Publish your picture book

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COLOFON
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Going on an adventure

Do you also hear often around you? “Someday I will write a book!” or “Later, when I have more time, I want to write a children’s book.” But Later has already begun a long time ago and today will never come back.

Aproximately 1% of everyone who intends to write a children’s book, takes steps to publish their story. One of the reasons the idea never becomes a goal, starts with words like “later” and “someday.” A dream becomes a goal when you put a date on it. I want to have my book published before the end of the year! That’s a goal. Once you’ve set a deadline on your project, you can create a schedule. Do you dare to go on this big, exciting picture book adventure? Will you have your own book published by the end of the year?

Step 1: Deadline
You have signed up for this free e-book because you are serious about turning your dream into a goal. Grab your diary and circle the date you want the book published. So, that’s fixed! This was the hardest part, the rest will be one big, exciting adventure, you will eventually look back on with pride.

What is a picture book?
You can find the most amazing books for every age group. Picture books are written for the age group from two till about five years old. It also depends entirely on the development of the child, whether they like the book or not. A picture book has a lot of illustrations, with only about 500 words. That doesn’t seem like alot, but writing a picture book can be quite difficult. You want to tell the story, but you have to use a short, clear sentence structure. It is important that illustrations and text match. When the illustration shows a girl with a red balloon, you don’t have to repeat in the text that the balloon is red. “Show it, don’t tell”.

The main characters in a picture book are often the same age as the readers. This can be children, but also animals or an object, as long as it is on the same level of thinking as the reader. Not often you see adults in a picture book (unless it has to be about a certain topic in which the adult plays an important role).
A book that is entertaining for children is more popular than a book that “preaches”. The message you want to convey is of course hidden in the story

In the next chapter, we’ll take a closer look at the characters of your story. You can already think about who will tell your story. So many books have been written about bears, dogs and cats. Maybe you can think of another animal to tell your story. Whatever you choose, make sure your main character is unique in their actions. Ultimately, you write your story, your way that no one has ever written before.

TIP: *buy a special notebook, where you can store all your sketches, ideas and writings and keep everything organized together. The whole project in one notebook is also easy to put in your bag and take with you to further develop your ideas.*

Gathering ideas

Sometimes you have a story in your head for years, all you have to do is write it down. But there are also times when a new idea suddenly pops up, just when you are at the butcher's or in the schoolyard. Just when you're not being creative for a while, your brain can throw out the most amazing ideas for about twenty seconds and if you don't write them down immediately, they disappear just as quickly as they came.
Collect all these small ideas in a fixed place so that you don't find small notes everywhere with scribbles and ideas. When you get a brilliant book idea, just as you're in the schoolyard, you can quickly write it down in your notepad at your smartphone. You can then email it to yourself and save it in a special folder, where you store all your ideas. In the same folder you can also store all your photos, illustrations, pictures and color palettes so that you can always refer back to what information you had thought of or found.
Not so handy with a computer? Buy a special notebook where you can write down all your ideas. You not only have a beautiful book full of ideas, but also an analog Pinterest version that you can browse through.

