



# **Module 12 : Illustrating your Story and Working with Illustrators**

- The power of illustration
- The differing nature of illustration for different formats and age ranges
- How to submit a picture book for publication to a conventional publishing house
- How to choose and work with an illustrator

**In this chapter we will cover the following topics in more detail:**

- The power of illustration
- The differing nature of illustration for different formats and age ranges
- How to submit a picture book for publication to a conventional publishing house
- What to do if you want to illustrate your story yourself
- How to self-publish a picture book
- How to choose and work with an illustrator

## **12.1 Introduction to Illustration**



**Illustrations are pictures or designs that combine with words to convey a message to the reader or viewer.**

Good illustrations can transform a humdrum text into a marvellous wonderland for children to enjoy, and poor illustrations can ruin the best of writing. With this in mind, you should take the matter of illustrating your book very seriously.

Whether your book will contain illustrations, and to what extent, depends on the format and target age range that you have chosen.

- Toddler books - will be almost entirely illustration, with few words.
- Picture books - will of course be rich in illustration, with a varying number of words.
- Early levelled readers - will also have many illustrations.
- First chapter books - will usually, but not always, have some illustrations, but these tend to be in black and white and fairly infrequent.
- Middle grade books - are less likely to be illustrated, but sometimes are.
- Young adult books - sometimes have a small illustration or two, but not often.

All of these formats will have an illustration on the cover.

The first consideration regarding illustration of your book is whether you are going down the self-publishing or conventional publishing route.

## **12.2 Illustrations in Conventional Publishing**



**The general rule in publishing houses is that when you submit a**

## **book, even a picture book, you should submit only the manuscript - the text.**

The editor will then find an illustrator to work with your writing to produce the finished book, and the author has little to no input in the illustration process. The illustrator and writer each receive half of the royalties from the book.

The idea behind this is that as a writer you are qualified to create a story with words; you would not want the illustrator telling you how to write, as that is not their expertise.

Similarly, the illustrator is uniquely placed to provide a visual counterpart to your words, and does not want to be led by your ideas. You may have an idea of how characters and settings should look in your head, and feel aggrieved that someone else will be taking your idea and changing it. But, editors argue, the illustrator is likely to be able to take that idea further than you could when it comes to visual representation. You may find that, if you are lucky enough to get your book published by a publishing house, you will be pleased with the finished result and accept that the illustrator has done a better job than you could have.

However, you may have a very specific idea in mind that includes both illustrations and text, which you are unwilling to give up.

Be aware that if you choose this stance, your chances of publication with a publishing house are greatly reduced.

Editors have the best idea of what will sell and their priority is to do just that. They will have little patience with what they may see as personal sentimentality in a commercial market that is experiencing strain from the changes in the way people read, with the arrival of the Internet and the eBook.

If you feel confident that your illustrations and writing work together well, and are not willing for them to be taken separately, you can submit them as a whole unit. Include a copy of your manuscript (text only), following the publisher's submission guidelines, along with your cover letter. They may prefer a synopsis with a first chapter instead, especially if your book is on the long side, but be guided by their guidelines or response to your query letter (see the next chapter for more general information on submitting your work to publishers). Distinguish page divisions to correspond to your storyboard if you feel strongly about this. Picture books have a standard length of 32 pages, and usually at least four of these are beginning and end matter (the title page, copyright information, etc.). Therefore, you actually have between 24 to 28 pages for the text and illustrations themselves. Also include a storyboard of illustrations, with a box for each page; you can print out templates of these online.

The drawings should be rough, first drafts. This is because, at this point, you need to give the editor the impression that you are willing to be flexible about the specifics of the illustrations. They want to see how you think and formulate your illustrations. This is also how the process is performed professionally, so you are demonstrating your understanding of how things are done in the commercial sphere. Finally, include one or two copies of complete art work to give them an idea of your skills and how a finished illustration would look.

You should only go down this route if you have received consistently good feedback for your work from fairly objective bystanders. Your mum telling you that she loves them does not count here; it should preferably be someone with experience in the field of children's publishing, or at least someone who will not feel obliged to be positive. You should also be prepared to self-publish if you are unwilling to be flexible about illustrations.

If you think your strengths lie more in illustrating than writing, or you have found that through the process of illustrating your own book you have more of a passion for this element of the work, submit your package of manuscript plus storyboard and finished pieces to the art director of the publishing house instead. However, unless they see your text and art as a perfect pairing and a successful combination, they will ask you to discard the text, and may offer you a contract based on the strength of your illustrations.

## **FACT**



The average person will decide whether or not to buy your book within 8 seconds of seeing your cover

*Source: selfpublishingadvisor.com - 2013*

## **12.3 Illustrating a Self-Published Book**



**If you choose to self-publish your book, the most pressing and primary concern is cost.**

This is especially relevant if you are producing a picture book, early levelled reader book, or toddler book, because all of these are likely to need to be printed in colour, and printing a colour book rich

in illustration is very expensive. Factor this in to your estimations of whether this path is viable for you when you commit to it.

