

Touch the hearts of children!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Children's
Book Author**



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Welcome

Welcome to the **FabJob Guide to Become a Children's Book Author**. In this guide we offer you the tools and techniques you need to enter the children's book publishing world.

If you are a beginner, this guide will offer you the information you need to get started.

If you are an experienced children's book writer, you can glean gems of information by learning more about working with editors and publishing houses.

The first step to becoming a children's book author is to take a look at where you are now. Have you ever:

- Written a story for your children?
- Written a children's story for a class?
- Thought up a story that would help a child through a difficult time?
- Told a story that kept a child's attention?



If so, you may already have the skills needed to become a published children's book author.

Our guide offers you:

Tools for developing the best manuscript.

Techniques that will get your manuscript noticed.

Insight into the book publishing industry.

Ways to send your manuscript to editors.

Options for getting a foothold into the industry through a back door.

Each section is set up for a distinct purpose.

- The **Introduction** covers the essentials of becoming a children's book author, so that you can utilize your life experiences in partnership with good writing skills.
- **Getting Ready** defines the difference between writing for yourself and the commercial market, organizing an office, developing ideas, and attracting an editor's attention.
- **Skills** defines the basic fiction and nonfiction categories and gives effective writing techniques to develop children's books that will win the hearts of editors and kids.
- **Getting Published** presents a step-by-step approach to marketing and publishing your book and provides key print and online resources for additional investigation.
- Each section includes a number of **Skill Practice** exercises for you to gain hands-on knowledge and experience in the area you have just studied.

The road to becoming a children's book author is challenging, but this guide will help you **navigate the process**, enabling you to move from wishful thinking to the realization of your goal. If you truly want to discover your untapped potential, get paid for your writing, or make the world a better place for even one child, then read on. You **can** become a children's book author.

1. Introduction to Becoming a Children's Book Author

Beatrix Potter. A.A. Milne. E.B. White. Lewis Carroll. Even their names conjure up memories of friends we have met within the pages of books. Their **stories have transcended time** to create an indelible mark on the hearts of children everywhere. Can you imagine your name being linked to this list of great authors someday?



The good news is that each children's writer, no matter how famous, had to go through the same process. At some point in their lives, they had to start at the beginning. They had to come up with ideas, find time to write, and sell their work to a publisher. They had a **desire to write for children**, and they acted on that desire.

Some people trying to break into the field wonder why no one will tell them the secret to getting published. What is this mysterious element that everyone protects so tenaciously? We will let you in on it. There isn't one. Although there is no secret, there are a few essential ingredients that form the recipe of who you are as a writer. You must have:

- A **passion** for what you are doing
- A working **knowledge of the market**
- An understanding of your **audience**
- A comprehension of **who you are**
- A **yearning** to be a children's writer

The secret is not to "do this" or "do that." The secret lies in **learning the process** of writing for children and then applying what you've learned to find where you fit best.

1.1 Essentials for Becoming a Successful Children's Book Author

Many people believe that you have to wait for inspiration or be born with writing talent to become a successful children's book author. Neither is the case. The best juvenile writers are often those who are **determined to succeed** and have a **vibrant love for children**. Regardless of your skill level or creative talents, you can move toward your goal of becoming a children's book author.

1.1.1 Myths About Writing for Children

There are many reasons why you should and should not write for children. Here are some myths:

- Myth #1:** **You should write for children to make a lot of money and be able to retire young.** Although you can make a good living by writing for children, you have to treat your writing as a job, and like any other job, it's not a get-rich-quick scheme.
- Myth #2:** **Writing for children is easy.** Not true. Writing for children can be more difficult than writing for adults. You have less space to say more while encompassing a child's perspective. Creative and succinct writing is essential. The process takes time and effort to be completed successfully.
- Myth #3:** **Writing for children is a great part-time job that offers full-time pay and a means to working out of your home.** Although many children's book authors write from home, those who receive a steady income usually have to diversify their focus to include writing books, magazine articles, curriculum, etc. This requires time. Your monetary compensation is directly related to the time you spend writing. You will not get full-time pay for a part-time job.
- Myth #4:** **If you want to break into the adult market, you should write a book for children to get started.** Since the adult and children's market have so many different constraints, you will be defeating your purpose to learn one market and then move into another. You should write for the market that you hope to remain in.
- Myth #5:** **You have a child, so you can write a children's book.** Each age group of children is unique to itself and cannot be understood by the knowledge of any one child. You must balance your personal knowledge with research and experience.

Myth #6: You have some spare time and could use the extra money, so why not write a children's book. If filling your time and making extra cash are your goals, you should not write a children's book. People who write for children need to be dedicated to the purpose of developing quality literature for kids. This field is competitive. Those who have put children first are often most successful.

