How to Become a Millionaire Children's Author

LESSON SEVEN

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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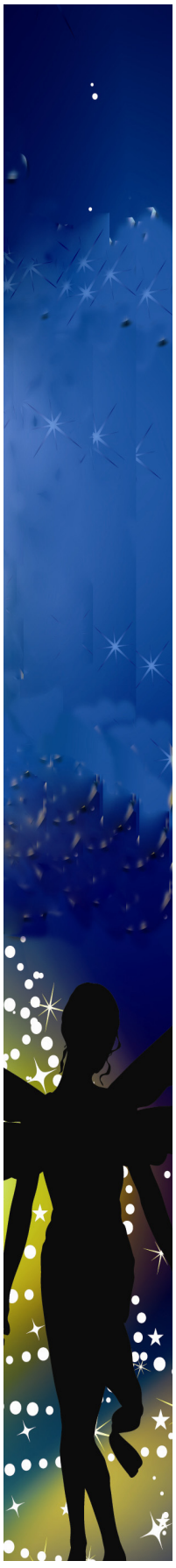


Welcome and a huge ‘Thank You’ for purchasing ‘Lesson Seven’ of the twelve part course, ‘How to Become a Millionaire Children’s Author’.

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 for the Under Sevens

Writing books for very young children is an area that is extremely attractive. This is partly because the books themselves are so appealing and partly because their simple text gives them the *appearance* of being easy to write.

Alas, this appearance is deceptive! The simplicity of text which makes them easy to read is the result of painstaking writing and a deep understanding of the purpose of these books and the abilities of the children reading them. Besides entertaining their readers and helping them to understand the world in which they are growing up, books for young children have to help them to **learn to read** and also **encourage them to read.**

This should not put you off. Like all the other areas of writing for children, once you understand the general principles and have mastered the knack of choosing and using words in the right way, you will find it comparatively easy.

The Rewards

It is also extremely rewarding. The books sell for small amounts and you will have to share the usual royalty percentage with the illustrator (all books for this age group are lavishly illustrated). On the other hand, if you look at it from a '£'s per 1000 words' basis, it could be the best paid writing work you ever do - and it's all good experience.

No professional writer can afford to scorn any market, particularly if it has the potential to increase theirr exposure and keep the money rolling in.

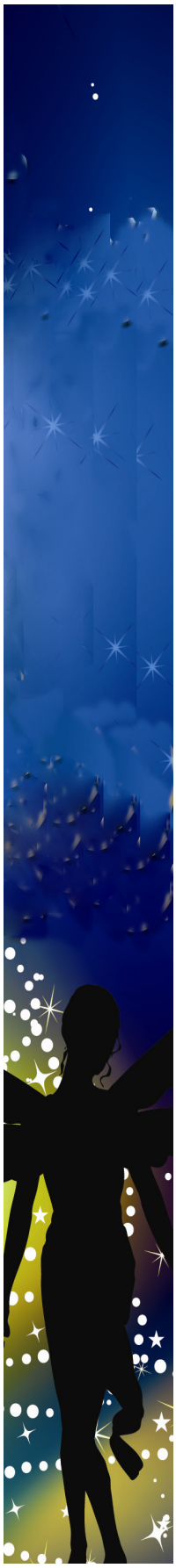
It does help, when you are writing for very young children, to know the processes by which they learn to read and acquire a vocabulary. So before we go on to look at the specific areas of this market, let's start by considering these processes and how they relate to your task as a writer.

The Development of Language

Stage One - The early months of a baby's life

Babies are very much **visually** orientated. They have little in the way of motor skills, but they recognise faces and seem to accept a flat representation of a smile with the dots for eyes above it.

By nine months, most children have enough motor skills to point at things, including pictures, and they can be introduced to rag and board books. In case



you hadn't already guessed it, the reason that baby books are made from rag or board is because babies are really destructive and have a tendency to eat everything in sight! A normal paper book would not last five minutes. Those of you who have had young children will know the truth of this.

From this age until 3 years old, if their parents are prepared to spend the time with them, toddlers are able to learn what a book is for, and grasp the concept of 'reading' a book from the front to the back and from left to right - or vice versa, depending on the culture.

Books for this age group are often designed to aid motor skill development, and will have, for example, half-pages that turn to give a gradually changing picture of a child getting dressed to go out. Some are made as jigsaw puzzles or even in the same way as Christmas decorations so that they open up into a ball. Some are even printed on 'chew-proof' paper!

Because of their specialised nature, these books are often written by in-house staff working full-time for the publishers. These writers usually have a degree in child psychology. **There are almost no opportunities for free-lance writers to produce these books for toddlers.**

Stage Two - From About 3 Years on

Children can now cope with shared reading where the parents point to each word as they read it. It is important that the reader pauses frequently, pointing to the next word, to ask the child to **guess what the word is**. This is what makes a child realise that reading is a way of finding meaning.

For this reason many of these shared reading books are written and designed so that the answer to the guess isn't given away by the picture until you turn the page. For example, the picture might show a dog peering round a door with a bone in his mouth, but his back end hidden. The text would say "This is Jane's dog. His name is Wagger. Wagger has got a long tail." Then you turn the page to see a very long tail.

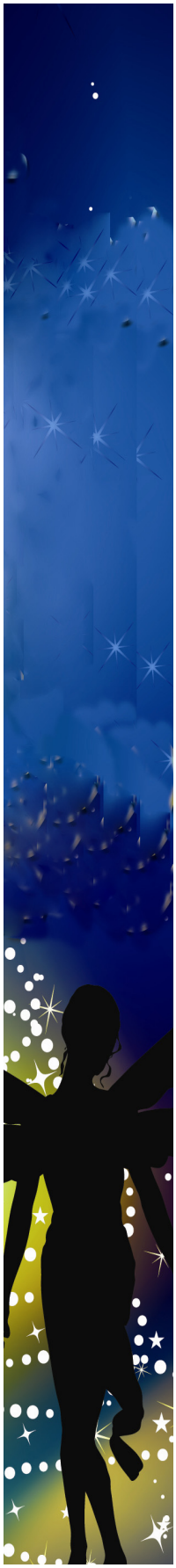
Language

At this age, children are developing what linguists call a LAD (Language Acquisition Device) which allows them to acquire both **vocabulary (**words and their meanings) and **syntax or grammar rules** (the 'correct' way to put these words together to form sentences).

If the child lives in Germany, he or she will learn that the 'correct' way to construct the sentence. **Here are two examples of syntax:**

"I to the shops am going." (In German, of course!)

The English speaking child will learn that the 'correct' way is to say: "I am going to the shops".



You will often find, when talking to such young children, that they will say things that are ungrammatical but which have their own logic, such as "I seed two cowses in the field."

They have worked out for themselves that an 'ed' on the end of *most* words means past tense, and that 'es' or ‘s’ means plural. (The wise adult does not comment that the sentence is wrong, but supplies LASS (Language Acquisition Support System) by saying "Oh, you saw two *cows*, did you?", thus supplying the correct version whilst keeping the conversation going.

You have probably realised that our language is far from logical. Thus children learn to apply certain common rules first, and then they gradually correct their speech by mimicking the **irregular** or unusual endings. Thus, "I want" translates to "I wanted" in the past tense. This is common, to add 'ed' for the past tense. But consider these strange and irregular verbs:

"I go" - "I **went**".

"I run" - "I **ran**".

"I see" - "I **saw**".

"I eat" - "I **ate**".

There are no rules here! What on earth must a small child make of these irregularities?

Word Shapes

Many children also learn to recognise words by their **shape.** This accounts for what seem to be wild guesses at meanings, if the word is **the same shape** as one they know.

