there is only one reason why they might not commission you to do so. If the subject is still alive and very famous, they are likely to make various demands. These will include the right to vet the manuscript before publication and remove or edit any passages that they dislike, and to have a say in the choice of writer. They are unlikely to choose a writer who does not have a track record with biographies.

It is not feasible to write a biography of a living person without their co-operation. No publisher would take the risk of the subject starting legal action to prevent publication. You would also want to interview the subject for their comments and to be allowed to verify various facts.

This is not to say that you would make controversial revelations in a book intended for young readers, but you certainly would not want to be restricted to reporting only the good side of your subject. It is how modern personalities have learned from their mistakes that makes interesting reading.

Top Insider Tip...

Your market research on publishers for a biography should include analysis of how each publisher prefers you to present a story.

Some like a straight-forward chronological account of the subject's life, while



others prefer the story to start with a dramatic highlight to engage the reader's interest. You will need to take this into account when preparing your outline.

Whether it is a biography or some other type of information book, don't assume that you have to be an expert in your subject before you can write about it. You don't, or not at the proposal stage, anyway. All you need at that stage is a broad overview that will allow you to put up a good case for the book, and an obvious interest in the subject.

Research

It is when you have got a contract to write the book that you need to become an expert, and you do this by the **process of researching**. One of the advantages of coming to a subject as a beginner and finding your own way round the available facts is that you do not have to accept someone else's notion of what is important.

This does not mean that you should ignore the experts' priorities, if they all agree on them, but that **you can choose the order in which you present the facts according to the purpose of the book**. If there is anything that is irrelevant to your target readership, you can skate over it to concentrate on what is relevant.

You will already have done some general research, to get an overall picture for your outline. **Now you need to:**

- Accumulate more detailed information.
- Sort it into topics as you go.

You should only use any given fact or mini-topic once in a non-fiction book, so you will have to have a grand sort-out of what to put where before you start the actual writing.

For any children's non-fiction subject, a good place to start researching is the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Then you can move on to more specialised encyclopaedias, other fact books, and finally other popular books. It is a good idea to start with books for adults, then move on to books aimed at children, and finally to magazines for adults and children.

You will find that you can follow a trail of information backwards, by reading the books listed in the bibliography of each book you read. You can also track down information and experts from the acknowledgements sections. Both methods are useful, but you do need to **be careful that the bibliography trail does not lead to information that is out of date**. If you allow five years for each 'generation' of the trail, you can soon find you are looking at work that is fifteen or twenty years old.



Quotations

If you intend to use quotations (and they are useful as they add authority to your work) you must acknowledge their source. You do not necessarily need permission, although it is polite to request it.

The rule of thumb that normally applies is that up to 50 words do not need permission, unless they are from a very short work like a poem; but if in doubt, ask your editor for guidance.

Don't restrict yourself to collecting only the information that you think will be relevant to your target readers. Until you have a good grasp of the subject you will not be able to make a proper judgement of what will or will not be suitable for young readers.

Anyway, it isn't what you tell, but how you tell that creates the targeting.

Remember the Golden Rule...

The younger the reader, the shorter and more simply structured your sentences should be; and the fewer complex words you should use.

It is also silly to waste your research time by restricting the information you collect. You may be intending to write a short book for seven year olds right now, but by the time you have finished your research you should have collected not only a great number of facts, but also a comprehensive picture of the coverage of the subject.

Is There More Than One Book?

