

FACT SHEET NO. 7

Selling to the Children's Book Market

The following invaluable information was prepared by Jen McVeity, children's author and president of the Australian branch of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

STEP 1: PICK A GENRE

Children's literature is divided into diverse and specific categories. Readers, picture books, bridging books, chapter books, middle grade fiction, teenage novels, young adult novels, non-fiction, puzzles & games, and multimedia. Which market will you write for? Read as much current children's literature as you can and you will soon develop a feel for the genre that best suits you.

STEP 2: PICK A TOPIC

What's hot? Kids facing challenges and overcoming them - but that's a formula you'll find in most children's literature. Apart from that, you might like to write in one of the following genres - mystery, adventure, humour, fantasy, sci-fi, etc. What's not hot? The 'granny topics' - anything with talking animals, old-fashioned language or heavy topics.

STEP 3: START WRITING

The easiest part of the job - and of course, the best!

STEP 4: PICK UP PUBLISHER (OR FIVE) - Australia or USA?

What is the main complaint of publishers? The huge burden of having to process inappropriate manuscripts. Target the right publisher, cut down on rejections. Some tips:

Trade - Australia: HarperCollins, Allen & Unwin, Omnibus, Scholastic, Hodder Headline, Penguin, Random House, University of QLD Press, Reed for Kids, Margaret Hamilton. Education - Australia: Addison Wesley Longman, Reed-Rigby, Heinemann, Macmillan Education, Nelson. Trade - USA: HarperCollins, Bantam Doubleday, Dell, Atheneum (Simon & Schuster), Random House, Houghton Mifflin, Boyds Mill Press, Viking (Penguin), Little Brown and Co.

STEP 5: KEEP WRITING, START NETWORKING

Writing is a solitary business. Don't wait until you start talking to the cat or the wall. Form a critique group, attend writers' festivals, do a few classes, join organisations such as -

FAW (03) 9528 7088 Aust. Society of Authors (02) 9318 0877 Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (03) 9598 4232 and the Writers' Centre in your state.

STEP 6: PRE-SELL YOUR WORK

(Send our sample chapters and synopses *while* you are writing. In non-fiction this is always done, as editors like to have input. For longer works, this saves 1 - 2 years' selling time. However, for short books, send the entire manuscript.) **1. The cover letter** - CV, areas of expertise, target audience, why is yours different from others available. **2. The synopsis** - A succinct outline of the chapters in the book (maybe 1 - 2pp) **3. Three chapters** totalling 5000 - 8000 words (mostly consecutive). You can do a multiple submission to save time. Always include a SSAE for the return of your MS. Keep track of what MS you sent where on what date, and any letters of interest.

STEP 7: FINISH WRITING

This means both the first draft and the 3 - 20 subsequent edits. There is so much competition now that manuscripts have to be fully developed to be considered by a publisher.

STEP 8: SEND THE BOOK OUT (and start your next one)

Send it to editors who have expressed interest. Ring first to check that the interested editor is still there. Make them curious and enthusiastic. Some publishers don't mind multiple submissions - target them first! Do cover letter as in Step 6. Send the whole manuscript unbound, with 1.5 spacing, wide margins, page numbers and your name on the bottom of each page. Understand that you *will* get rejected - it's all part of the process. Don't let rejections put you off! Keep selling, keep writing.