



# TIPS FOR Emerging Children's & Young Adult Writers

From Australian writers, illustrators, publishers, and booksellers

## WRITING TIPS

- A strong, authentic, original voice is key
- Develop a character's voice first, then start asking 'why?' (e.g. 'Why do they think/say/do/feel that?')
- A single word of dialogue can convey a lot about a character, so choose carefully
- A character's name can say a lot about them
- When writing 'bad' characters, find their likeable traits and show their motives/beliefs/actions within their context
- If you can cut a word out, then do
- If writing about a dark or heavy topic, break it up with humour
- Don't rush; some books take years to write
- Having a 'day job' to supplement your income can help take the pressure off, reduce isolation, and provide inspiration
- Your writing is never going to resonate with *everyone*, but it will resonate with the people who need it most
- It's okay to write about something you don't fully understand; through the process of researching and writing, you can move closer to understanding (writing helps to develop empathy)
- Use positive self-talk to manage rejection, self-doubt, and writer's block (e.g. 'I have something important to say')
- Remember that each rejection is one step closer to publication
- Don't read your reviews on Goodreads

## WRITING DIVERSE CHARACTERS

- Diverse characters need to be well developed, rather than 'token' characters included for the sake of showing diversity
- Start by focusing on the character's emotions and find a point of emotional connection, then consider other aspects (e.g. culture/religion/sexuality/disability)
- If you give a character their own voice, they cease to be just a label
- When submitting to a publisher, mention any cultural consultations or sensitivity readings that have been completed
- Be prepared for criticism; you need to be able to justify why you chose to write a particular character

## PUBLISHING TIPS

- Sometimes just one aspect of a book has to be really working in order for a publisher to take it on
- An original, authentic voice is key
- Diversity is important (avoid mono-cultural narratives)
- You can make a direct enquiry to a publisher, asking if they would be interested in taking a look at your book (this is different to submitting an unsolicited manuscript)
- You need a killer pitch
- It's okay to submit simultaneously, as long as you are transparent about this

- When pitching to publishers or agents, include evidence of your dedication to the craft (e.g. awards, past publications, programs completed)
- Formatting submissions: check the guidelines, use page numbers, use a simple font, mention similar books on the market, mention programs you've participated in
- Publishers do a SWOT analysis when taking a book to acquisitions (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), so consider these aspects of your own work
- Know the market and where your book fits within it
- Participate in CYA and SCWBI conferences to get your work in front of publishers
- If you're a member of the ASA, they will review your contract for you

## BOOSTING SALES

- You can contact your local bookstores directly to encourage them to stock your book (take your book in, email sample pages, mail a sample package, offer to do book signings)
- October and November are not good months for debut authors to be published, as bookstores are focused on Christmas sales and the big names dominate
- School visits are important for promotion
- A lot of sales are based on the seller's recommendations, so get to know the staff at your local bookstores
- Promote your local bookstores' events on social media (70% of your social media activity should be unrelated to your book)
- Book launches in bookstores work best for local authors and can result in good sales
- If your book is shortlisted for a major award, sales increase

- Approach your local community newspaper for publicity and let your local bookstores know your book is being promoted this way
- Schools are interested in CBCA shortlisted books
- Shelf-talkers and face-outs help boost sales
- Book covers are important (young people *do* judge books by their covers!), so give your publisher feedback if you don't like the cover or think it's been over done
- Sign your books! Bookstores have a three-month 'sale or return' policy, but signed books can't be returned to the publisher
- It's important for the author to help build up their own public profile (e.g. through social media)
- It is important to understand who your audience is
- The Copyright Agency ensures you get paid for any work which is photocopied
- Once your book is published, register for Public Lending Right (PLR) and Educational Lending Right (ELR) – these are programs that compensate writers for income lost through free multiple use of their books in libraries

## PICTURE BOOK TIPS

- Don't over-write, pare back the text to the bare necessities
- The images and the text should each tell a story in isolation (this may or may not be the same story)
- When illustrating, consider creating an image which provides a contrast to the text
- If you take the words away entirely, readers slow down
- Hiding a small image on each page that the reader has to search for also helps to slow the reading pace

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