Now that we are past those myths, you may be asking, "What can I bring to the lives of children?" The most important thing that **you bring is yourself**. Hundreds of people have written books, but no one can write a book like you. Your perspective and insight is unique. A piece of yourself is given with each word that you write. In order to do this, you must have a deep-seated passion for your work.

1.1.2 How Does Passion Fit into Your Writing?

The first step in choosing the career of your dreams is **discovering what you are passionate about**. Passion transforms the drudgery of everyday tasks into something that brings joy and fulfillment into your life.

What are your passions? Let's try to narrow down what you feel strongly about. Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I **love most** about children?
- What is it about their **actions** that grab my heart?
- Which books did I **read as a child** that helped me discover who I was or the world I lived in?
- If I had a magic wand and could **improve the lives** of all children, what would I wish for?
- Who has told me that I'm a **natural storyteller**?
- Do I knit stories together in my **daydreams**?
- What **fascinating aspect of life** do I feel that all children should know about?
- What **role** did books play **in my life**?
- What **role do I hope that my books will play** in the lives of children?

From answering these questions, you should be able to clarify your enthusiasm for children. If you are not able to see any strains of excitement in your answers, ask yourself why you really want to write for them. Your passion must be at the core of why you write.

This guide will offer you the **practical steps** you need to achieve the goal of becoming a children's book author. It will require time, effort, and an adherence to the craft. If you feel you have the passion for children's writing, we will help you achieve your goal.

1.1.3 What Is Your Purpose?

Passion without purpose cannot reach the best results. It is unbridled and without direction. **Purpose gives passion an avenue to complete its end.**

Take a moment to explore your purpose behind writing for children.

- When the opportunity arises, do you **feel compelled to explain things** to children?
- Do you like to see a child's eyes light up with excitement when he or she **discovers something new**?
- Do you want to help children **explore their world, thoughts, or emotions**?

Your purpose in writing must rest in the **desires and needs of your audience**. Too often, beginners write in such a way as to satisfy themselves, giving no thought to helping the reader. Now you must ask yourself, "What is my purpose?"



Developing a statement of purpose helps you to set a **personal standard** for your writing. Then anything that comes along to dissuade you from that purpose can be discarded. Aligning your writing with the goals you have set for yourself gives you the ability to make decisions about what you want to write.

Here is an example of a **purpose statement**:

I have chosen to write for children because they have captured my heart, and I want to help them discover through reading my books that the world is a wonderful place. I want to offer them resources for tough times and entertainment to bring joy to their lives.

Once you have realized how your **passion and purpose can be fused together**, then you can move forward.

1.2 Do You Know Yourself?

Writing, whether for children or adults, consists of sitting down and taking the time to write. You will always have work to do. Your family will make demands on your time. Other areas of your life will often take priority. Life does not stop so that you can apply yourself to your writing tasks. In addition to external demands, you must also **understand your own work habits and limitations**.

Every human being has their own set of **idiosyncrasies**. Some may have a certain couch that they like to write on, like Claudia Mills, or certain writing instruments such as sharpened pink pencils like Phyllis A. Whitney. Some are superstitious about when or where they can write, and others are not. Although **balance and moderation** even in your idiosyncrasies is a good rule to follow, the bottom line is that you should know yourself and how you work. In this process, you can train your subconscious to not rely on "luck."

The most important aspect of all writing is **sitting down and doing it**. Find a time of the day when you feel you do your best work. Perhaps after an hour of writing, your writing lags until you take a break. Or maybe you write best when you get up at 5 a.m. or just before you go to bed at 11 p.m. Experiment with time and place, and learn about yourself.

TIP: If you get the inspiration for an idea, you must have the discipline to write it down and then rewrite it later. Although a few writers claim to have written their whole book in one inspirational moment, they most likely spent time rewriting and polishing to get it published. Inspiration has a place in the writing process, but it does not dictate it. If you rely solely on inspiration for your writing process, you will never get your book completely written.

1.2.1 What Are Your Work Habits?

As a writer, review the list below and answer each question based on how you work.

- Is there a **certain chair** you must sit in, a **time** you must work within, or a **place** you must be to write?
- Can you write around a **busy schedule** or do you need **large blocks of time** to write?
- **Where** do you do most of your writing?
- What kind of time does your **lifestyle** allow for writing?
- **How** do you write (with a certain pen, pencil, computer, etc.)?

Let us show you how this works out in one writer's life. . .

Kay would love to be in a mountain cabin and have large stretches of time to write. She can get quite a lot done in the solitude and beauty of a mountain resort. Realistically, as the mother of three boys, Kay must write in ten to sixty minute snatches. She can't go an entire hour without an interruption. She does most of her writing in a small room in her house where the computer is set up.