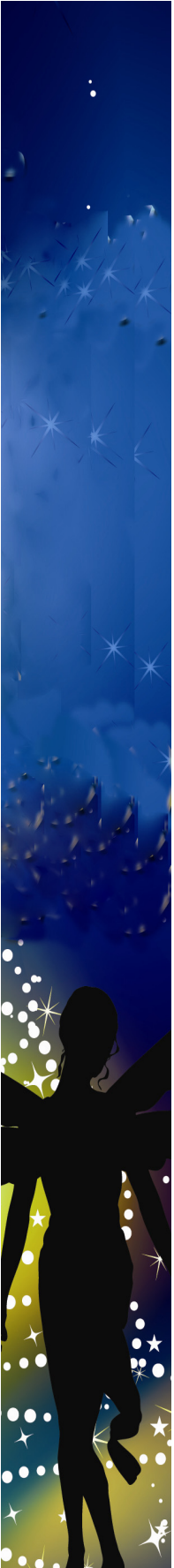
There may be other gaps that you could exploit for the same or other publishers.

For example:

- You're doing a book for seven year olds, but is there one for nine year olds or thirteen year olds or adults?
- Have certain aspects been left out of other books which you could expand on in a separate book?
- Is the field changing so swiftly that you could write updates at regular intervals? Would you be able to sell articles to magazines on the subject? (You will, after all, be able to prove your expertise by mentioning that you have published a book on the subject.)

All of these other possibilities mean, of course, that you will have to keep up to date with new developments and the latest theories, but you can do this by keeping an eye on the relevant magazines.

All of this is the answer to that perennial problem: which information to use



and which to leave out. Many new writers feel that to leave out any of their research is to waste those hard-won facts, but to put all of it in a single book inevitably makes it top heavy.

If you feel you should not waste any of your research, don't. Just save it for another book.

There's one final point about researching and being a writer. Everything you see or hear or read is research, and always has been, even though you may not have been aware of it.

Whilst any competent writer can research any subject and produce a reasonable piece of writing, a mature writer, who has spent a lifetime reading and assimilating facts on various matters, can flesh out the bones of their research with what they already know.

It is part of the direct-subconscious-to-writing-hand connection. You often read back something you have written and find that it contains not only things that you don't remember writing, but also things that you didn't know you knew. Your years of reading have paid off, and you are now in a position to sell the contents of your head.

Techniques

There are some techniques that you need to use when writing non-fiction that are different to fiction. The first is related to the long life of non-fiction books and the rapidly changing nature of the world we live in. To a certain extent, the way you tackle this is dependent on the type of book and the expected lifetime of each copy.

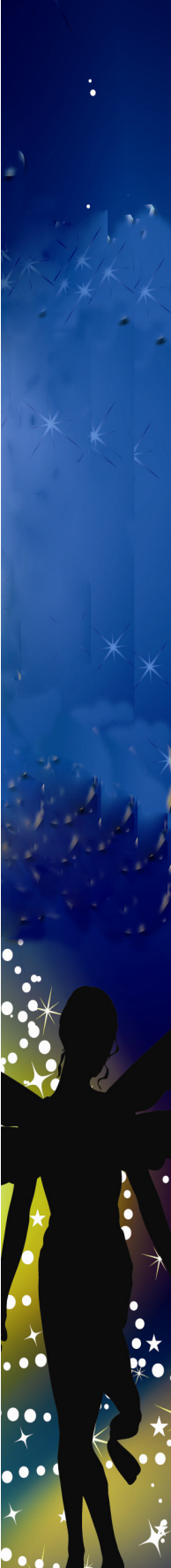
The two types of book are short-life and long-life.

Short-life books are either text books that the schools expect each pupil to buy for use during one year's classes; or dated information books that they re-issue each year. In both cases, changes to the text and illustrations are expected for each new edition.

Long-life books are those which the purchaser, whether it is an individual child or a librarian, expects to use for many years. The publishers will prefer not to make frequent changes, and might even reject your manuscript if you write in a way that will require regular expensive re-setting.

It is the cost of re-setting that is the main consideration, although obviously the marketing people will be anxious that your book does not date quickly. The trick is to structure your writing so that you put changeable facts in a position where changing them does not mean resetting a whole block of text.

For example, say you are writing about the European Economic Community (EEC). At the time of writing, there are 27 members, and you want to include



that information in your book.

Let's suppose you write:

"The EEC consists of 27 member countries, each of which sends representatives to the European Parliament. This is situated in Brussels."

