

# Children's Book Writing & Illustration Concepts — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a finished project. Work the sections in order: nail the format and idea, draft and cut your manuscript, paginate it into a 32-page dummy, then polish and prepare a real submission package. Use the templates to track word counts, spreads, mentor texts, and your agent queries so nothing falls through the cracks.

## How Children's Books Actually Work

Lock in the right format, study the market, and read like a writer before drafting.

### Worksheet: Format Fit Sheet

Pin your idea to a single age category and its hard numbers. If your idea needs more words than the target allows, it likely belongs in an older format.

One-line idea

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Target child age (as narrow as possible)

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Chosen category (board / picture book / early reader / chapter book)

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Word-count target for that category

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Page-count target

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Why a child this age cares about this idea

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### Exercise: Reverse-Engineer Three Mentor Texts

Pick three published books in your target category, ideally including one from the last three years. Read each twice, then answer the prompts for each.

- What is the estimated word count, and how many page turns did you count?

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- What structure does it use (cumulative, circular, escalating problem, other)?

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- Mark three lines that only make sense with the picture: what is the text leaving to the art?

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- What does the final page do to satisfy the reader?

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### Checklist: Market-Readiness Checklist

- I have read at least 30 books in my target category with a writer's eye
- I can state my category, target age, and word-count ceiling from memory
- I logged each mentor text's category, word count, and structure
- I included recent titles, not only classics, to read the current market

[ ] I can name two or three comparable titles my book sits beside

## Crafting the Story

Generate a strong child-driven idea and shape it into a tight, page-turn-aware manuscript.

### Exercise: Twenty Problems Brainstorm

Set a timer for ten minutes and list 20 small problems from a child's daily life without judging them. Then evaluate.

- Which five problems let the child want something specific and concrete?

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- For your top idea, write the want as: the character wants X but Y is in the way.

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- Does any adult currently solve the problem? If so, how will you let the child act instead?

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- What emotional or comic payoff could the final page deliver?

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### Worksheet: Spread-by-Spread Beat Map

Plot your story across roughly 14 spreads. Each beat should end on a hook that pulls the reader to turn the page.

Spreads 1-3 setup: character, world, and want

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Spreads 4-6 first attempt and failure

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Spreads 7-9 second attempt, raised stakes

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Spreads 10-12 third attempt or the turn (emotional peak)

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Spreads 13-14 resolution and final-page button or twist

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Where the rule of three appears

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### Checklist: Tight-Draft Revision Checklist

[ ] Manuscript is under my word ceiling (aim under 500 words)

[ ] I deleted adjectives, adverbs, and stage directions the art can show

[ ] I replaced explained emotion with visible action or dialogue

[ ] I read the whole manuscript aloud and fixed every stumble

[ ] Each spread still ends on a hook after cutting

[ ] If I rhymed, the meter is flawless and the story survives without the rhyme

## Words Meet Pictures: The Dummy

Paginate the manuscript onto 32 pages and storyboard it to test the visual flow.

### Worksheet: 32-Page Pagination Planner

Account for front matter, then place one story beat per spread. If a spread holds too many words, the book is too long for the format.

Pages 1-2 front matter (half-title / title)

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Pages 3-4 copyright / dedication / opening spread

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Story spreads (list the beat and word count for each)

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Page where the climax lands

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Final interior page and its button or twist

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Total story word count after pagination

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### Exercise: Thumbnail Storyboard Pass

Draw a grid of small boxes, one per spread, and rough each composition (stick figures or labelled boxes are fine). Then review the whole grid at once.

- Where can you vary the camera (wide, medium, close-up) to avoid repetition?
  - Which spread could go near-wordless because the picture carries it?
  - Are any faces or key elements landing awkwardly on the centre gutter?
  - After sketching, which text lines can you cut because the picture already tells them?
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### Checklist: Dummy and Collaboration Checklist

- My story paginates cleanly onto 32 pages with front matter accounted for
  - Every spread ends on a page-turn hook
  - I have visual variety across the spreads, not 14 identical framings
  - I used art notes only where the words alone would be misread
  - I did not specify colours, character looks, or layouts I merely prefer
  - I understand that for author-only books the publisher chooses the illustrator
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## Polish, Submit, and the Business

Revise to submission quality, format correctly, and build a real query and submission plan.

### Exercise: Layered Revision Sprint

Run your manuscript through one focused pass at a time rather than fixing everything at once. Note what changed in each layer.

- Structural pass: is the want clear, do stakes rise, does the child drive the ending?
  - Read-aloud pass: which lines stumbled, and how did you fix them?
  - What specific feedback did a critique partner or a real child in the target age give?
  - What is your finish-line test that tells you the manuscript is ready to submit?
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### Worksheet: Query Letter Builder

Draft a one-page query under about 250 words, personalised to one recipient. Fill each field, then assemble. Hook sentence that pitches the story

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Title, category (picture book), and word count

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Two comparable titles and the reader it is for

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Brief honest bio or relevant credentials

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Why you chose this specific agent or editor

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Polite closing line and submission-format note

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### Checklist: Submission-Ready Checklist

- Manuscript is double-spaced, 12-point serif, with name, contact, and word count in the header
- No clip art or illustrations unless I am the illustrator submitting a dummy
- I proofread to zero typos
- My query is personalised and under roughly 250 words
- I followed each recipient's submission guidelines exactly
- I am querying only agents or houses that accept my category
- I confirmed I am never paying a reading fee to a legitimate agent

### Your Action Plan

1. Choose your category and write down its word-count and page-count targets
2. Read 30 books in that category and log them in the mentor-text tracker
3. Brainstorm 20 child-sized problems and select one child-driven idea
4. Draft the manuscript freely, then cut it under your word ceiling across three passes
5. Map the story to roughly 14 spreads, ending each on a page-turn hook
6. Paginate onto a 32-page dummy and thumbnail every spread
7. Cut any remaining text the pictures already tell
8. Run layered revision passes and read aloud to a child in the target age
9. Get critique from at least three other writers and revise to a finish line
10. Format the manuscript, write a personalised query with comps, and submit in small batches







