



SPECIAL SNEAKY PUBLISHING TIPS

Welcome aboard the publishing train! Whether you've done this before, are completely new to the process or have similar experience elsewhere, there are some useful things to know that will help break down the process ahead. From relationships with your illustrator to the general timeline and planning marketing, there can be a lot of information going back and forth, so familiarising yourself with the hints below will help keep you stay on the same page and allow for smoother sailing.

BEFOREHAND ...

The manuscript is complete and with your editor or publisher. If the book is a picture book or junior reader, have you chosen an illustrator? If not, no worries at all, we can set you up with an illustrator whose style you like and who will do a fantastic job on your book. The fee for the illustrator goes directly to them, whether they have come through us or not, and the usual system is half paid before beginning and the other half on completion and delivery of the art. Your editor will prompt this if the illustrator does not invoice you. If your editor gives you a list of suggested artists to see who you like best, let them know exactly who you like and (importantly) in what order. The editor will contact them one at a time (whether they are found from our portfolio, online, via Instagram or you passed by their work somewhere) to see if they are available and keen, so please make sure you are certain before electing the preferred order (if we offer an artist work and then say that sorry, we don't need them anymore, it comes across as a little unfair). Found an online artist you think will be perfect? You can contact them yourself if you wish, or you can let your editor know and they can liaise for you. Some illustrators would prefer to be contacted by a representative of the publishing company rather than the author, as the former poses less risk for them, or they may have had previous experience with author-directed illustrations.

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If your chosen illustrator is a friend or you have sourced them yourself, that's wonderful. Either way though, we ask you to let them know the illustration process hasn't started yet (this happens once the edit is complete) and to pass on their contact details to your editor once they are in touch. The illustration process is coordinated by the editor (even if the illustrator is your friend), to ensure technicalities are correct for design and printing, and to get the most out of the storyboarding. Our editors have had a lot of experience in getting the most out of the work, and our whole team is made up of people who are comparing picture books all the time. We stay up-to-date with current trends, and classic quality.

If our Publishing Manager has spoken to you already about illustrations that are already complete, that's already sorted. All we will need is for the art or files to be sent directly to our designer, so that by the time the edit is complete, we are ready to begin the layout side of the process.

What kind of TIMELINE does this all take?

Let's say that once the edit, which usually takes anywhere between 2-4 weeks (or more, if editing an adult or chapter book) is complete, the illustrations are normally given a timeline of 3-5 months for total delivery. The stages are outlined below.

Edit: 1 month

Illustrations: 3-5 months

Design: 2 weeks to 1 month

Print: 4-6 weeks

Freight: 3-4 weeks

So normally between 6-9 months; sometimes longer, sometimes a bit shorter. Think of it like a baby, only with a slightly more flexible gestation period!

Following printing, a few advance copies are flown out ahead of the boatload, and we will send you your first copy of the final book once it comes in. If you wish to airfreight a box (normally between 80-100 copies, depending on the book size) over in this time as well (for a specific deadline), speak to your editor or the Production Manager.

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THE EDIT ...

The Process

The edit is made up of several tasks. As well as proofing the manuscript for grammar and spelling according to current style, your editor will also be looking at where certain points of the story could be strengthened. The main aim is certainly not to chop up your book into something you can barely recognise (your editor can't do this and has no wish to), but if certain words, phrases or sections would be better with something substituted, they will suggest this to you.

If the manuscript is considered to be quite long for its target, the editor may ask you to cut down some of the text. They can give examples of where and what they suggest to come out and keep in. The idea of chopping your manuscript up may be a little terrifying at first, but this will be suggested only to improve the book's marketability and get it to a better place. It won't hurt your book one bit, we promise.

To use an extended metaphor: think of it like baking a cake ... too many ingredients and the reader will get sick; too much of one ingredient and not enough of another will affect the mix and we might end up with a floury or gummy cake; and baking a child's birthday party cake with ingredients for a mature fruit cake will only end up being tasty for adults!

What children are reading nowadays is something your editor is familiar with, as well as suitable topics and word lengths for each age group. Some kids will read more advanced material than others, and there are certainly books that appeal to a larger range of ages, but for the purposes of being clear for bookstores, we need to pinpoint exactly where we are aiming the book to go. So an age range of 4-10 years is not really applicable; here we are trying to cover too many bases, all the way from a child barely able to read, to a junior reader who might be starting 35,000 word stories. Your editor will work out if there is a clash with the age range, and will let you know.

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Rhyme is something that will always speak of childhood to us, and is still quite popular in children's books. The downfall with rhyme is that if the beat and rhythm does not flow, the book is worse off than if written without rhyme at all. So if your editor suggests that rewriting without the rhyme might be a good idea, it is to allow the flow of language more naturally. Another benefit of not writing in rhyme is that it is far easier for foreign publishers to pick up. Translating rhyme is something that a foreign publisher does not wish to do, so a book without it may be more easily picked up at foreign book fairs.