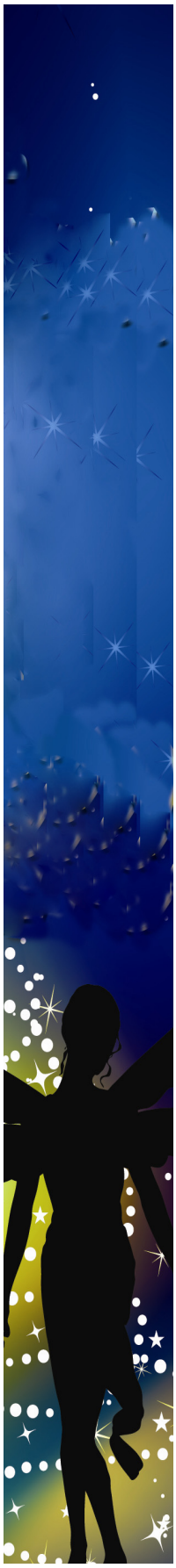
For instance, 'cat', 'mat', 'mad, and 'cod' are all short words with a tall bit sticking up at the end; 'elephant' on the other hand, has a shape of ups and downs that it shares with few other words likely to be met in toddler's books.

It is not unusual for a child to be able to recognise the word 'elephant' and struggle over a far shorter word such as 'house'. So you also need to be careful when choosing words to go at the end of sentences, for a child who guesses wrong too often is soon going to go off the whole idea of reading.

Stage 3 - Age 4 and Upwards

From four years old, the average child has grasped the concept of the alphabet and how words are made up of letters, and from then until about six, they can be coaxed to actually read for themselves with games and the "I'll read a bit, then you read a bit" technique.

At this age their vocabulary starts to grow quickly. By the age of five, the average child has a working knowledge of about 2000 words, but will only use about 700 in normal conversation. This makes adults think they only understand those 700 words, which can lead to some very restricted



conversations and writing.

So when you are writing for young children, never forget that they **understand** considerably more words than they use, otherwise your stories run the risk of sounding patronising and they will not encourage children to learn to read for themselves.

Linking Technical Factors and Age Requirements

I have already mentioned that all books for young children are **picture books**. You should therefore be aware that these books are restricted by **technical factors relating to their physical production.** This is governed by the printing and folding processes.

Books are not put together as individual pages or pairs of pages, but as a **series** of standard sized, large sheets of paper which are folded in half as many times as is required for the size of book.

Here's the format:

- The first fold gives 4 pages.
- The second fold gives 8 pages.
- If there is a third fold, it gives 16 pages, which is often the limit.

So books are made up of multiples of 8 pages.

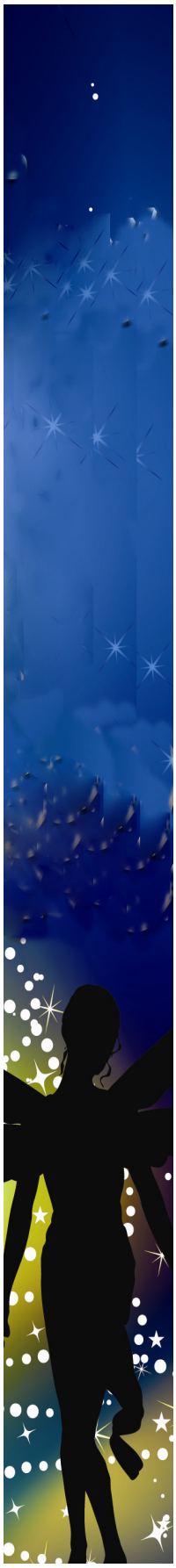
The whole book will consist of:

- 16, 24, 32, 48, or 64 pages.
- At least 2 of these pages will be taken up with titles, leaving you with 14, 22, 30, 46 or 62 pages for pictures and text.

Sometimes the pictures need to extend over two pages, and this is called a 'double spread'. If you need these (for example your story might be about a diplodocus who needs to stretch her neck and tail at the same time) remember that she will have to do this on an **even and an odd numbered pair of pages,** e.g. 4 and 5. Odd numbered pages are always right hand pages.

Unless you have some special requirement like this, you need not worry unduly about the layout of the pages, but you do need to be able to 'see' your story in picture form. Tony Bradman says that he sees a picture book as being like a series of 'stills' from a film; each picture representing an **emotional highlight.**

This doesn't mean that you should tell the publishers exactly what the pictures should be, or attempt to draw them yourself. Unless you are a trained graphic artist you are unlikely to be able to supply the sort of pictures that are needed, and most publishers prefer to use artists from their own 'stable'.



The most you should do when you submit your manuscript is **to list, on a separate sheet of paper to the text, an indication of how you visualise each picture.**

For example:

"Pages 4 and 5 as a double spread, showing Dippy with her neck and tail out-stretched. She looks puzzled."

The rest of your manuscript should consist of:

- A title page, as usual.
- A sheet containing a brief summary of the concept, especially if there is some irony involved (for example, a child thinks he is small because everything around him is bigger than he is, but he turns out to be the child of giants).
- And one or more sheets with the text.

Don't present the text as one sheet per page of book. On the first read-through, editors will want to see how the story flows, and it's easier to do this on one or two sheets of paper. So just **indicate the page or spread number on the left and type the text on the right.** There should be about the same amount of text on each page.

Adding Suspense

If you want to introduce an element of suspense, the **text for the odd page should end with a cliff-hanger**.

Example:

"and down the hole there was a ..."

Apart from these cliff-hangers, each spread should be complete in itself, and the text should invite a series of pictures, each of which is different.

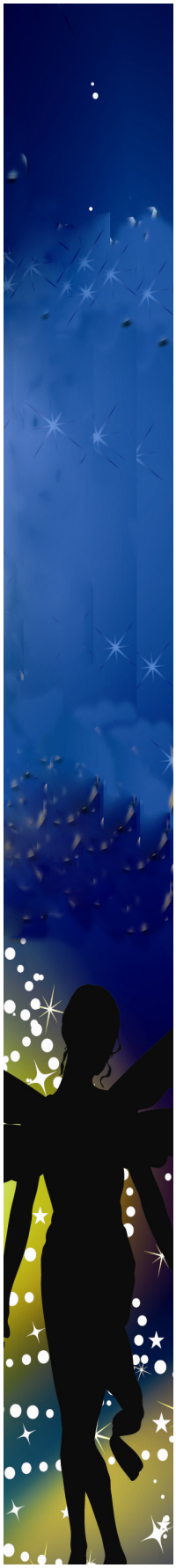
A good example of this is **Babette Cole's, 'The Trouble With Uncle'** (Heinnemann). **This book consists of:**

- 13 double spreads.
- A final single page.
- A single title page.

Although the words are simple, the **pictures are lively and witty, and they carry more than half the story**, as they should.

Spread One

This tells us, **"The trouble with Uncle is...**
He doesn't just play around with boats," and the picture shows Uncle, in



yellow water-proof trousers and boots, with a radio-controlled boat ramming all the other boats on the pond, while his parrot sits on his shoulder and the ship's cat, complete with eye-patch, looks on.

Spread Two

This tells us that Uncle is a pirate, and that his boat doesn't fit in at the marina.

Spread Three

This tells us that Uncle doesn't fit in at the yacht club.

He then goes off on a treasure hunt, rescues a film star, and meets a mermaid. The text of the whole thing is **less than 150 words,** but the pictures of Uncle creating havoc wherever he goes fills the whole book with excitement.

Most picture books for young children have this small number of words, and if the book is for toddlers, it may be even less. **Jan Omerod's 'Dad's Back'** (Walker), which is part of a dual series called 'Dad and Me' and 'Mum and Me', has a text of only **29 words, in 8 spreads**. Dad is back from shopping to greet his toddler and play with him on the floor.

For slightly older children**, 'In My Garden'**, by **Carol Thompson** (Julia MacRae) tells of all the things that can be found in a garden, **in 8 spreads** of **about 10 words per page**. The pictures, featuring a delightful pig and his frog friend, are a mixture of **between one and four to a page**.

Both these books fulfil the purpose of showing the child 'reader' some of the things that can be encountered in the world. They do it without swamping the child with too many facts on each page, and they allow the adult who is reading the book to expand on the pictures or compare them with similar items at home.

Familiar Topics

It is important that the topics are those which the young child will find familiar.

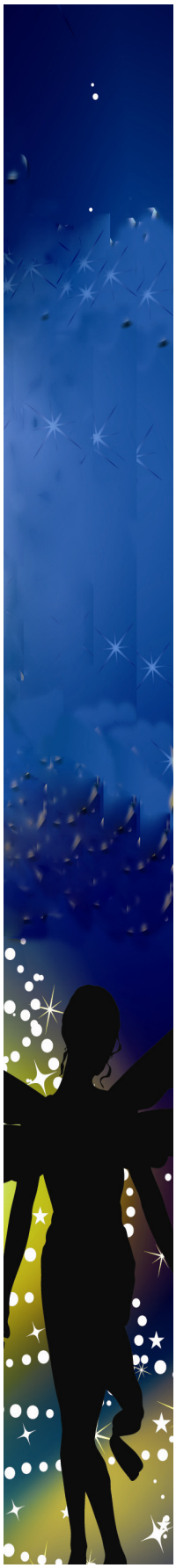
Examples:

- A garden.
- Dad's scarf and gloves.
- A cat or small dog.

Imaginary characters, like fairies and dragons, **are less popular with toddlers than older children**.

What toddlers do like, as well as familiar things, is a sequence of events. Examples:

- A journey with its changes of scene.



- The passing of time during the day, which can help the child to feel secure in a well-ordered world.

The syntax in books for toddlers needs to be very simple. This doesn't mean using words of only one syllable; three syllable words, like 'ladybird' or 'elephant' are all right, because they are names of familiar things, but you must keep **the sentence structure simple.**

'In My Garden' is excellent for this.
Here's a part of the book analysed:

- It starts "In my garden I can find all sorts of things", and then gives a simple list of four items.
- Next it introduces a new idea: the use of the word 'to': "I have gloves to keep my hands clean, a hat to keep off the sun", etc, so the child sees that some of the things in the garden are there for a purpose.

None of the sentences are any more complex, but the reader has learnt an important grammatical lesson.

Research shows that many children who have difficulty in learning to read at school have never realised that the 'function' words such as to, so, of, etc, even exist, let alone know what their function is. These children rely on **context** to get the meaning of what is being said to them, and use gestures to get their meaning across to others.

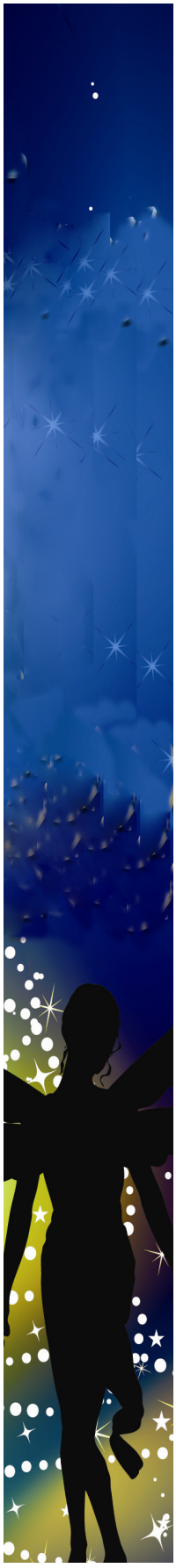
This is why it is important to introduce the concept of such words in small doses rather than crowd several into one short book.

Reading Schemes

For this reason you should study the books produced for structured reading schemes. Typical of these are the series produced by Ladybird. They include the **'Say the Sounds' s**eries, which introduces sets of sounds in each of 8 books. The early books in this series introduce the most commonly used sounds, with less common sounds in later books, e.g. 'j', 'u', and 'y' in Book 7 and 'x' and 'z' in Book 8.

The other major series produced by **Ladybird** is **'Key Words'**, where 36 graded books introduce new words in each book. At level one, there are 16 key words in each book, with higher levels introducing more words until a total of 2000 have been introduced.

As a free-lance, you are unlikely to be accepted as a writer for such schemes. However, teachers have the freedom to use their own choice of books, with most **choosing a mixture of these structured series and other books produced by non-specialist publishers.** Your books are more likely to be accepted if you develop and use a knowledge of the content of these schemes.



‘The Reading Bug…And how to help your child catch it’ by **Paul Jennings** (Penguin ISBN 0141318406), contains lots of practical advice for helping children learn to love books with selected booklists for all ages.

For you, as a writer, it gives invaluable insight into the language levels and the stories that are published for children.

Picture book editors put a high emphasis on the choice of words. They also want to avoid the use of words that are difficult to pronounce and thus discourage children from reading. For example, one child was heard to struggle over what she pronounced as "Det-er-min-ded" in a book that should have used an alternative word or phrase such as "made up his mind".

Editors are also aware of the young child's tendency to take phrases literally, and often ask for rewrites to avoid ambiguity.

Example of ambiguous sentences:

‘He ate the whole plate of cakes’. Even rendered more correctly as ‘plateful of cakes’, a child might think this meant the plate was eaten as well.

Example of how to correct those ambiguous sentences:

‘He ate all the cakes on the plate,’ or ‘There were six cakes on the plate and he ate them all’.

Avoid the Abstract

Remember when writing for very young children that their world has **boundaries imposed by their size.** When you are less than two feet tall, things that adults take for granted, like tables or shop counters are very high to you. For the same reason you cannot see very far.

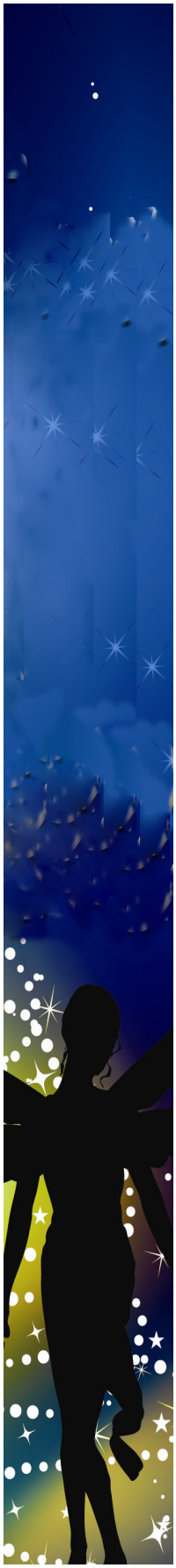
Because of this, **small children don't have much concept of distance**, and their only way to measure time is by the regular events in their day.

So rather than write, ‘They stayed in the park for a long time’ (or worse, ‘They stayed in the park for three hours’) you should write ‘They stayed in the park until tea-time’.

This not only avoids using abstract concepts like 'a long time' or 'a long way', but introduces the familiar concept of tea-time.

Repetition

Children find great reassurance in familiar things, which is why many of them like to have the same story read to them repeatedly. Woe betide the adult reader who loses concentration and gets a word wrong!



They also like repetition in books. A good example of this is **'Mr Gumpy's Outing'** by **John Burningham** (Jonathon Cape). Mr Gumpy goes out in his boat, meeting a succession of children and animals as he goes. Each asks if they can come, and he says they can as long as they don't muck about. Inevitably an argument breaks out, the boat is swamped and everyone gets wet.

