

Helpful Tips for Illustrators

How do I begin to learn about picture books? Uri Shulevitz's *Writing with Pictures* is a great resource for learning the basics of children's picture book design, illustration, and printing. In his book and through a picture-book study of your own in a library or bookstore, you will learn these basics:

Most picture books are 32 pages; some are shorter or longer, always in multiples of 8. The title page, dedication page, etc., typically fill the first three or four pages, so in a 32 page picture book the story matter is limited to about 28 pages total. If you are both the writer and the illustrator of a picture-book story, you will be writing and revising your story in tandem with designing a layout of sequenced illustrations. Once you find a publisher, its editor and art director will both weigh in on the final design, font styles, and cover art and title page; they will also provide direction for you to fine-tune both the story and the illustrations.

What is a dummy? A picture book dummy is a working model of your text and illustrations, put together in a bound mock-up. Its purpose is to show an editor that you have thought about the sequence and pacing of your story and that you have created fairly detailed sketches of the illustrations necessary for that story.

How do I construct a dummy? A dummy is a life-size model with detailed sketches that show all the important plot, setting, and character elements of your proposed illustrations. This is the model in which you will demonstrate your skills in visual as well as textual story-telling. The work does not have to be absolutely complete or entirely in color, but it should clearly demonstrate your artistic skills and style as well as your vision of the finished book. The work should be finished enough that the editor and art director can see your skill and intention, but unfinished enough that you show that you are willing to revise your art work as well as your text. Keep in mind that you might end up revising every single page after editorial review. For purposes of the Tassy contest, at least two pages should be in full color, and finished to your satisfaction.

You can place your text onto copies of your sketches (with tape) or you can print copies of each page so that the text appears as one with the illustration. Some artists use computer design programs to construct a dummy. In either case, be sure to leave white space on the left or right of each page where the pages would meet. You can tape one-sided copies together to make double-sided pages, as in a real picture book. Have a few copies made in case you decide to submit to more than one publisher or enter more than one contest – or in case of loss or damage.

How do I submit to the Tassy Walden Award competition? Entries to the *Tassy Walden Award for New Voices in Children's Literature* MUST adhere to the following submission requirements. Entries not following these guidelines will be returned by the submissions committee and will not be seen by the judges. *No exceptions will be made:*

Text: Please submit your picture book text separately from (but along with) your book dummy. This text-only manuscript should be double-spaced, in 12-point black type, with ample margins, on one side only of 8 ½ x 11 white paper. Please paginate the text and put your name and the title of your story on every page of your text, preferably in the upper left-hand corner.

Dummy: With your text, please submit your completed dummy (with both illustrations and text) of up to 40 pages. It should be no larger than 8 1/2 x 11 inches. *Do not send original art.* Please

gather your artwork as described above (preferably taped or sewn pages, **no hard bindings**) or send loose pages in a numbered sequence. To protect your copies, you may enclose loose pages in plastic sleeves. *Do not enclose artwork sleeves or pages in an artist's portfolio or other binder.*

Illustrator Portfolio: Please submit exactly ten pieces of photocopied artwork no larger than 8 1/2 x 11 inches. *Do not send original art.* At least three pieces should show story progression with the same character or characters. To protect your copies, you may enclose loose pages in plastic sleeves. *Do not enclose artwork sleeves or pages in an artist's portfolio or other binder.*

How do I submit to publishers? Do your homework before you submit. Guidelines for authors and illustrators vary from house to house. Be sure to look carefully at publishers' listings in the *Children's Writer's Market* or other source. Request specific guidelines from the houses you most admire and whose current catalog seems a good match for your project. Study the current picture-book market: *read read read!*

When you submit your art samples and book dummy, include a separate manuscript with the text only in the standard format as outlined above for the Tassy contest. Your samples (one to three pieces) of finished artwork should be of the highest quality you can afford—but send copies only: *Never submit original art.* Don't bind the art samples into your book dummy; keep them separate and label each of them with your contact information on the back.

Create a clear, concise cover letter. Describe your book project and how you think it fits into the current children's book market. Provide a brief biography that emphasizes your professional training or career.

Submit your work to an editor; that is the person with the most power to acquire your book. If your text is not as strong as your art, he or she may pass your artwork to an art director. If you are open to the possibility that this publisher might consider your artwork and your manuscript separately, say so in your cover letter.

Ask yourself these questions: Is my story compelling? original? precisely revised? * Are my illustrations original? inventive? well-crafted? * Do my illustrations bring out implied elements of my story or add a visual dimension to my text? * Do my illustrations develop the themes, mood, or tones of my story? * Are my illustrations well-matched in quality to my text? * Are my colors vivid or otherwise well-suited to my story? * Have I created an engaging sequence of scenes and varied the visual perspectives of my characters?

Helpful Books and Web Sites

Molly Bang. *Picture This: How Pictures Work*

Uri Shulevitz. *Writing With Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books*

Yellapalooza www.yellapalooza.com/tutorials/ This site provides helpful hints and useful links for beginners in the children's book writing—and especially illustrating—field.

The Drawing Board <http://members.aol.com/thedrawing/> Information and resources for all kinds of illustrators, including illustrators of children's books.