Then three new countries become members. The whole paragraph has to be re-set to accommodate the shorter word 'thirty'.

But if you change it round so that the number of members is at the end, the resetting only involves a few words:

"The member countries of the EEC send representatives to the European Parliament in Brussels. There are currently **twenty seven** members."

But you may not need to state the number of members at all. If this is a school text book, you can expect the teacher to tell the class the current number of members which is likely to keep changing.

So you could avoid the re-setting problem by making that last sentence read:

"The number of member countries is steadily increasing as other countries join and seek the benefits of membership."

Tables

If the data are likely to change regularly, you have a couple of choices:

- You can deal with the situation by putting these data in tables rather than throughout the book.
- Alternatively you can structure the book so that all the changes occur in one section.


Have a look now at the chess book I have used as an example a bit further on in this lesson in the section on Proposals and Outlines.

I have split it into three sections:

- The basic rules of the game.
- Some sample games of increasing difficulty.
- Information on the competitive scene.

You could write this book with illustrative anecdotes throughout.

For example, in the chapter on how each piece is allowed to move, you could say: "By moving his queen in this way, Soandoski was able to win the 1998



championships in Helsinki." 1998? That's a long time ago even now.

If the book sells for 10 years, it will end up quoting a date that was before the readers were born. You would find a more recent example. There is also the possibility that Soandoski (or whoever) might reveal a set of clay feet that would render him definitely not a suitable role model for young readers.

No, if you want to use this sort of anecdote, **it is far better to put them in the third section which will need regular updating anyway, as the competitive scene changes.**

Religion

The other point that you need to keep in mind is that, with the exception of national curriculum based educational books, your publishers will want to sell copies or editions of your book in other countries. **This means that any examples you give should be as international as you can make them.** You may need to use a series of examples set in different countries, or vary the names of the people involved.

Remember for books in Africa and other countries the Judaic-Christian heritage is not predominant. All the Biblical references that come unthinkingly to us in Europe (the ten commandments, the parables and many other sayings) just do not mean anything to people brought up as Moslems or Buddhists or whatever.

To a certain extent this applies in the UK as well, although one can be reasonably sure that the Judaic-Christian ethics will be familiar to all children even if they do not form part of their own religion.

Gender

Of course, you must use non-sexist language. It offends many writers that they have to use the cumbersome 'he and she' all the time, but there is no avoiding it unless you are able to say what you want to by using 'they' instead.

There are also the descriptions like 'postman', 'paper-boy', 'house-wife' and 'tea-lady'. To avoid using them again means you may have to restructure your sentences.

For example:

"The postman comes before 8 a.m."

You can either use the cumbersome 'postperson' or write:

"The mail is delivered before 8 a.m."

The latter version is preferable, as it is easier to read out loud.



As a general principle, if what you have written is difficult to read out loud without stumbling over the combinations of words, you need to work on it some more. You should write non-fiction as clearly as possible to make its contents easily accessible even if the subject is complex or difficult.

What every publisher is looking for is a writer who can make their subject easy to understand, and at the same time convey their own enthusiasm for the subject.

If the writing is dull and it appears that the subject bores you, the reader will not enjoy learning about it, or become enthusiastic enough to want to know more.

Characters and Non-Fiction

There is no reason why you shouldn't let your own personality show in your writing, and you can achieve this by using the 'me talking to you' style.

Another device that some writers use is **to build the book round a particular child**. As long as you don't lapse into a patronising tone, these styles can work very well.

When you have finished your book, it is a good idea to find a friend, or better still a child of the relevant age, to read it through. It is best if this reader knows nothing about the subject, because you want to know whether you have told them everything.

You may find some of their questions silly, but you have to remember children of differing levels of intelligence will read your book. If there is anything that is not clear you will have many puzzled readers. It is unprofessional to let your manuscript go to the publishers without sorting out any possible problems first.