Another example of repetition, this time in words, is **'In a Dark Dark Wood'** (Arnold-Wheaton). This is a traditional rhyme that repeats its basic form of words and also each new introduction as it progresses through the wood to a house, inside and upstairs to a room where there is a cupboard containing a box in which there is a splendid surprise. It has a front page, 8 pairs of pages, and a back page with the surprise contents of the box.

The front page shows a wood and says "In a dark, dark wood", then each spread says, on the even page, "there was a dar, dark path" and on the odd page "and up that dark, dark path", then you turn over to find "there was a dark, dark house" and so on.

Part of the fun with such repetition of key words or phrases is that the listener can chant them along with the reader, in the same way that an adult audience will join in with the chorus of a song.

So look for key phrases which you can use. For example, in a story of a walk on a rainy day, the main character might encounter a series of animals who wade through puddles or small streams, each one going "Splish, splash, splosh". For this purpose, you can even make up your own words to describe sounds.

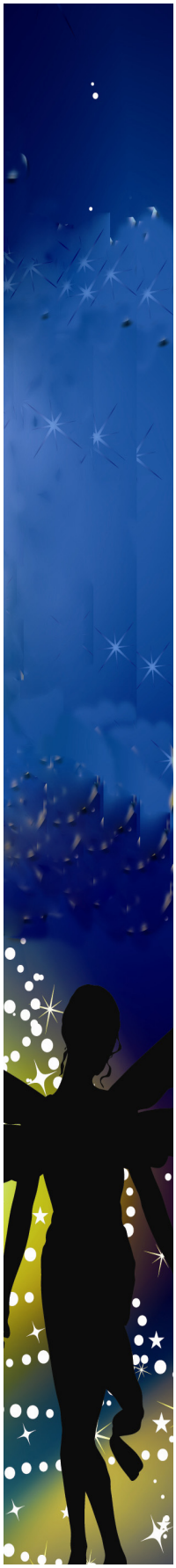
Best of all are onomatopoeic words. For example, in **Elfrida Vipont's 'The Elephant and the Bad Baby'** (Hamish Hamilton), the elephant goes "Rumpeta, rumpeta, rumpeta" as it runs; and in **Beatrix Potter's 'Tom Kitten'** (Frederick Warne) the Puddle Ducks go "Pit pat paddle pat, pit pat waddle pat".

Such repeated words, and sentences like "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" have a rhythm like rocking. They are easily memorable, and you will often hear a child repeating them quietly when they are on their own.

You can probably remember your own favourites, even now. The discovery that such delights reside in books is one of the major things that encourage children to learn to read for themselves.

The Over-Fives

Once they are over 5 years old, children can cope with more demanding stories. They still need to be read to although more advanced children, (usually those whose parents have taken the trouble to work at it with them) can read



short books for themselves with a little help. The books themselves will often have a picture on every page, but the amount of **text increases from about 10 words per page to about 30 words per page.**

In **'The Big Concrete Lorry'** by **Shirley Hughes** (Walker), there are **20 to 30 words per page, on 12 spreads**. The family is cramped in their house, so they decide to build an extension. Two sets of father and son (one white, one Indian) come and help to dig the foundations, then have to be called back to help in a hurry when the big concrete lorry dumps a pile of quick-setting ready-mixed concrete outside the house in the street.

In **'Two Can Toucan'** by **David McKee** (Andersen Press), there are about **30 words per spread, on 12 spreads.** The hero, a large black bird with no name, leaves the jungle to seek his fortune. In the city, he gets a job carrying tins of paint. He is able to carry two cans at a time, so they call him Two Can, then he tries to carry three cans, but falls down stairs and gets red, white, and yellow paint on him. Now he is marked like the toucan we know, and he goes home with his new name.

For slightly older children, **'War and Peas'** by **Michael Foreman** (Picture Puffin) has text that varies **from 30 words to 120 words per spread, on 13 spreads and one final page**. Food is scarce in King Lion's country and his greedy neighbour the Fat King refuses to help him, even though his own people have more than enough to eat. War is declared.

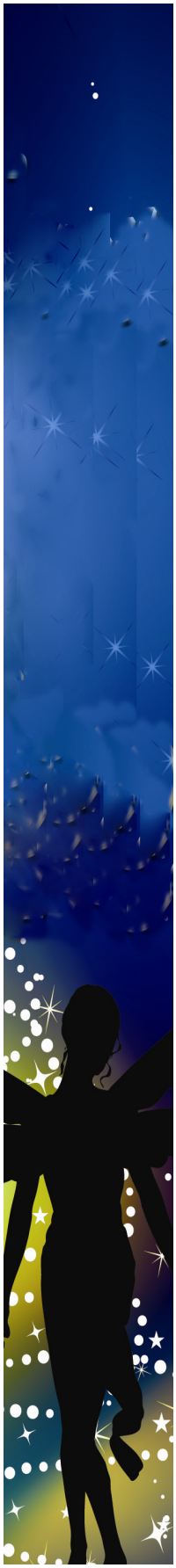
'Pedro and the Singing Dog', by **Val Biro,** in Hodder & Stoughton's 'Hedgehogs' series, which they **describe as being 'a step up from picture books',** still has pictures in double spreads, but **has about 120 words per spread**. Set in Mexico, with Pedro wearing an enormous hat, no-one wants to hear him play his banjo because he is too bad a player. A dog comes along and 'sings' when he plays in the town square, until he buys a book to learn how to play properly.

In a slightly different vein, **'Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain'** by **Verna Aardema** (Picturemac) is a modern version of a traditional tale from Kenya. Written in the accumulating style of the old favourite 'This is the House That Jack Built', each spread adds a few more lines to that which has gone before, until the whole rhyme is shown on the last spread. The rhythm is compelling, and the rhymes are simple, telling us about Ki-pat, the Masai herd boy:

"who watched his herd
As he stood on one leg
like the big stork bird,"

and

"This is the arrow
Ki-pat put together,
With a slender stick
and an eagle feather,"



Publishers seem to go through phases of enthusiasm for stories in rhyme. Before embarking on a rhyming story yourself do check which, if any, publishers are currently doing them.

Children love rhymes, adults who read to them love rhymes and editors, if asked about their personal preferences, also love rhymes. But there is a snag. **RHYMES don't translate into other languages without complete re-writes**, so they are restricted to sales in ENGLISH speaking countries.

Consider the Worldwide Potential

These days, the profitability of children's books is often dependent upon co-editions overseas. Foreign language editions should ideally, involve no more than simple translations rather than complete re-writes.

Each language will need its own re-write, and since this will probably be arranged by the overseas publisher they will want to pay correspondingly less for the book and your share of the proceeds will be much smaller.

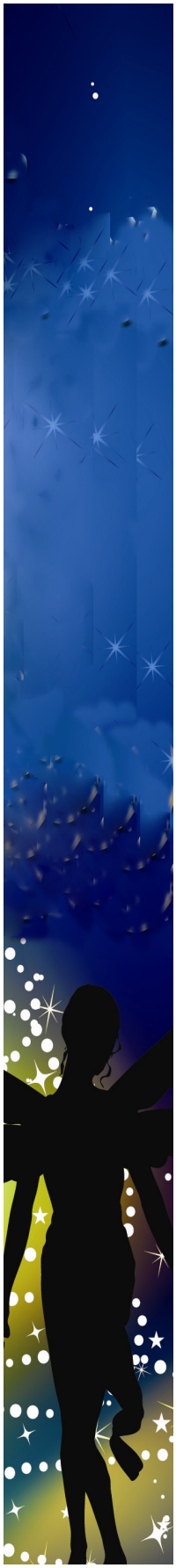
For the same reason of co-editions, **publishers will be happier if your characters and situations are also translatable.**

For example, we are one of the few countries where milk is still delivered to the door. It certainly is not in America, and since American publishers do not want to change the book by adding an explanation of this curious English practice, you would be wise not to include the simple domestic tasks of fetching in the milk or putting empty bottles on the doorstep.

