

Fightin' Bookworm
Report:



writing children's
nonfiction

This collection copyright © 2013 by Children's Book Insider, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this document or accompanying files may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or otherwise, by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This eBook is presented to you for informational purposes only and is not a substitution for any professional advice. The contents herein are based on the views and opinions of the author and all associated contributors. While every effort has been made by the author and all associated contributors to present accurate and up to date information within this document, it is apparent technologies rapidly change. Therefore, the author and all associated contributors reserve the right to update the contents and information provided herein as these changes progress. The author and/or all associated contributors take no responsibility for any errors or omissions if such discrepancies exist within this document.

The author and all other contributors accept no responsibility for any consequential actions taken, whether monetary, legal, or otherwise, by any and all readers of the materials provided. It is the readers sole responsibility to seek professional advice before taking any action on their part.

Readers results will vary based on their skill level and individual perception of the contents herein, and thusly no guarantees, monetarily or otherwise, can be made accurately. Therefore, no guarantees are made.

Children's Book Insider, LLC
901 Columbia Road
Fort Collins, CO 80525
<http://cbiclubhouse.com> mail@write4kids.com

Table of Contents

About the Authors:.....	4
The Scoop on Nonfiction.....	5
Writing for the Gifted Education Market.....	7
Developing an Idea into a Winning Article for Kids.....	9
The Art of the Interview.....	11
Writing for the Special Education Market.....	13
How to Organize and Pitch Your Nonfiction Book.....	15
Exploring the Education Market: An Interview With Evelyn B. Christensen.....	17
Using Fictional Techniques to Enhance Your Nonfiction.....	21
Draw from Life Experience to Write Nonfiction Books.....	23

About the Authors:

Jane McBride Choate is the author of over 30 books. Follow her two blogs: The Menopause Monocle (<http://www.menopausemonocle.blogspot.com>), and The Gratitude Project (<http://www.janemcbride.blogspot.com>)

MaryAnn Diorio, PhD, MFA. is a widely published author whose short stories, poems, and articles for children have appeared in numerous children's magazines. She is also the author of *A Student's Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, *A Student's Guide to Herman Melville*, and *A Student's Guide to Mark Twain*, all published by Enslow Publishers. She can be reached through www.maryanndiorio.com or maryann@maryanndiorio.com.

Dr. Suzanna E. Henshon is the author of *Mystery Science: The Case of the Missing Bicycle*, *Haunted House: Descriptive and Narrative Writing Exercises*, and *King Arthur's Academy: Descriptive and Narrative Writing Exercises*, all from Prufrock Press.

Kimberly M. Hutmacher is the author of 25 books and numerous pieces of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for the magazine market. To learn more about Kimberly and her books, visit her website <http://www.kimberlyhutmacher.com>. You can also celebrate nature themed picture books with Kimberly at *Wild About Nature* blog <http://wildaboutnaturewriters.blogspot.com>

The Scoop on Nonfiction

by Jane McBride Choate

When I wanted to research writing nonfiction for young adults, I went to the experts: Mary Bowman-Kruhm and Catherine Reef, who, between them, have authored over 72 books.

Why do you write nonfiction rather than fiction?

MBK: I write nonfiction because I enjoy the research and I like to read nonfiction. I'll take an issue of *National Geographic* or a book like the *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* over a book of fiction any day. I know much fiction has well researched background material in it, but I really prefer to read only the background material—told in an engaging way, of course.

CR: I was working as a writer in the health field and feeling unfulfilled when my husband and I took our ten-year-old son and his friend to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. I sensed that the boys didn't have a good understanding of what we were seeing, and I had the idea of writing a book for children on the memorial. That project never got completed, but my query to a publisher led to my first book, *Washington, D.C.* (Dillon Press, 1990). Writing about our heritage for young readers turned out to be a good fit for me, and I am doing work that is satisfying and important.

What are the possibilities in writing nonfiction? Can writers grow a career from it?

CR: Publishers will always need good writers, so those who can produce high-quality nonfiction manuscripts that meet market demands should look forward to steady publication.

MBK: I framed a career around mostly nonfiction, but you have to be willing to research and write varied materials. You also have to seek out varied markets. I have written articles for *Children's Book Insider* since the Internet was just taking off. I have also done a great deal of work-for-hire. Having been in education most of my life, I also write materials for the Johns Hopkins' Center for Technology in Education, a great group of people working to help teachers benefit from cutting edge technology combined with current research. A friend writes those booklets found in hospitals and doctors' offices. Wherever you find the printed word, you find the need for a writer.

We all know that fiction is taking off in ebooks. What about nonfiction?

