

For Aspiring Children's Authors

by Jacqueline Jules

www.jacquelinejules.com

1. I want to write a picture book. Do I need to find an illustrator?

No! Publishing houses prefer to find the artist and direct the illustration of the book. You could actually reduce your chances of publication by finding someone to illustrate your text before sending it to a publisher.

2. Where can I find good resources on manuscript format, query letters, and other aspects of the submission process?

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators <http://www.scbwi.org/>
Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books by Harold Underdown
Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market by Alice Pope

3. Do I need an agent?

It is possible to break into children's publishing without an agent. SCBWI conferences provide opportunities to meet editors and hear them speak. [Jacketflap.com](http://www.jacketflap.com) and The Children's Book Council <http://www.cbcbooks.org> have resources on publishers. Finding a publisher requires the same kind of online research needed for finding a job. It can be easier for a first-time author to find success with a mid-sized or small publishing house since big houses often don't read unsolicited submissions.

4. How do I get an agent?

Agents frequently speak at SCBWI conferences. They also write blogs and post their submission guidelines online at agency websites. Online research and social networking are helpful. Check out *Guide to Literary Agents* <http://www.guidetoliteraryagents.com>, Association of Author's Representatives <http://aaronline.org/>, and SCBWI <http://www.scbwi.org/>. Make friends with other writers who can personally recommend agents.

5. Should I join a critique group?

Your family, friends, and students may love your story. But it does not guarantee that an editor will. You need readers who know the children's market and can give you honest advice on how to make your work stronger. Join a critique group and be ready and willing to revise.

6. Should I attend writing workshops or pay for professional critiques?

Writing workshops and professional critiques can be quite valuable, but be sure you are seeking help from someone respected in the industry. The Highlights Foundation www.highlightsfoundation.org/foundationIndex.html offers workshops. So does SCBWI. Vermont College has a low-residency program <http://www.vermontcollege.edu/low-residency-mfa/writing> which has led many children's authors to success. Look in your area for classes at community colleges and centers.

7. What should an aspiring children's author do first?

READ, READ, READ! The best way to break into children's publishing is to be familiar with it. Know what children are reading and publishers are publishing. Find out if there are other books similar to your idea. If so, give your work a fresh angle. If your book is unique, be sure to let editors know. A savvy author knows where his or her work fits in. A savvy author also knows the kinds of books different publishing houses do. It is a waste of everyone's time to send fiction to a house that only publishes nonfiction or to send a picture book to a publisher who only publishes YA novels.

8. Where can I find good resources on the children's book business?

School Library Journal, *Booklist*, *Hornbook*, and *Publisher's Weekly* all have free online newsletters with reviews and news of the children's book business. Libraries, librarians, and independent booksellers are excellent information sources, too.

9. Are children's magazines a good stepping stone to book publication?

Yes! Editors are impressed when they read your work has appeared in established children's magazines such as *Highlights* and *Cricket*. Publishing is like any entertainment business. Expect to work your way up to the top.

10. Can you recommend some good books on the writing process?

Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life by Anne Lamott

Characters and Viewpoint by Orson Scott Card

How I Came to Be a Writer by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books by Uri Shulevitz.

On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King

Word Magic for Writers by Cindy Rogers

The Writer's Book of Hope by Ralph Keyes

Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg