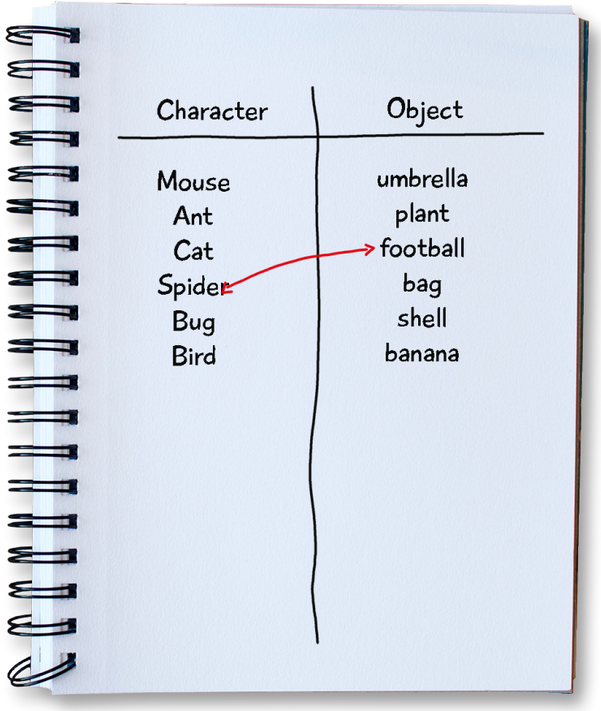
Time management
"I really want to write a picture book, but I don't have the time." If you really want something, you make time for it. Writing a picture book is challenging but not impossible. Get up an hour earlier every morning and take that time to work on your project. Reduce your TV time. Write an hour before going to bed every night. Don't go to that party for once. Do you travel a lot by public transport? Instead of staring out the window, you can use that time to work on your project. Take yourself seriously. When people ask about it, dare to say, you are a picture book author. That's why you can take time to write, even if it doesn't feel like work. It is a project with a beginning and an end that you work towards to. Make time in your calendar and make sure you stick to it, just like you keep appointments with clients or your employer.

Funny or educational
Children should be able to know so much these days. In group one they are already dealing with tests and exams. In order to teach children the joy of reading, it's important that picture books are first and foremost just funny or exciting. Would you still like to tell a special message with your story? I suggest you do that very subtle. Children don't like pedantic books. The best way to teach children, is to do it unconsciously.
Because a picture book only has about 500 words, it seems simple to write a children's book, but in practice, it can be quite difficult. The phrase 'Less is more' is very important to remember. A child should be captivated by the story and the main character on the first page.

"Charly watched his friends on the soccer field. He also wanted to play soccer."
In the above example, we don't really know anything about Charly yet.

"Charly was a clumsy little spider with long legs. Like his friends, he wanted to learn to play soccer. But his legs are always tangled up."
We now know that Charly is a clumsy spider and therefore perhaps also funny.

Try to grab the attention of your readers immediately, so they want to keep reading. Children can better identify with the characters if they also talk a lot in the book. Children have a better sense of how the character feels. When a child takes your picture book again and again to be read to. Then you know you have written a good book.



Character design

If you want to start writing but don't know where to start, start with character design. In a simple but effective way, you discover who your main character is going to be. You determine the adventure, he or she is going to experience.

Make two columns in your notebook. Above the first column write "Characters" and above the other column write "Object". Under the column "characters" write all kinds of characters that come to mind, for example: mice, crickets, spiders, skunk, robot, a boy or a girl, or something like the garbage can, the doormat or a stone.
Under the other column, write the objects that the character could use, such as an umbrella, a plant, a ball, a bag, a shell or a banana.
If you take your time with this assignment, you will eventually end up with a whole list of characters and items. No character is right or wrong. It's just brainstorming. When you're happy with your list, start putting things together. For example, a spider that tries to play soccer but its legs keep getting tangled up.

Get to know your character

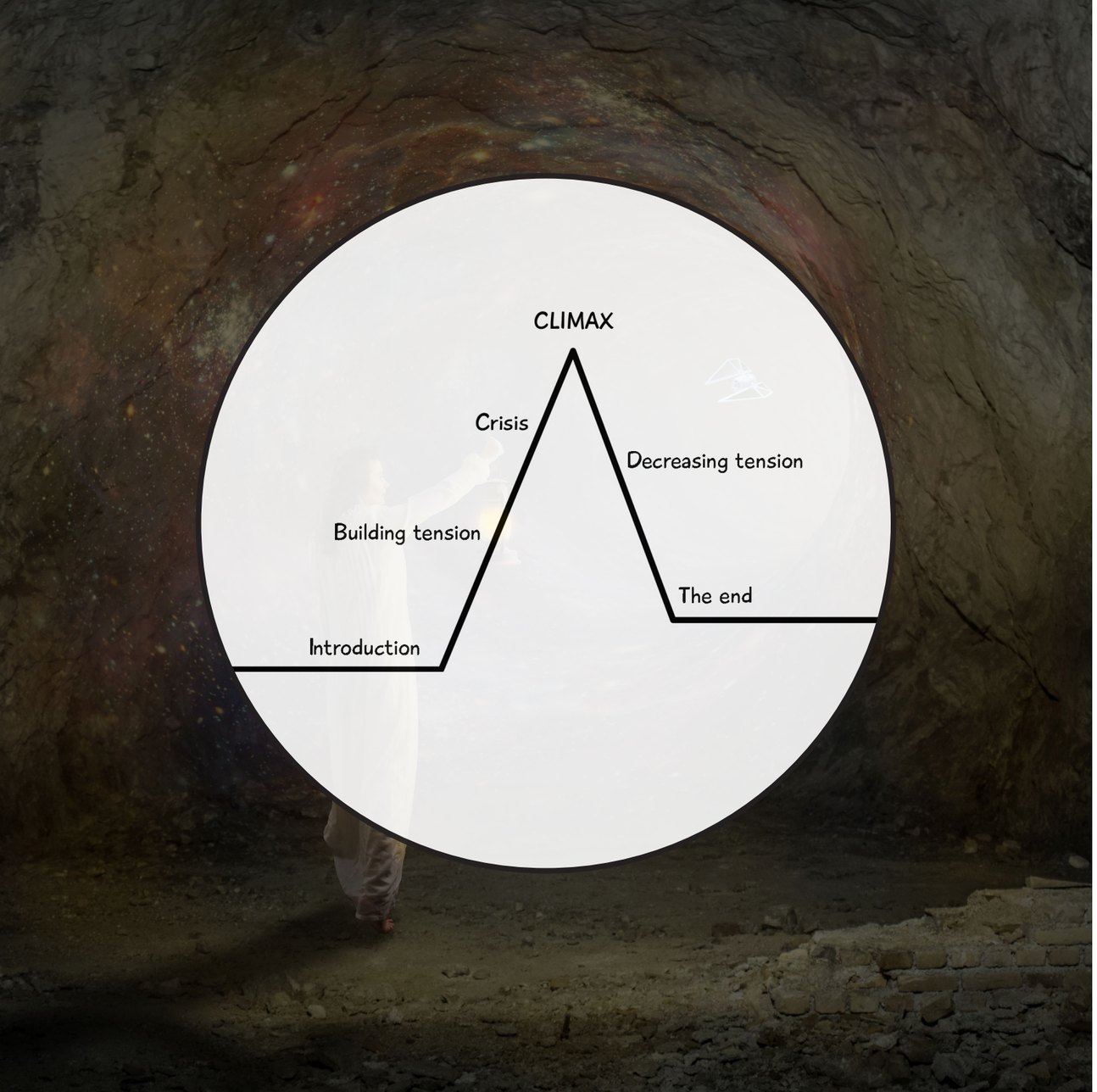
Once you've decided who will be the main character in your picture book, you need to get to know him or her. What is his name. How old is he. Where does he come from. Where does he want to go. How did he get here. What does he like to do. Does he have a pet? Does he have a best friend. What makes him angry or sad. What makes him happy. What obstacles does he encounter. For the sake of convenience, we speak of 'he' in this case, but it can of course also be a 'she' or an 'it'.

Developing your character

Now that you have a clear idea of the character in your book, we still don't know what he looks like. You can leave this entirely to your illustrator, but often they still want a certain image, that you had in mind. Is the spider that can't play football wearing a shirt and shorts, is he wearing football boots or is it just a spider without any clothes on. You can supply rough sketches of how you think the illustrations should look like. You can also create a mood board by matching pictures and colors on Pinterest. You may want to use a certain color palette. Illustrators often sense exactly what you mean and love the creative freedom they get, which only improves the quality of the illustrations.

Show it, don't tell

Before the illustrator starts he or she always likes to receive the story, description of the characters and possibly sketches that make it clear, what you have in mind. Because a picture book doesn't have to be more than 500 words, text and illustration must be coordinated quite well. For example: If the soccer-playing spider is wearing a red shirt, you can use the sentence "Charly was wearing a bright red t-shirt." out of the story because we can already see this in the illustration. This again saves on the number of words that can be used elsewhere.