Worldwide Sales and Political Correctness

Political correctness applies at this age-level too. **Characters must include an ethnic mix,** and whilst it is all right for white people to be portrayed as dim or bad, it is not permissible for anyone else to be depicted in this way! Especially that favourite baddy, the Red Indian in cowboy stories. (You have to call them Native Americans now.)

Good examples of multi-cultural books are **Tony Bradman's 'Wait and See'** (Methuen) where the heroine Jo (who like her parents, is Afro-Caribbean) goes shopping with her mother and meets Mrs Tomaselli, Mr Singh, and Mrs Brown; and **'Metalmiss'** by **Linda Pitt** (Red Fox). This story is about a robot teacher, whose class includes children named Billy, Harry, Holly, Garry, Norma, and Rashid. Rashid comes up with a couple of good ideas, but is otherwise only singled out when Metalmiss's language skills are mentioned. Rashid asks if she speaks his language, and she replies that she can, but doesn't need to as his English is so good.



Using Animals

You can avoid all the problems associated with human 'baddies' by using animals as characters. No-one can point a politically correct finger at you if you portray a dog as being stupid, a fox as sly, or an elephant as naughty - not *yet*, anyway! Whilst there is a school of thought that wonders how appropriate animal characters are in a world where most children are raised in cities, there can be no doubt they are vastly popular with children.

The publishing house, Usborne produce a series of Phonics Readers books for age 2+ which are animal stories. Because the reader age is so young, the animals are not given any serious vices. In **'Big pig on a dig'**, by **Phil Roxbee Cox and Stephen Cartwright**, the big pig is happy when he digs for gold. However, when he discovers the treasure map he found was a trick played on him by the Fat Cat, the big pig says, "Digging is fun too!"

Some of the other titles in this series (by the same authors), are: '**Fox on a box'**; '**Ted in a red bed'**; **'Fat cat on a mat'** and **'Shark in the park'**.

As with many other areas of publishing, **fashions change** on how animals should be portrayed. It used to be essential to anthropomorphise animals by dressing them in human clothes and making them behave in human ways. Now many books portray them as living and behaving as their real counterparts do. But there is still a market for the humanised versions if that is what you prefer.

Toys also make good characters, but for PC reasons don't use golliwogs. Also be careful, if you want to use any newly introduced toys, that they do not have trademark restrictions attached to them, e.g. 'Transformers', 'My Little Pony', etc. This might also date your story very quickly, as these toy fashions are transitory.

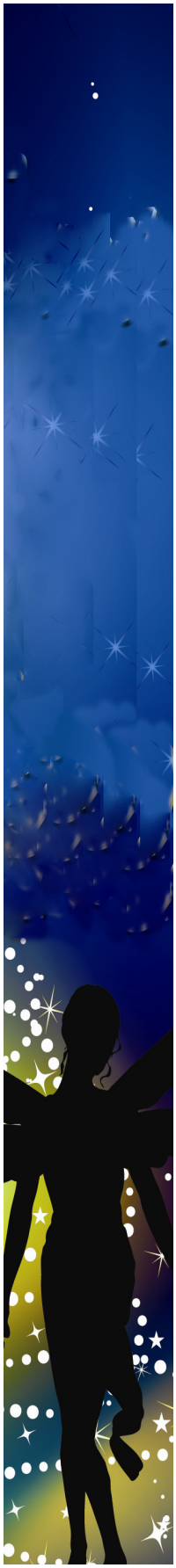
Your really neat story about 'Ninja Turtles' would have been completely unsaleable a mere six months after the craze hit this country. Certainly, 'turtles' were dead in the water (excuse the pun) after just a few months, and **the same applies to all toy fads nowadays.**

Other items also have potential as characters.

Here are some ideas for making characters from items:

- A grumpy bike that hates being ridden.
- A cuckoo-clock bird that decides it wants to be a parrot.
- A china figurine that goes off in search of its long-lost pair-mate.
- The adventures of a wheelbarrow that is stolen by joy-riders.
- A supermarket trolley that runs away.

Once you start thinking along these lines, you will find that the world is full of



potential characters. All that is necessary is that they should be an item which will be **familiar to children**, and that like human child characters, they do not do things which might lead a copying child into danger.

So avoid these taboo actions for your characters:

- Taking sweets from strangers.
- Lighting fires.
- Playing near deep water, railways or dangerous machinery.
- Slipping away from home when parents are not watching.
- Etc!

Otherwise, anything goes, provided you follow the guidelines I've given you. Writing for very young children will allow you **to stretch your imagination in ways other markets do not - and it is tremendous fun!**

Working with Illustrators

Many beginners to writing for children cherish the notion that they will work closely with the illustrators for their books. Some, who are amateur artists, hope to replace the professional illustrators whose style fits in with the publisher's house style.

Both notions are fallacies. The truth is that most publishers feel that someone who is not a trained book illustrator can neither produce the type of artwork they need, nor direct an artist in how to produce it. And the artist is certainly not going to tolerate someone telling them how to do their job.

It is not just a matter of style, but of the techniques needed for print production.

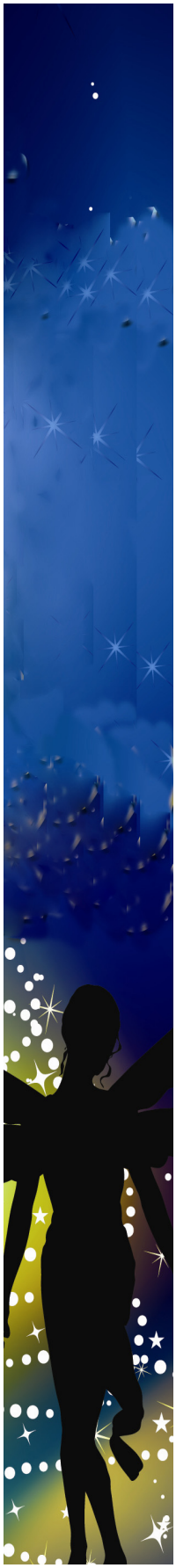
Producing Artwork is a Highly Skilled Process

Colour printing is done in four passes through the machine, with blue, red, yellow, and black ink each laid down in separate passes, with extra passes for varnish, silver or gold.

Preparing artwork for this process needs different skills to those of producing a picture to hang on a wall, and learning these skills is part of the illustrator's training.

One technique that may surprise you is the way in which alterations are done. Alterations or corrections are quite normal on illustrations for non-fiction books, where the illustrations need to be exact; much less so for fiction where the picture is part of the story and a representation of an idea rather than an exact picture of objects, people or other living things.

If the alteration is a very simple one, such as moving a single line on a black and white drawing, the artist will use correcting fluid and redraw the line over



the top of it. But when the alteration would involve lengthy redrawing, such as moving the position of a tennis racquet that is otherwise faultless, they cut out the piece and stick it back on in the correct place.

They do this with coloured art-work too, but only where the piece to be replaced has a 'frame' around it, as it is extremely difficult otherwise to match the colours and impossible to avoid a shadow at the joining point. For example, they could replace a whole face, but not a patch of sky. Even with this technique, colours that are mixed on a palette can be difficult to reproduce, and you don't want to end up with, say, hands of different shades.