The Editor

Meetings during the actual process of the book are often best substituted by phone calls. We would love to meet you in person if we haven't already, and this can be wonderful for establishing a primary relationship with the team and getting through things like finishes and printing options that are best explained visually in person. More often, however, phone calls are the best way of getting in touch, so if you have days or times (or tiny humans that prevent phone chats) that aren't good for calling, let your editor know, and they will be happy to work out times to chat that are best for you.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS ...

The Process

Here's a rundown of what will generally happen. Once the edit has been established for page numbering, layout and content, the edit is generally complete and the illustration process ready to begin. Hurray! Your editor will get this started, setting up a timeline with the illustrator and arranging a contract if the two of you would like one (we can arrange a contract for arrangements happening between the author and illustrator who are friends as well).

Then your editor will ask you to complete an illustration brief for the illustrator. This is your chance to specify anything you particularly would like illustrated a certain way (e.g. Tim the cat is a big, fat ginger one with straggly whiskers, or your preferred colours are ones that are soft or vivid etc). The editor will complete one as well, and this will often steer the content towards making sure there is enough variation and picture-book suitable layout (e.g. if two spreads have content that takes place at sunset, we don't want them both to be double spreads of the sunset, but to vary the images with different perspectives, closer or longer views etc). Before storyboarding, there may be some character sketching to sort out what the main characters will look like, if necessary. This is a good chance to let the setup of your creation become clear, so let the editor/illustrator know your inspiration and desired feeling and look.

Then the storyboarding, where the illustrator goes away and has some time to create some thumbnails of the action presented on each image. These are black and white and rather rough in style, so don't feel that they will give the exact detail that will come in the final work. Once the storyboard comes in, there might be a bit of to-ing and fro-ing as the editor thinks a few changes to some spreads will improve it, then sees what you think as well and then the illustrator gets back with revised thumbnails if necessary. Once the storyboarding is complete though, the content is locked off (we do not accept any changes at the roughs stage). When the storyboarding comes in, please wait until you have spoken to your editor about any changes, and don't respond directly to the illustrator, as the editor may wish to discuss some options that potentially differ from your original suggestions. This is to make sure we aren't double-taking the illustrator's time and getting the best out of their work, while keeping all parties happy!

Then the illustrator goes away again and produces the black and white final linework, known as the roughs. This is checked by the editor for technical things for design, and making sure the content has come across truly and beautifully from the storyboard version. Once this is approved, the

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illustrator goes away again for the final time and finishes the final colour, then delivers them straight to our office by either post or digital files. Then just wait to see the first designs of the book!

The Illustrator

If the illustrator is somebody like a family friend or a close acquaintance, it would be expected that the process between the two of you is much closer than it would usually be. While this is understandable and you will likely be meeting up privately together to discuss content, colouring etc, the illustrator will still need to deliver the different stages of the process to the editor to check.

When you see the storyboard, the illustrator may have placed some digital text over it (to show where the text goes). This is to indicate text space and does not show what the actual font will look like. All text design is done in-house by our designer, so if the font is one you dislike, or it's wonky or misspelt, don't worry!

Below are a few pointers on keeping the relationship with your illustrator positive and efficient:

- Try not to overprescribe content. While the book has been written and characters created by you, there is a necessity for trust in the artist's representation of it. Directing every single aspect of the work will constrict the process for the illustrator, and the book won't end up with the best work they could do for it.
- Style guidance: If you have chosen the artist based on a certain style you saw in their portfolio, refer to this so they know what you want to go for, but avoid trying to steer an artist down the track of a different style to that which they are comfortable with ... this will almost always end up a little messy ... for both the book and the creative relationship!
- Giving feedback and notes: Send your notes directly back to your editor with all your thoughts, not the illustrator. This way, they can go through with you and make sure that both your notes don't clash, that you get the look you are going for with the book, and anything that could be even better is made clear. They can also be the one to pass on the notes to the illustrator, as certain wording like 'his paws look a bit funny' or 'the mum needs to be standing there instead' can be unclear for the illustrator to improve on and may clash with other content. Sorting with the editor first will allow you and the illustrator to keep a positive relationship.
- Once decisions are made, let's stick with them unless it's unexpectedly something technically incorrect. Changing content late in the process or going backwards and forth about options will make inefficient use of the illustrator's time and strain the process. Unload all your thoughts and wishes with the editor and they can sort it out with you earlier in the stages!

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DESIGN ...

The Process

Once the art or files have come in, the designer will be checking them individually to make sure they are all suitable. If they have any technical issues or the designer sees that one image needs a tweak, they'll get in contact with the illustrator directly. If the artwork is physical and needs scanning in-house, it may take some time to get all these in before design. This part of the process is leading up to the most exciting part, but please be patient (it's hard, we know! Getting illustrations in are one of the best parts of the book's journey), as it may take anywhere between a week to a few weeks to get the first designs to you.

The design consists of digitally layering the text over the illustrations and making sure they are correctly aligned, looking colour-true and setting up the layout of the book for print.

The designer may send you the first PDFs of the book themselves. If this happens and there are some text issues, it is likely the editor hasn't had a chance to see it yet and correct this. Don't worry though, the book will go through the editor for checking, along with other members of the team for double-checking. The designer is sometimes working from what they can tell from the online information available, and as they are primarily concentrating on look, alignment and images, don't be alarmed if they haven't picked up on an error in the text!

