

Writing for Children: Getting Started

There is much more to becoming a children's writer than getting your manuscript in front of an editor! These tips will help you learn the art, craft, and business of children's writing:

1. **Read, read, read!** Board books, picture books, early readers, middle-grade novels, young adult novels, magazine stories, games and activities, internet sites, test passages. Which of these genres piques your interest and speaks to the story in your heart?
2. **Join the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).** This international organization with regional chapters (like NESCBWI for New England) runs workshops and conferences for beginning, intermediate, and accomplished children's writers. The organization is a treasure trove of printed and online information on every aspect of children's writing.
3. **Join a critique group.** The NESCBWI web site lists critique groups welcoming new members. Critique groups share news and business information and give members critical feedback on their manuscripts and artwork. Beginners to seasoned professionals use critique to hone their manuscripts to a shine.
4. **Write because you love to write.** It's hard work, but your goal must be to write the best story you can write, NOT simply to get published. Embrace the journey.
5. **Do your research.** Until you reach a certain level of expertise and artistry, you will probably have to do the work of an agent yourself. When your manuscript is ready, learn which editors are accepting unsolicited manuscripts (unagented manuscripts that no one has asked you to send). The *Children's Literary Marketplace* and the *Children's Writers and Illustrators Market* are annual reference books that list publishers, agents, contests, and other helpful information. Search their listings for potential publishers, then take your list to both a children's library and a good children's bookstore and read as many books as you can find from those publishers. Does your manuscript seem to fit well among books produced by those publishers? Has one of those publishers just published something similar? Have six new books on your topic been published in the last two years?

Helpful Books:

Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market: This annually updated guide is a complete resource on the children's publishing industry. It includes book and magazine publishers, agents and reps, conferences, contests, sample query letters, and more.

Treld Pelkey Bicknell and Felicity Trotman, ed. *How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books and Get Them Published*

Olga Litowinsky. *It's a Bunny-Eat-Bunny World: A Writer's Guide to Surviving and Thriving in Today's Competitive Children's Book Market*

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

Harold Underdown, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books*

Jane Yolen, *Take Joy: The Writer's Guide to Loving the Craft*

Noah Lukeman. *The Plot Thickens*

Ursula LeGuin *Steering the Craft*

Helpful Websites:

THE SOCIETY OF CHILDREN'S BOOK WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS www.scbwi.org This national organization hosts conferences, produces a useful newsletter, and offers other member benefits, including grants, contests, awards, and local critique groups. Check www.nescbwi.org for SCBWI New England.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL www.cbcbooks.org This reputable site lists new books, articles with tips for new writers and illustrators, lists of publishers with addresses and editor names, and, among other great resources, an invaluable Reading List of 75 Authors/Illustrators Everyone Should Know.

THE PURPLE CRAYON www.underdown.org, Renowned editor Harold Underdown writes this very useful site for new writers and illustrators. The "Who's Moving Where" page notes recent editorial moves.