For this reason, as well as the requirements of colour printing, **professional illustrators tend to use special inks or paints that come in ready mixed standard shades.** They also try to keep their colour ranges as simple as possible.

You, as an adult, may find the **colour ranges rather basic**, but do not forget that they are intended for children. The sequence in which children learn to recognise things is well documented. Some educational publishers try using photographs in their books for young children,

The publishers will choose whichever printer is offering the best deal, and they could be located anywhere in the world. Spain does a lot of colour printing work, so does the Far East, and prices and availability of work slots changes from week to week.

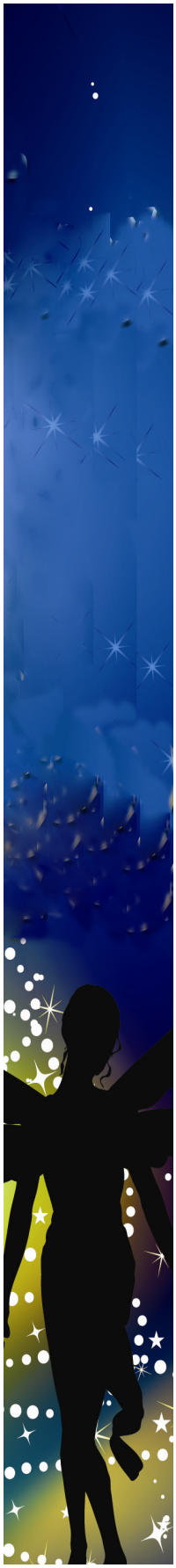
It is usual for publishers to turn down a manuscript sent in by a team of writer and illustrator. However, as always there is the exception to the rule.

Chris Riddell carried out the illustrations for the book, '**Castle Diary…The Journal of Tobias Burgess, Page'** written by **Richard Platt** at the request of the publishers (Walker Books Ltd). However, he teamed up with **Paul Stewart** for the series of '**The Edge Chronicles'** (**'Beyond the Deepwoods' book one of the *Twig Sequence*, is a Corgi Book**) and they presented the manuscripts to the publishers with both text and illustrations.

They have written and illustrated many books together over the years and as mentioned in an earlier lesson, they have a huge following. The skill of Chris Riddell matches any professional illustrator the publishing houses employ – which is obviously **the only reason** this team of writer and illustrator got away with what is not normally acceptable.

So, unless you are a highly skilled illustrator, or know somebody who is and you both want to team up, <u>just concentrate on the text</u>.

It varies tremendously from publisher to publisher, but you do usually get some say in the choice of artist. Not on the basis of your choosing an artist



whose work you like and the publisher engaging that one, but more on the lines of "These are samples of work from artists we frequently use and who we know are reliable. Do you have a preference?" If there are any whose work you really dislike (or really like), now is your chance to say so.

You should already be familiar with the artists used by that publisher, from your market research. It is worth going to a book-shop on your way to the publisher's office to have another look. You will also find that their reception area will have a display of this season's jackets. This will allow you, when asked if you have any preferences, to reply "I'm not that keen on John Thingy's drawings, but I do like Jane Whatsit's picture in such-and-such-title."

Illustrations for Non-fiction Books

The situation on illustrations for non-fiction books is rather different, especially if the book is on a specialised subject on which you are an expert.

For example, a competent artist will easily produce an acceptable drawing of an ordinary pony for an adventure story, but if the book is about 'Saddles and Bridles around the World', even an experienced horse artist will not know what all of them look like.

They will ask you to provide reference material, (ideally photographs) for the artist, and to check the art-work for accuracy and authenticity. They might ask you to meet the artist, or they may send photocopies of the art-work on which you can indicate any necessary corrections, and indicate which parts require labels.

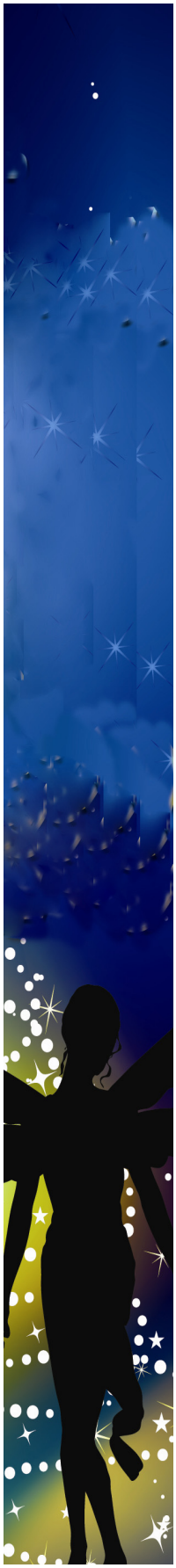
The Front Cover

You will have noticed, during your market research that even books for older children, which have only a few black and white drawings inside, have full colour pictures on the front jacket. The jacket is the term for the loose cover that usually is the same as the book cover on hardback books. Only hardback books have jackets and these days some don’t. So, for ease of writing this next section, I’m just going to allude to front cover, but it also applies to the front jacket.

The front cover of a book matters a great deal to both publishers and the bookshops. It is the most powerful marketing tool and many of the big stores that also stock a limited number of books, make their choices on how much they like the book covers. Publishers have even been known to redesign book covers in order to get the books stocked by a big store.

The Sales Department

You may already have an idea of what you would like to see in the way of a picture on the cover. But unless your idea corresponds with that of the designer, and more importantly, the sales department, you will have to bow to their experience. **The sales representatives rely on the designs to sell your**



books to book-shops, libraries and schools, and they have a very good idea of what attracts both children and the adults who control the purse strings.

If you don't have any firm ideas about illustrations, don't worry. You may think that all writers of picture books have strong ideas on what the pictures should show and how they should show it, but many do not.

It is not essential for you to be able to 'see' a finished picture as you write each spread, as long as you have an idea of what the picture should contain. For example, if your book is about farm animals, you will know that a particular picture should show, say, a confrontation between a chicken and a pig. But you won't necessarily see the chicken's tail feathers standing on end, or the pig's wrinkled nose and how his ears nearly cover his eyes.

That level of visualisation is what being an artist is about. As a *writer*, your business is with words, so relax and wait to be pleasantly surprised at how the artist interprets your words into pictures.

Working with Publishers

People who have never been involved with publishing often have a strange idea of the writer/publisher relationship. They ask you, "Who publishes your books for you?", as though it were you who were in the dominant position and were able to choose from a queue of publishers all hoping that you will grace them with your latest output!

If you are a multi-millionaire writer of international best-sellers, that might be true, but for the average writer, and certainly the beginner, the relationship is the other way round.

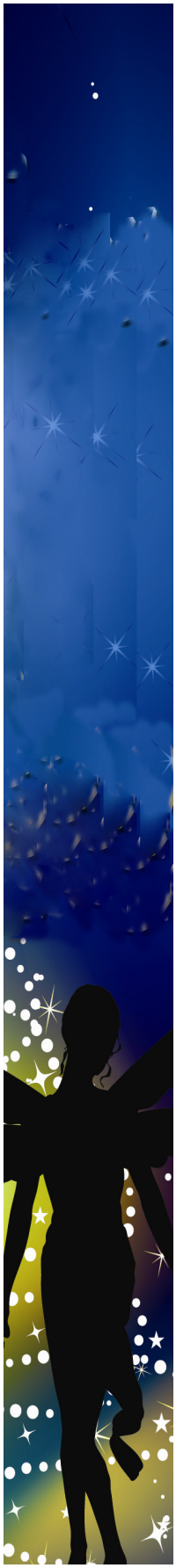
Publishers have the power to decide whether they publish your book or not. **If you are a talented writer you can feel confident that your books will be published, eventually**. But if you prove to be difficult to deal with, opinionated, cantankerous and awkward, then unless you are exceptionally talented, you will find it less easy to get other books published.

