

Secrets of Picture Book Success

If it already exists, don't waste time writing it. It's hard enough to get published with an original idea. Use Amazon, B & N or library websites to research other ideas like yours. Hopefully there won't be any.

Good ideas are common. Good ideas that are *written well* get published.

Children's books are books first and for children second. Have something to say and tell the story simply and dramatically.

Writing is a craft, you get better with practice. Writing only becomes an art after it is honed and shaped. Sculpting with words makes craft into art.

When you think you have the story down, focus your message. What is the story essentially about? Make sure each word or phrase develops that essential idea.

Don't be boring, but say things simply. If you get to a part of your story that's fascinating, but not essential, leave it out! Don't fall in love with your own writing. Leave out almost everything. Then read it again, and take out some more. Repeat.

Get in a critique group and LISTEN to what the group members say about your work. Your book is not the exception to the rules. Take criticism. Other writers are usually too nice, not too critical, and not nearly as critical as professional editors. If they say it doesn't rhyme, for example, trust them, it doesn't rhyme!!!!

Go to conferences and LISTEN to what professionals say about writing.

READ the picture books that have come out in the past three years. Type out the text of ones you love or ones that are in your genre. You'll learn phrasing.

Once you've read it aloud a hundred times and had it critiqued by an individual or a group, submit selectively (say 3-5 houses at a time). Change the story depending on feedback. If all you get is form rejections, it probably isn't good enough yet (or you're not choosing publishers wisely.)

Always keep working on new projects, don't put all your hopes into one story.

[Barb Rosenstock](#), September 3, 2008 – SCBWI-IL Far Northwest Suburbs