Storyline

To write a good picture book, a number of factors are important. Each book has a main character (protagonist), an opponent (antagonist; this can be an enemy but also a rival, competitor, villain or an obstacle). In addition, the personality is described (characteristics, quality, personality characteristics) and the place where it takes place. Each protagonist encounters an obstacle or problem to overcome and then the final solution with a satisfying conclusion.

Storyline
Every storyline is built the same way. We use Freytag's Pyramid for this, which is made up of 6 elements:

Introduction:
Who, what, where and why of the story. Get to know the main characters or secondary characters.

Building tension:
This sets the story in motion. Character tries to solve the problem multiple times (ideally 3x) and fails miserably.

Crisis:
Everything seems to be lost. Main character gives up. The problem of whether the opponent appears to have won. Main character feels defeated.

Climax:
But then something amazing and incredible happens to turn the story around. The problem is solved by the main character. The reader can breathe a sigh of relief.

Decreasing tension:
After the climax you don't end the story immediately but you let the story land softly. The tension binds up loose ends, reveals all the truths, answers all the questions of the readers and leaves them very satisfied.

The end:
A happy ending for your readers that will make kids want to read it again.

On the next page you can read how the page division is arranged.

Storyboard

On the right you see the structure of a storyboard.

A picture book has 32 pages of content. From a printing point of view, it is important to always use a multiple of eight. The layout of a book is almost always the same. The diagram above clearly shows the layout of a picture book.
Page 1, 2, 3 is the title page, the colophon and possibly dedicated to.

The storyline begins on page 4. Characters are introduced, the situation is described and the environment is shown. The main character should be the center of the story. Because he has to tackle a problem, he grows in the story.

On pages 4-12 you define characters (who are they, why should we care about them?). What is the plot for your story. Define the problem and what your character wants or hopes to achieve. Introduce a second character that is necessary for the story to run smoothly.

On pages 13-20, the main character begins to look for ways to solve the problem. He makes a first attempt to solve the problem but fails. Other characters can encourage or help him. The antagonist or problem continues to cause problems.

On pages 21-28, the main character makes two more attempts to solve the problem, resulting in disaster. The antagonist seems to be winning, the other characters fall away or give up and all seems to be lost. The main character seems to be failing.

A glimmer of hope suddenly appears on pages 27 - 30. The main character discovers the solution on his own and carries out a plan that works, overcoming the problem or the antagonist. The main character is proud of himself.

On pages 29 - 31 all loose ends come together and story has a happy ending. The main character is happy and proud that he has kept up his mission. The story ends very satisfying for the young readers so that they want to hear it over and over again. Children love a happy ending.

Editor, corrector or proofreader

Even the best language purist makes a typo, spelling or language error. It's therefore important to always have a third person look at the text. You can hire an editor for this. If you're just looking for someone to have it corrected, you need a corrector. A proofreader looks at spelling, grammar, the use of punctuation marks and sentence structure.

An editor goes a little deeper into the story. In editing, an editor looks at the storyline; is the content correct, are names used consistently, does the sentence structure fit the age category? Editing therefore goes much further than a typo.

There are many copywriters who also do editing work. Discuss the options with various editors and do your research well. Read recommendations and reviews and ask about the books they've edited before.

Illustrations

Choice, choices, everything stands or falls with making the right choice. Especially with a picture book the pictures are of course very important. Children who are read, look at the pictures to get the extra information that is not told. If you feel a super creative mood coming up and you want to illustrate yourself, that's fine of course, but be realistic, does this benefit the quality of your book? Ask children and people around you, who dare to be honest if your illustrations are nice and good enough for a book. Take the self-test, if you saw your book with your drawings in the store, would you buy it?

Before choosing an illustrator, think about which style you love. Which style suits the story. Pinterest is an inexhaustible source of illustrations in different styles. What attracts you and what do you hate? Digital illustrations (which can usually be a bit more smooth but can be edited more quickly) or traditional illustrations made in pencil, pen & ink, watercolor or any other type of painting technique that may have "mistakes" because it would cost too much to recreate the artwork to make.