The design will go back and forth a few times until everyone is happy, the font choice is perfect and the cover design is chosen (they will send you two designs of the cover to go off; feel free to say what you prefer about one to the other. If we don't agree, we will let you know).

Your Designer

Design is a funny stage of the process, as it requires both individual taste in aesthetic, as well as technical knowledge, skill and objective construction. So while we can all say, 'I like that black colour of the title', the designer is more likely to say, 'I like that charcoal there but the balance is now thrown off if we make it this dark, so I'll change the creator names below it to suit that more.'

When getting feedback to the designer, it's imperative that you tell us what you are hoping to happen with any change that you are suggesting. E.g. where has the direction come from in 'Can we make it more **bold**?' Is this because you find the current **SIZE**/colour/font type annoying or difficult to read, or because you want it to stand out comparatively to the creator names? We

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can make the changes best fit what you wish by knowing exactly what the issue is, and then the designer themselves can figure out how to fix it, as it is likely to affect other factors in the design. By explaining to the designer what you would like to achieve, the designer will be able to achieve the desired look and feel in a way which may not be the most straightforward or obvious way to do so to us non-designers. So if you have said you would like the title to stand out more against the background, while the most obvious solution may be to make it **bigger** or **'bolder'**, the designer may have technical tricks,

changes in placement

or other design elements that would add emphasis and achieve the same result in a subtle or more consistent way, that doesn't take away the balance from the overall piece.

If you aren't a fan of the **font** chosen, let us know what kinds of fonts you like, e.g. quite simple and without serif, **traditional with serif**, **playful but with serif**. The designer has a large range of professional fonts used by graphic designers, so let us know what effect you want it to have, and the designer can work to achieve that. There may be a font online that you have seen somewhere that you think is great. Feel free to mention it, but it will be likely that the designer has already considered a similar choice or there is a reason due to trend, overuse or outdatedness that some options may be rejected. For example, it is highly unlikely we will have a book designed in **Comic Sans font**, or something as basic as **Times** or **Calibri** (the two most simple examples of a serif and non-serif font).

Meetings for the design stage are not necessary, as the best communication at this level occurs over email with attachments, and we have likely discussed all options for the style and look of the book long before we get to this stage. With any request for a change, the designer will be considering how this affects the entire book as a whole. Consistency throughout the book is incredibly important, so if one requested change is likely to throw the balance of the book out, the designer will let you know, as they are looking at the aesthetic and visual cues of the book as a whole, along with gridlines of alignment and technical factors.

Love a certain design aspect of a picture book you know? Mention it to the designer, as they are likely to know the book and be able to see what feel you are going for. They also have the illustrations in consideration, so if that particular request does not suit the style of your illustrator's work, we would prefer to work with it than try and mix elements in that end up making the book messy. Our designers are huge fans of picture books and you will probably find them (along with our editors) snooping through the children's sections of bookstores on weekends, so they are aware of what was in 5 years ago and what is on trend now. Even the classics still get design rejuvenations

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in later editions - so when referencing these beloved books, have a look at their contemporary counterparts.

SIGNOFFS

Once the PDF proofs of the design have been sorted, we have the first signoff to complete.

After the first signoff, we receive proofs from the printers and send you these large files to approve as well. No changes to actual content happen at this stage; it is purely for checking all last-minute details are correct and that the printers have received a correct print layout from our end.

After the second signoff and final payment, we are just waiting for advances. During this time we will guide you in setting up a book launch and events. Putting on a launch can seem daunting, but really it's a party where your guests buy your book!

Too Many Cooks Spoil the Books

Throughout the process, and especially at design or final edit, you may be tempted to send the text or pdfs to a friend who is a writer or someone whose opinion you value. While it can be great to get an idea of what others think, user testing can bring on a strange phenomenon known as 'Too Many Cooks Spoil the Books'. Asking a five-year-old what they think of a book in pdf form is going to give you suggestions that may seem like they are coming from the target consumer ... but five-year-olds are not consumers of anything (except ice cream) and though it is important to create books kids love, children are generally not the ideal authority on whether a book has sellable appeal in a shop. Adults buy books they like, and bookstores stock books they think will sell. So if the bookstore doesn't stock a book in the first place, children will have less opportunity to read it, whether they would like it or not.

A similar principle exists in asking multiple friends, who all have their own ideas and memories of beloved picture books, and what their thoughts are. This is very rarely helpful to the book or yourself, and will end up confusing the situation. If you are choosing a cover, decide what your favourite parts are yourself, and we can work with this. As with every creative endeavour a 'creative' or 'artistic' voice needs to come through and too many voices will muddy the waters.

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Bringing a book of any kind into the world is a wonderful, enjoyable and occasionally stressful process. There may be times when it feels hugely impossible or the future of selling your own book is just far too daunting. Most of all though, remember that this is your book that is coming out, that it will be read and loved by children you know as well as complete strangers, and that you are now a part of the stage in life where a child is introduced to reading. It can seem tough, but we are overjoyed to be able to help you along the way. If you ever have any questions, give us a call or email us.

Until next time,

The Little Steps Team