Her lifestyle does not allow her the pleasure of an ideal situation. In order to make a living from her writing, she must accommodate her lifestyle. Once Kay realized this, she was able to make deadlines and get contracts without being frustrated.

The key to working at home is to take a close, practical look at your lifestyle, then **train yourself** to work best within that situation. If you cannot do that, then your book will not take a priority in your life for a very long time, if ever.

Remember that pencils, typewriters, and computers are all tools to help you. Every writer likes to work with different tools. The important thing is to **reach your goal**. If you find that you write best in bed but keep falling asleep, don't write in bed.

Figure out **which things work best for you**, and then apply what you have learned.

1.2.2 What Does It Take?

In every area of life, **something is required and something is given**. Ask yourself "What is required to become a children's book author?" and "What you will receive from this career choice?" We have written this book to help you answer this question, showing you in detail what is required and the possible benefits of this career step.

The first logical question you might be asking yourself is: "**Is natural-born writing talent required?**"

The answer is a **resounding NO**.

Of course, having a natural writing ability is an advantage. The disadvantage is that it will be more difficult to discipline your talent because it has come to you so easily. There are **benefits and drawbacks**, no matter where your abilities lie as a writer.

In many cases, **determination** is found to be a deciding factor in an author's success. If you are determined to become published, then you will. If you are determined to become successful, then the odds are in your favor.

Determination can:

- Fuel your creativity
- Force you to hone your craft
- Help you prioritize your writing time
- Push you to attend conferences and classes
- Set you up for success

The other attribute that seems necessary for success in this business is **tenacity**. Tenacity helps writers hold on when the road gets bumpy.

Bumps can come in the form of:

- Frustration
- Critique group comments
- Lack of family or friend support
- Rejection of a manuscript

Tenacity helps you hold on; to **see the bigger picture**, and not just the problems along the way. Remember, though, that these obstacles will not block your path unless you let them. They are small inconveniences that are easily worked around on your road to a published work.

1.2.3 Setting Realistic Goals

One of the best ways that we have found to write is to set **daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly goals**. The key is to set **realistic** goals. For example, if you have never written a story, setting a goal to have your manuscript become a bestseller by the end of the year is extremely unrealistic. Completing your first story and taking your first writing class would be a far more practical goal.

Each day that you write, ask yourself:

- What can I do to feel I have accomplished something today?
- How can I complete the task?
- Is this a realistic goal in light of my day's schedule?
- What is the least amount of work I need to get done today?
- In an ideal situation, what is the most I would be able to do today?

Then each week, set a goal for that week, such as writing for half an hour for five days in a row, for a total of two-and-a-half hours for that week. Ask the questions above, only insert the word *week* in place of the word *day/today*.

To set your monthly and yearly goals, find a calendar that you can use. Write your year's goal—"finish my first book"—at the end of the year. To accomplish this, you must divide your work into eleven increments, with the twelfth being your year's goal. Each increment will become your monthly goal.

For example, if you want to complete your first children's chapter book in one year's time, you could set up a schedule as follows:

January - Write synopsis and outline; sign up for a class on writing books for children.

February - Complete ch. 1; find a critique group.

March - Complete ch. 2; send ch. 1 to critique group.

April - Complete ch. 3; send ch. 2 to critique group; revise ch. 1.

May - Complete ch. 4; send ch. 3 to critique group; revise ch. 2.

June - Complete ch. 5; send ch. 4 to critique group; revise ch. 3; sign up for a workshop on selling your book for children.

July - Send ch. 5 to critique group; revise ch. 4 and synopsis.

August - Revise ch. 5; find a group of children in the age group for which your book is intended. Have children read the book and give their impressions.

September - Rewrite the whole book, looking for transitions, appropriate word use, and overall affect.

October - Query publishers; join writers' group.

November - Send finished manuscript to publishers.

December - Finish your first book.

Although you cannot be guaranteed a contract by month twelve, you have set yourself up for success. The hard part is over.

This plan might work well for you, or you can adjust it to meet your needs. If you get ahead of your schedule . . . GREAT! The directive is to finish your goal on time. The beauty of this system is that all you have to do is take **one step each day** to achieve your dream.

1.3 Skill Practice

1. Make a list of the reasons that you want to become a children's book author. Hold onto this list. When you finish this book, decide which reasons on your list are myths and which are valid.
2. With your favorite children's book author in mind, write down what you feel this person's passion and purpose was in writing for children. Was he or she successful? How did the author demonstrate purpose and passion within the books he or she wrote?
3. Write down a brief statement that combines your passion and purpose in writing for children.
4. Begin making a calendar of realistic daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly goals.