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Writing for Kids! Q & A

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.

Where can I find resources on manuscript format and query letters?

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI) <http://www.scbwi.org/> and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books* by Harold Underdown <http://www.underdown.org/> are both good places to start. Be sure you are familiar with manuscript format and query etiquette before you submit anything.

Do I need an agent? It is possible to break into children's publishing without an agent. SCBWI <http://www.scbwi.org/> conferences provide opportunities to meet editors and hear them speak. Finding a publisher or an agent requires the same kind of online research and networking needed for finding a job. First-time authors can sometimes find success with a mid-sized or small publishing house. Big publishing houses require an agent for submission.

How do I get an agent? Agents frequently speak at SCBWI conferences. They also write blogs and post their submission guidelines online. Check out the Association of Author's Representatives <http://aaronline.org/>, and SCBWI <http://www.scbwi.org/>. Sign up for the free newsletter <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/index.html> and see who is making deals on *Publisher's Weekly Children's Bookshelf*. Follow each agent's posted guidelines carefully.

Should I join a critique group? Your family, friends, and students may love your story. That does not guarantee 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.

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 offers workshops. So does SCBWI. Vermont College of Fine Arts has a low-residency MFA program which has led many children's authors to success.

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. Learn what 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.

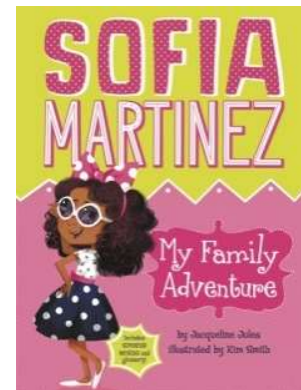
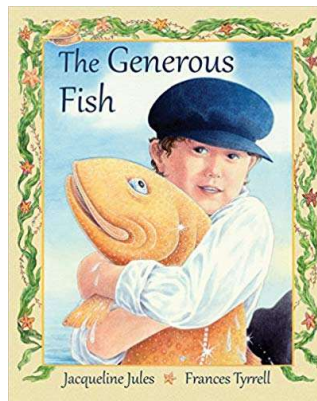
Where can I find good resources on the children's book business?

School Library Journal, *Booklist*, *The Horn Book*, and *Publisher's Weekly Children's Bookshelf* all have reviews and news of the children's book business. Librarians and independent booksellers are excellent information sources, too.

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.

Any other advice? Excellent writing is always the end product of many rewrites. Persistence is key. If this is your dream, keep trying until it comes true. Good luck!



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