Many authors wonder how much an illustration costs. This is a question that is difficult to answer. How much does a house cost? A villa is more expensive than a one-room apartment. It has to do with many factors such as technique, how detailed the drawings are, but also how much experience an illustrator has.

How to choose an illustrator
We have a large number of great illustrators in the Netherlands who would love to illustrate your books. If you prefer to look outside the Netherlands, you can look beyond the national borders via Facebook groups and special websites.

- ❏ Choose a style and look for different illustrators
- ❏ View portfolios of illustrators
- ❏ Read validated reviews from illustrators. It's easy to come up with reviews and put them on your website, but can you find the people or companies who placed the reviews. Do they really exist? Is it a valid review?
- ❏ Does the illustrator have experience in illustrating books? Making a painting is quite different from illustrating a book.
- ❏ Does the illustrator have a graphic background? It is important to know how to create digitally files ready for print. A designer can also advise on this.
- ❏ Have you found the right person to work with? Put agreements on price and deadlines on paper to avoid disappointment.

Design and publish

Have you checked the date? Is your deadline already in sight or are you way past the deadline? You have written your story, an illustrator has provided the illustrations (or maybe you made them yourself), an editor has checked the text for errors and there are now two virtual piles on your virtual desk, namely a pile of illustrations and a pile of pages.
Now what?

Now we are going to put everything together into one book. An important question, that only you can answer is whether you want to do this yourself or have somebody else do it for you. Do you know how to work with computers and programs? Do you learn quickly? Do you have a limited budget? Have fun yourself!
There are several programs and online tools, you can use to put everything together. If you want to start publishing through Amazon, they also offer tools on their website.

Do you get nervous at the word tools, online and doing it yourself? Hire somebody who will do the work for you. A designer knows all about the terms, that might mean nothing to you. RGB or CMYK, bleed, crop marks. A designer will ask you to send the text in a text file and the illustrations separately via wetransfer or another download option. The illustrations must be 300 DPI and the correct size for your book. If the designer has to enlarge them, there is a good chance that they will become blurry or pixelated, of course you don't want that. The designer also needs to know what size your book is and how many pages.

A designer will convert illustrations to CMYK if needed, text and illustrations are placed on the pages. A font will be chosen. In addition, the book will have a title page and a colophon. The cover is created in a separate file.

If you have purchased an ISBN number yourself, the designer will make a barcode from it, which is placed on the back of the cover. You can also get a free ISBN number at Amazon.

Ultimately, you will receive two certified PDFs that you can upload in your KDP (amazon) environment. After uploading, KDP checks if the content file meet the correct requirements. This can take about 72 hours at Amazon.
Then the moment is finally there and your very first children's book goes LIVE.

Congratulations! You now belong to that one percent that turns a dream into a goal. You can sell your books online at Amazon, but you can also order your own copies from KDP and distribute or sell them in your area or through your own website.

Many authors breathe a sigh of relief now their book is published. They are euphoric about their first book, they show the whole world. Enjoy that euphoria because it lasts about half a day, maybe a day but then you can't wait to do the whole process again. A new author is born!

I hope this quick introduction how to write a picture book has helped. I am very curious about your book. Will you let me know when your book is launched or maybe already launched? Or if you need any help or have questions, you can always contact me.

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Mireille van Yperen has been working as a graphic designer and web designer since 1995. In 2003 she started her own company DTPH. Because of her many years of experience in the world of the graphic industry, she knows everything about design, color and printing. In 2019 Mireille started writing, illustrating and publishing her own children's books, she sells in her Spinselshop, Amazon and Bol.com.

In addition to her graphic work at DTP-hulp.nl, she still enjoys working on the books of other authors for whom she also designs everything an author needs for the media kit, such as flyers, folders, business cards, logos. , banners and websites.

For more information go to: dtp-hulp.nl
or take a look in the shop: Spinselshop

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