Most importantly, in the modern, **competitive** world of publishing, there is little room for the 'precious' writer - someone with an over-inflated sense of their own self importance.

Attitude

In these days of corporate mergers and staff reorganisations, editorial staff change jobs quite frequently, and the reputations of awkward writers spread throughout the publishing world very quickly.

It may be that you are too close to your book to be able to view it objectively. You just have to accept that they have considerably more experience than you, and that they do not suggest changes merely for the mere sake of it. Mostly,



these changes will be for reasons of clarity, or to tidy up discrepancies in the plot, but occasionally they may be for technical reasons.

Practical Solutions

For example, for children who are just starting to read, it is important to select a **type-face** that resembles the way children are taught to write, and for the type to be large enough to be easily read. It is also usual to leave a good space between the lines, as this also makes it easier to read. However, this means that the amount of type that will fit on a page is restricted, and that it may be necessary to split a long word at the end of a line.

Doing this, with the addition of the usual hyphen, is undesirable. It looks untidy and it confuses young readers, so your editor may have to ask you to change a word or two, to make it fit the page. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to change the long word for a shorter one, but that you may have to juggle a little with the whole contents of the page.

Your editor will give you precise details of the problem, and tell you how many characters you have to lose. You normally have to lose these characters above the problem word, or the rest of the text will be pushed out of kilter and may create another, similar, problem later on.

For instance, supposing you write:

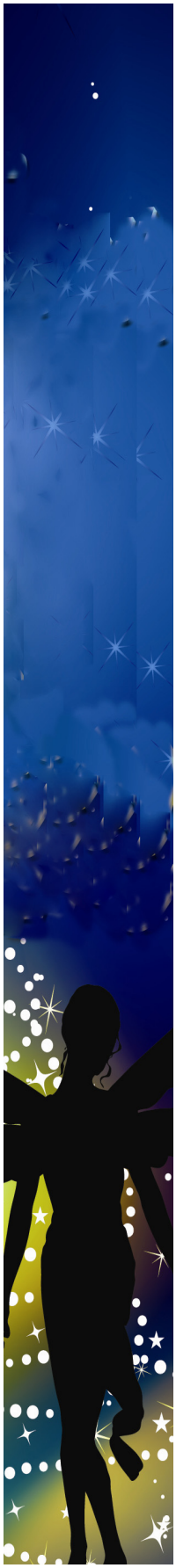
Would you like to meet Dippy? She is a diplodocus and lived a long time ago.

When typeset, it might come out like this:-

Would you like to meet Dippy? She is a diplod-ocus, and she lived a long time ago.

As you can see, the problem appears to be with the word diplodocus. There isn't a lot you can do about that, as the only other possible words are brachiosaurus or dinosaur. Brachiosaurus is even longer than diplodocus, and dinosaur is a generalisation.

So you are going to have to change something else, to lose the offending 3 characters. If you count the characters (including spaces and punctuation marks) you will find that the maximum available for each line is 24 characters.



In this example you may be prepared to drop the concept of 'meeting' Dippy, in which case you could change it to:

This is Dippy. She is a	(24 characters)
diplodocus. She lived a	(24 characters)
long time ago.	(14 characters)

This has changed two sentences, one of which has a comma, into three very short sentences, and makes it more suitable for younger children than the first version. So it would probably be better to retain the 'meeting' idea, and change the question into a simple introduction:

Meet my friend Dippy,	(22 characters)
the diplodocus. She	(20 characters)
lived a long time ago.	(22 characters)

This may seem a pain, to have to fiddle around like this, but it is far better for you to do it, and retain your own 'voice', than for an editor to do it.

Working with Editors

The staffing situation in publishing houses these days may mean that you will not necessarily have the same editor from book to book, but it is rare that you will have a change of editor during the publishing process on any given book.

Your editor may be called 'Sponsoring Editor' or 'Commissioning Editor' or 'Publishing Director' or some other title, depending on the publisher, but it all boils down to the same thing.

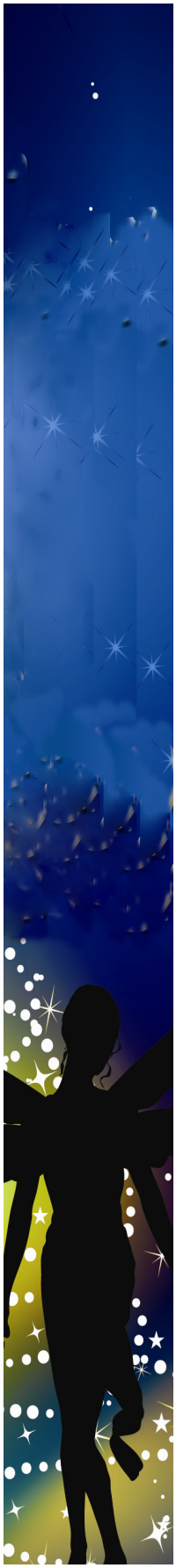
She (most children's book editors are female) will be the person who sees the potential of your manuscript and persuades her colleagues that they should publish it, and she will be your main point of contact throughout the publishing process.

The Offer

Different publishers work in different ways, but what normally happens is that you will receive a letter saying they like your book and want to publish it, and inviting you to visit them for preliminary discussions. If you have an agent the letter will go to the agent who will telephone you with the good news and accompany you on your first visit to the publishers.

There will be a general discussion about timing, which list the book will go in, and about illustrations. Various other people will probably come in to meet you: the designer, somebody from marketing, possibly a copy editor. At some point during the discussions they will 'make an offer', which means that they will say they definitely want to publish the book, subject to their usual terms.

In amongst all these general discussions and comings and goings, your



editor will want to talk in detail about the book itself. It is important that you should trust her judgement and her understanding of your story; and that means that you have to talk it through in detail. There may be passages where her understanding is different from your intention, and once she knows your intentions she will be able to suggest ways in which you can make your meaning clearer for other readers.

She may also have some other suggestions on revisions which will strengthen the plot, and this is the point at which you may need to bite your tongue instead of saying "Oh, but I couldn't change that!"

If you do this too often, she may end up by suggesting that perhaps you might do better with another publisher. It is inevitable that there will be some revision needed, especially with your first book, but such revisions are usually a matter of compromise rather than a total rewrite.

The Expert Team

Remember above everything - these people are **experts** and they **know their market**. This business is one hundred percent about **selling books and making money** and zero percent concerned with your artistic sensibilities and ego!

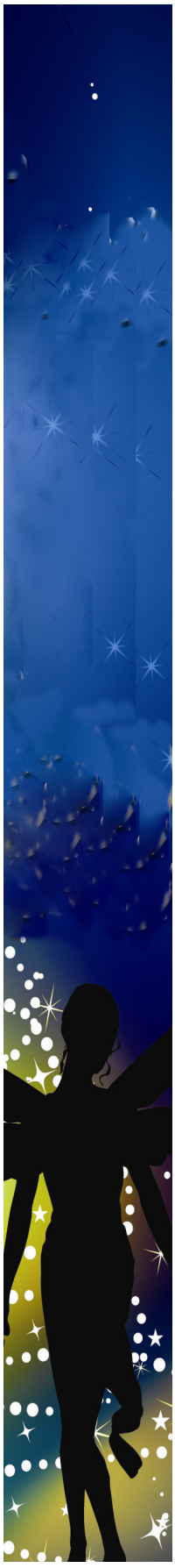
Once you have agreed everything, signed the contract, and delivered the revised manuscript at the agreed time, the book will go to the **copy editor.** She (again, they are usually female) will check for any continuity problems.