Non-Fiction for Magazines

There is a market for non-fiction for magazines.

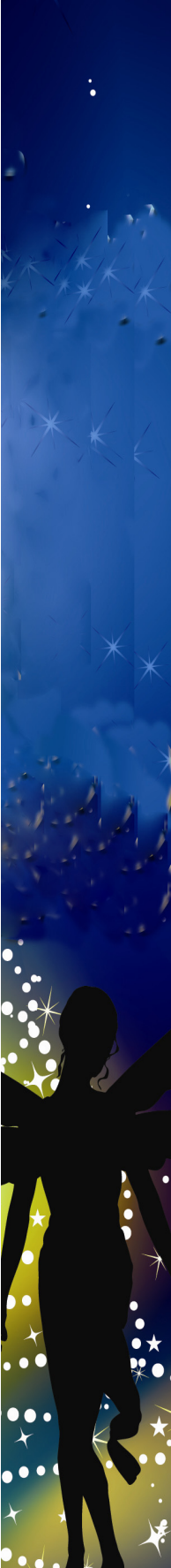
The readers are mostly teenagers and the subjects are mainly on:

- Careers.
- Hobbies.
- Leisure activities.

In girls' magazines they cover:

- Relationships.
- Make-up and fashion.

Magazines for younger readers do not publish much in the way of solid text, but often need short (under 200 word) 'fillers'.



As always, the rule is to do your market research. When you have found some magazines that seem to cover the subjects you can write on, check them out in The Writer's and Artist's Yearbook to see if they take work from freelancers. Then write to ask if your chosen subject interests them, ask for their house style guidelines and tell them how you will tackle the subject.

The guidelines may not mention this, but you should write your piece in short paragraphs. Almost all magazines are printed in columns, and anything longer than 60 words forms a daunting lump of solid print.

Remember that **magazines with large sections of colour printing will have a four or five month lead time, so get seasonal articles in to them in plenty of time. July or August is the time for Christmas articles, for example – not November 30th!**

Payment

Magazines all pay 'on publication', which usually means a month after the date on the cover - or anything up to ten weeks after the issue appears in the shops. The March issue of a monthly magazine will be on sale from mid February, but they won't pay until late March at the earliest, and possibly not until late April.

This is a minor nuisance, but worth putting up with if the end product is a list of published pieces that you can quote as proof of your writing ability in your covering letters to publishers.

Multi-Media

If you haven't seen multi-media in action, you should go and look at it straight away. It is the most exciting development in information publishing, and as a writer you can be part of it.

The information is stored on CD or DVD. It works by presenting you with a menu on the screen, and you select items, moving from screen to screen of information. You can delve deeper and deeper into a subject, or move into associated subjects; listen to a voice pronounce words (in a foreign language, or in scientific subjects such as chemistry); watch a video sequence (of a volcano erupting, or of a chemistry experiment); or make a diagram expand into finer detail.

There are two major fields in multi-media.

The first is mass-market works such as encyclopaedias, produced by publishers like Dorling Kindersley. This field is unlikely to be available to you as a novice writer.

The second is educational works, produced by publishers such as Nelson, who sell their single subject titles (e.g. 'Periodic Tables') direct to schools. They are actively seeking writers who are experts in their subjects.



This field is expanding rapidly, and other opportunities will soon follow these two basic markets.

As with heavily illustrated information books, you would work with a team that will consist, in this case, of computer programmers and film (video) editors as well as the usual artists, picture researchers and designers. As always happens in any multi-media publishing, you should go to a specialist agent for advice before you sign a contract.

You will not get paid as high a percentage of the selling price as you do for a book. Multi-media is multi-disciplined, and there will be a *lot* of other artistic input besides yours, as well as the cost of the hardware needed to create the CD ROM and the programmers to put it all together. (It costs about £250,000 to produce each title.) But the selling price of the CD is considerably more than a book, and the volume of sales should more than make up for a low percentage royalty.

Proposals and Outlines for Non-Fiction Books

Top Insider Tip...

Your proposal and outline for a non-fiction book is a **selling instrument**.

If you are unable to excite the recipient of your proposal and outline, you are unlikely to be able to excite your young readers.

We'll look at each document in turn.

The Proposal

This is your **offer to the publisher** to write a book on a particular subject for a particular market, and it should contain everything that will enable the publisher to make a decision on whether to accept your offer.

You should date your proposals, and re-date them if you prepare later versions. **It is important that in any discussions with your editor you can be sure you both have the same version in mind.**

It should state immediately below the title what sort of book it is, and the level of reader you are aiming at.

For example:

TITLE

'A How To' book on the basics of playing chess for new players.

Not, you should note, 'for beginners'. Children hate to be labelled beginners, and this single word could put them off the book.

Then you need to say:

- What sort of youngster will read the book, and how many of them there are.

You will have to do a little research on this, but it should not be difficult to find out. **Example:**

'Children start playing chess at age 8. Both sexes play. Players tend to be social classes B and C+, and there are approximately 500,000 of this type of child at any given time.'

Add to this some statistics on the percentage increase in the membership of junior chess clubs over the last 5 years, and you have provided the **evidence that a good market exists for chess books.**

You also make a brief (and accurate) statement about other books on the subject. Say what you think they are missing and how your book will have the marketing edge. Perhaps they do not cover the new competitive opportunities for eight year olds, or perhaps they do not start at the very beginning and go to the competitive level that your book does.

Example of a good selling point statement:

'This book covers ground that currently requires the purchase of two or more books.'

It is a good idea to indicate the price of the competing books, as this will allow the publisher's marketing people to consider how to price your book. **Don't tell them how much your book should cost, as they might take offence at this.**

Finally you should say how you have structured the book and make a brief suggestion on what illustrations you think they will need.

For example, the chess book would be in three parts (as I covered earlier on):

- An introduction to the game, with explanations of how each piece is allowed to move.
- A sequence of games of increasing difficulty.
- Information on the competitive scene.

The whole of this proposal should take no more than two pages.

The Outline

This consists of:

- Details of the contents of the book.
- In the order in which you will present them.





The normal procedure is to lay it out in chapter order, with the chapter heading in bold type or underlined, and a few words describing each paragraph, each of these separated by a semi-colon.

For example, the outline for the chess book would say:

Chapter One. Introduction. Chess is a type of war game; object to capture other player's 'army'; origins of game; some famous players.

Chapter Two. Basic Moves. Pawns; Castles; Knights; Bishops; Queen; King.

You must do this, in equal detail, for all the chapters. Leaving any of them blank, or with only one sub-heading is akin to saying, "I suppose I should do a bit on this, but I haven't worked out yet whether there's anything worth saying. Perhaps I'll find it when I start researching".

It doesn't matter too much if the final version of the book is different to the outline, as long as it is along the same general lines. **Editors are fully aware that detailed research may throw a different light on certain aspects of the subject, and that you may want to change the contents of some chapters or add new ones.**

They will want to know:

- How you will tackle the research.

So you should include a section at the end to show what resources are available. This could include a list of books, the fact that you have an invitation to use a professional body's library, and a statement of your intention to interview key people.

They will also want to know:

- What you intend to include in the way of 'back matter'.


The term 'back matter' includes:

- Indexes.
- A list of further reading or a bibliography.
- A list of useful addresses.
- Sources of material which interested youngsters and their teachers can obtain if they want to investigate the subject further.

Publishers' Specific Formats

If your book is an educational book, do find out before you prepare your outline whether your chosen publisher has a preferred format.

The higher the level of education the more likely it is that the publisher has a



rigid house-style.

This will include:

- Layout.
- Paragraphs.
- Numbering of Chapters.
- Indexes .
- Illustrations.

This style will apply to outlines as well as the finished book.

At the beginning you should include a couple of paragraphs of pure 'selling' text describing what the book aims to do.

If you get it right, it will not only clinch the sale for you, but it will also form the 'blurb' for the jacket.

And that, very often, is the basis of what the book reviewers say in their columns. **Yes, that's right - you can write your own reviews!**

The Covering Letter

Your covering letter should be ideally one page, and certainly no more than two pages.


It should state that you enclose a proposal for a book on whatever subject, together with an outline and sample chapters.

The second paragraph should include a summary of the outline in a single sentence, for example: 'a complete guide for young chess players of all levels, in three parts covering the basic moves, some sample games, and information on competitions.'

It should state that your book will fill such-and-such gap in a growing market.

You should **briefly state your qualifications for writing the book**, for example: "I was school junior chess champion in 1975 and continue to play competitively for my county". If you have a track record of publications you should mention it here, for example you might say: "I have been writing a chess column for the Blanktown Argus since 1990", or "I enclose a list of my publications, which you will see includes a book for Bloggs Publishers on Board Games for Juniors".

If your book is to be heavily illustrated, and you have a good selection of either publishable photographs or other pictures that can be used as reference



material for an artist, mention this. Do not send original photographs at this stage, but you could send photo-copies of a few to indicate their quality and subject matter.

Top Insider Tip...

Everything you send should have your name and address and the title of your book on each page. It is almost certain that the various items will get separated, as different parts go to different levels of decision maker throughout the publisher's office.

Common Mistakes

Offering Your First Non-Fiction Book to a Big Publisher

Many beginner writers, when they are thinking of doing a non-fiction book, don't go far enough in their market research. They concentrate on the big publishers, seduced by the glossy presentation, and fail to notice the smaller publishers.

Yet it is far easier to persuade a small publisher that a book is viable. Since most of them have minimal staff, and are often managed by the majority shareholders, you do not have the task of persuading several different layers of management that your book will be profitable. And because the operation is small, and usually very tightly run, their overheads are usually much lower than the 'big boys'.

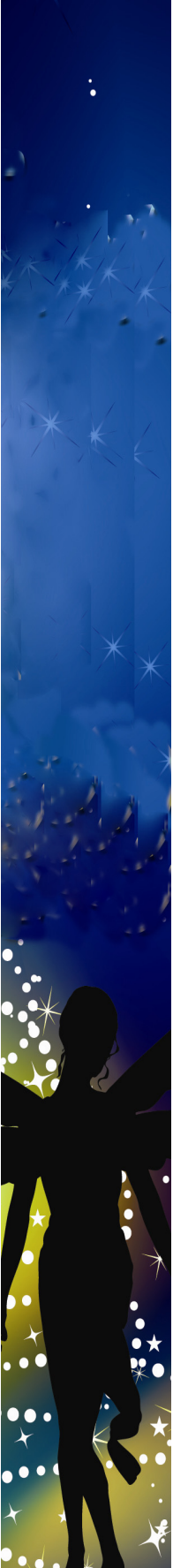
Royalties

They are also more likely to pay you on the royalty basis than the flat fee basis that the major publishers offer. That means that you could, over time, earn more from the book. Finally, they are much more likely to take on a new writer than the bigger publishing houses in this field.

Because of the expensive resources that each book ties up, the big publishers reason that they cannot afford to gamble on the professionalism of an unknown writer. They prefer to use a writer who has a track record, so that they can be sure of getting the right words delivered on time, without the need for time-consuming re-writes.

If you were a boxer, you would not expect your first fight to be for the World Heavyweight Championship. You would be content to start at a much lower level, and the same thing applies to non-fiction publishing.

So, for your first few books, be content with smaller publishers, who will nurture your talent and be patient with you while you learn the finer points of this new trade.



If you follow these guidelines, you could soon be earning good money from writing. And if you come up with a non-fiction best-seller you could become another of the growing bank of millionaire writers of children's books.

Good luck and I'll see you next month, for the last lesson.

Scott Thornton