You have two options regarding illustrating a self-published book. You may illustrate it yourself, or work with a freelance illustrator. As we said earlier, the illustrations can make or break a book, especially one which relies on the pictures to tell the story. A lot of the advice in this section is directed towards picture-book, early levelled reader, and toddler book authors, as it is these writers who will have to factor in the subject of illustration to the greatest extent.

## **Here are the steps you would undertake to plan and execute your illustrated self-published book.**

### **1. Create your text first, perfecting it before you move on to the pictures.**

Remember, that in order for a book to be heavily illustrated, there must be something new happening on each page that can be depicted with an image. Divide your proposed text into pages, remembering that you only have 24 to 28 of these to work with in a standard 32 page picture book. Think of whether you could create a picture for the text on each page. If not, rewrite until you can. This is also good for the writing itself, as in picture books, the action to words ratio should be high.

### **2. Create a storyboard for your book.**

You can print out templates for these from the internet. It should look like a bird's eye view of all the pages in your book, side by side. Arrange the text on the pages, along with a proposed idea for the illustration. Think carefully about the layout. Do you want the text in one block on one page, with the illustration on the other? Do you want the entire double page spread as an illustration, with the words transposed on top? More complex layouts like this are likely to be more expensive when you get to the printing stage, and the larger and more numerous your illustrations, the more you will have to pay the illustrator, if you are going to employ one.

If you are, provide them with a rough idea of what you want on each page. This could be a rough sketch of an idea, a description in words, or just a word or two. Many illustrators prefer that you give them as little guidance as you can bear to, and don't like being micromanaged. It is their job, after all, to take the written word and make it into something visual that complements your work.

### **3. Insert the beginning and end matter into your storyboard and text.**

This will include copyright information, a title and possibly half title page, possibly a dedication page, and maybe a page with an illustrated bubble and the words: 'This book belongs to:' If you would like small illustrations on any of these pages, do not forget to include them too.

### **4. Choose a printer company**

Research online for a printer company that will provide you with a good quality product at a low price. There are several considerations here: do you want a print-on-demand service that only prints a book when it is ordered? You'll be looking at a high unit price but low initial outlay. You may struggle to get some services with some of these, like the thick, glossy paper that many picture books have. Decide whether you want to pay extra for features like paper quality, colour resolution, hardback covers, and others. If you are producing a first chapter book, consider having black and white illustrations to keep the costs down, and print on standard, matt paper.

You may decide to go with a vanity press, who will charge you a set amount for a certain number of copies. Increase this number and your unit cost goes down. If you have a lot of capital and are fairly confident that your book will be received well (or simply willing to take the risk), get a large number printed at the outset.

#### **5. Make a full size mock-up of your book, on paper cut to size.**

Insert notes for illustrations if you are employing an illustrator, or rough sketches of what you might put in if you are doing the illustrations yourself. This is the stage to check whether the layout is working. Every page of a picture book should cause the child to want to turn to the next. Each should have plenty to discuss, learn from, or laugh about.

#### **6. If you are employing an illustrator, now is the time to do it.**

You may have been researching your options previously or in communication with one or more individuals in preparation for this point. Visit online sites, like the Society of Children's Book Authors and Illustrators and [childrensillustrators.com](http://childrensillustrators.com), to start searching for someone who you think will give your book an extra sparkle.

Review portfolios of illustrators' work to see whether their style will meet the subject matter and tone of your book. Once you have chosen one, try to trust them. Send them your storyboard and mock up and ask them to create a rough storyboard of what they think would be good on each page. Have a look over this, approve it or make any changes that you feel strongly about, and then let them get on with their work.

Proven, working illustrators do not come cheap. Expect to pay in excess of a £1,000 for an experienced illustrator, and the sky's the limit.

#### **7. If you are illustrating the book yourself, chances are you have a fairly good idea of what you want to include.**

Remember to make the illustrations engaging and relevant to the text, enhancing it.

#### **8. Once you have the illustrations you need to do a final format of the book.**

You can get a professional to do this for you, or do it yourself. You can find formatters on online freelancing sites, or on their own company websites. Consider paying a professional to do this for you; a professional layout will make all the difference to the final product.

#### **9. Submit your formatted book to the printer.**

The methods for this differ depending on which company you go for, but it is generally online and quite self-explanatory.

See the next chapter for more general advice about self-publishing your book.

### **In Summary**

The amount of illustration your book contains will depend on your target age range and the format of your book.

Picture books, toddler books and early levelled readers are likely to be the most illustration-dense.

In conventional publishing the industry standard is to submit your manuscript text-only. If the editor thinks it has potential, they will assign an illustrator to work on the imagery.

If you feel strongly about submitting a package of illustrations with your text, you may do so, but follow the submission guidelines and expect your chances of publication to be reduced.

Self-publishing will ensure that your vision is kept pristine, but can be very expensive.

You can employ a freelance illustrator or do the pictures yourself, if you truly believe you are able.

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