Editorial checks are for:

- Continuity problems - a group of youngsters whom you have inadvertently allowed to go out with a dog and come home without him.
- Typographical errors.
- Spelling is consistent (your hero may have changed from Jeff to Geoff).
- Text conforms to house style (single or double quotation marks for dialogue, etc.).
- Glaring faults of grammar and punctuation.

Once she has done this, if there have been any major changes, you will get the manuscript back to approve the changes. If there are only a few corrections necessary, you may be able to approve them over the telephone.

When you are happy with the corrections, it goes to the **designer,** who marks it up for style, and then on to the **printer** who will set the text. They will send you copies of galley proofs, which may not have any indication of page breaks, and you proof-read it for any typographical errors that may have crept in. They usually allow you 14 days to do this.



The graphics are then co-ordinated, and a 'blueprint' of each page is provided for checking. This is your last chance to spot any dreadful errors, and, if it is a non-fiction book and you have to provide an index, to compile that index with page

Marketing Your Book

The page galleys are bound and passed to the **Marketing and Rights** departments. Marketing sends copies to the key book-shop buyers, and library reviewers. Newspaper reviewers will have copies of the finished book.

Meanwhile, the Rights department will be seeking sales of rights to book clubs and overseas publishers. If your characters are potential TV material, they will also approach directors and the heads of various TV companies' children's departments.

Eventually, they will approach paperback publishers, if your book is the sort that will convert to a paperback and is not being published as a paperback original.

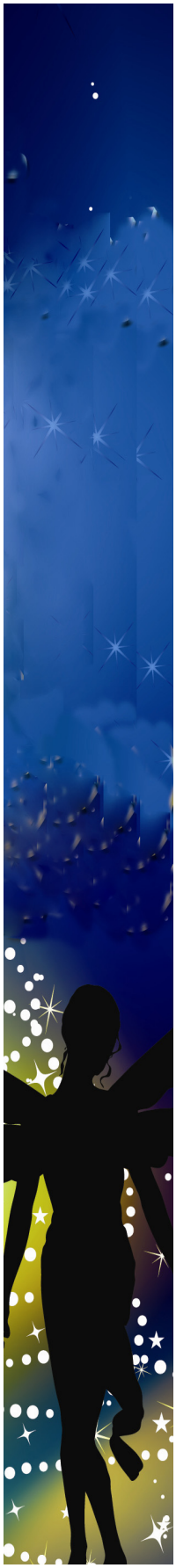
Author's Questionnaire

Early on in this process you will have received a questionnaire to complete from the marketing or sales departments, asking for some biographical details, what inspired you to write this book and create these characters, whether you have a personal connection with the location, and whether you know of anything else which will make your book stand out from all the other books that will be published this year.

It is well worth filling in this form as fully as you can, and sending them a good photograph of yourself. If you go to your local photographic studio, they will only charge about £50 for a photo session. This is a good investment. Everyone likes to know what the writer looks like, and children are no exception.

Publishers and librarians' groups make a tremendous effort to encourage children to read, and there are many events during the year to publicise the general concept of children's books.

They will ask if you want to attend some of these functions and it is well worth going, both to see what is going on in the world of children's books and to meet some enthusiastic young readers. You may well go home with the idea for your next book.



Common Mistakes - Vanity publishing

Many beginner writers, who have tried sending their manuscript to several mainstream publishers without success, fall victim to what the book world calls vanity publishers.

There are two essentials of the publishing business that you should never forget:

- Real publishers have no need to advertise for authors or manuscripts.
- Real publishers do not require their authors to contribute to the costs of publication. (There are a few exceptions, such as books of poems, or specialised scientific or academic books, but none that apply to children's books.)

This is the crux of the matter: that these so-called publishers want you to pay them for 'publishing' your book. The reason we say 'so-called' and put 'publishing' in quotes is that they are not publishers at all, but merely **manufacturers or printers**.

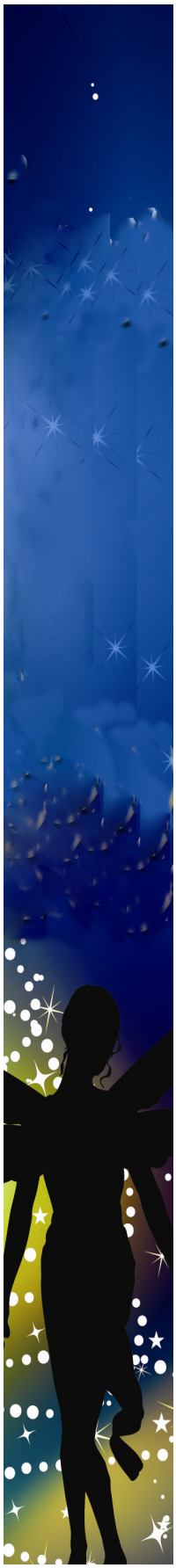
If you send your manuscript, they will write back telling you it is suitable for ‘publication’ and stating their terms. Often they will send a letter full of glowing praise for your wonderful talent - this should be enough to make you instantly suspicious!

Their 'terms' will include *you* paying *them* several thousand pounds, often a five figure sum, and for this they print usually 2000 copies of your book. They will then have a couple of hundred copies bound and sent to you.

And that's it. **They don't market them, or advertise them, or send out review copies**. You will have to do all of that, and you will soon realise that book reviewers will not review your book at all, because these 'publishers' never turn a book down, no matter how bad it may be, and because they do no editing, the reviewers all know that most of what they publish is unreadable rubbish. Not that your book will be, if you have followed our guidelines, but **as soon as the reviewers see the publisher's name, they will assume it is as bad as the rest**.

The Marketing is Your Responsibility

So without the benefit of any reviews, you will have to sell your book yourself. If you are able to sell all the copies you have, and ask for more, they will ask you to pay a **further fee** to have the next batch bound.
When you reach for the small print, you will see that it states that you have to pay binding charges in excess of the first two hundred copies. Some even have the nerve to ask for a **warehouse fee,** and tell you that if it is not paid by a certain date, they will dispose of the stock; often they don't even have the stock, and will only print it if you pay the exorbitant 'warehouse' fee – and sometimes not even then!



Or of course, if you care to pay for delivery, they will send you the un-cut, un-collated and unbound sheets. Bluntly put, once they have locked onto another desperate sucker, **they will endeavour to extract as much money as possible from them.**

There is nothing you can do about it, because it's all in the small print in the contract. The moral of this story is that you should never pay for your books to be published. So do not answer those tempting adverts in the newspaper (Authors Wanted!) no matter how many rejection slips you might have accumulated.

This is not to be confused with self-publishing.

You may elect to self-publish, which means that you will become the publisher yourself, and will pay an ordinary printer to print and bind your book, but this will cost a tiny fraction of what the vanity publishers charge, and you can order as few as 100 copies at a time.

There are however, many specialised self-publishing printers. The best ones know a lot about the book business and can give you advice on more than printing. Some offer editorial services, along with book cover designing etc. You can choose how many of their services you want to use.

The best advice I can give you if you decide to take the self-publishing route is to subscribe to writing magazines, where these specialised printers advertise. For example, 'The Writer's Forum,' and 'The Writing Magazine'.

Many writers of specialised non-fiction books do this, especially if they teach the subject and thus have a captive market. Where children's books are concerned, it is best to stick with the main-stream publishers.

If your book is worth publishing, there is a main-stream publisher who will publish it. It may take you a while to find them, but persevere. The right publisher will be delighted to have you on their list, and will pay you for the privilege.

That's all for this month! Good luck and enjoy your writing until next month when I have more information on how to become a millionaire children's author.

scott Thornton