CR: EBooks have come to stay, but their eventual share of the nonfiction market remains

to be seen. My most recent book, *Jane Austen: A Life Revealed* (Clarion, 2011), is my first title to be made available in both print and eBook editions.

MBK: I feel eBooks are taking off in both fiction and nonfiction. You would have to check numbers but I think the market for nonfiction eBooks is potentially huge and only beginning. For instance, I'm a knitter and I can envision an eBook with video links to demonstrate techniques like yarn over and grafting toes of socks. For history, a book about the seeds of World War II in Germany could link to brief videos of Hitler making a speech, economic conditions, and so on. A cookbook can link to demonstration of techniques. Along with video and audio links, an app or game or blog can support the printed word. The field for nonfiction, including textbooks, is wide open and changing to a multi-modality experience.

Do you ever write for the educational market? What, if any, limitations are there for that?

MBK: Yes, in fact most of my books are for the educational market or both education and trade. A background in education helps, but many writers study the field to get into that market. Do you find librarians helpful and appreciative of your work?

MBK: I absolutely appreciate them and hope it's a mutual feeling. Both writers stress that they have found librarians and booksellers to be helpful and supportive. Mary Bowman-Kruhm's *Margaret Mead: A Biography* is dedicated to "two librarians at Johns Hopkins University who kept my backpack filled with resources I could never have found on my own." With writers like Mary and Catherine, we are assured that nonfiction for children and young adults is in capable and caring hands.

Writing for the Gifted Education Market

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

In recent years, gifted education has become a big field. Every year the National Association for Gifted Children hosts a meeting attended by thousands of teachers, parents, and administrators. There are many opportunities to publish in the field of gifted education, ranging from newsletters to books. Before hitting the keyboard with an idea, consider your own talent base. What unique interests, talents, and experience can you bring into your writing, and how will gifted learners benefit? Writing for a publisher like Prufrock Press isn't entirely different than writing for a more traditional educational publisher like Scholastic. You need to create a product that teachers can use in their classes, a book that parents can use with their children, or a resource that students can use on their own.

Figure out your audience. Before you begin writing a book, decide whether you are writing directly for students, parents, or teachers. If you are writing for a teacher, it must be something that is flexible to fit into a mainstream class but targeted specifically to gifted children. If you are writing for parents, think about what parents in general are looking for, and then consider what is best for parents of gifted learners.

Target your content. If you are writing an article for *Teaching for High Potential*, it is essential that you have direct classroom experience and can provide evidence that you have worked with gifted learners. If you are writing for Royal Fireworks Press, it is critical to look at their product line and think about whether your book will fit.

Consider why you are qualified to write for gifted learners. You don't necessarily have to be a teacher to write for gifted learners. Many publishers would be excited to receive a book proposal from a NASA employee or an oceanographer. But if you work outside the field of education, consider how your expertise will help you write, design, and market a product. You also need to study the formats the publisher usually works in, and write to these specifications. If you work in the outside world, you've probably never seen a lesson plan; familiarize yourself with the format and requirements that teachers need, particularly in this test-laden educational landscape. You might also have to learn about statewide tests in order to market your product to an audience of teachers.

Think outside the box. Many gifted learners are able to think at a level that is comparable to an adult even at an early age. So it's essential to create an innovative product that is both challenging and interesting. Gifted learners aren't looking for worksheets; they are seeking an experience that has cognitive, emotional, and educational benefits.

Study the products of publishers. Whether you are writing a book or an article, it is critical to understand the publisher's position in the marketplace of gifted education. Publishers have different niches even within this field. You don't want to submit a book for

gifted learners to an editor who publishes products for parents and teachers – and vice versa. Look at the website and read actual products before you send your query letter!

Remember that certain fields are “hotter” than others. Maybe you taught English for 20 years at a high school, and you want to turn this expertise into a book. That’s a wonderful idea, but it’s critical to keep in mind that science and math products are an easier sell in this climate. Publishers are also looking for books that cater to gifted learners with disabilities. Keep these trends in mind as you begin writing.

Developing an Idea into a Winning Article for Kids

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

How do you turn an idea into an article?

Many writers think in broad concepts, but to sell a nonfiction piece it is essential to consider each individual sentence and to refine your ideas into paragraph form. I will discuss how to write cohesive, clearly written paragraphs that will combine into a well written nonfiction piece.

Maybe you want to write about homework in medieval times (think about swinging a sword), or what it's like to impersonate the past at a historic site. You're excited about this concept, but you're not sure how to turn it into an article. You must figure out the direction of your creativity, transforming the cusp of an idea into a marketable article that young readers will enjoy. Before you hit the keyboard, decide who you are writing for and what you are trying to say . Selling an article to Highlights is different than writing a piece for *Ranger Rick*. Even within the field of children's magazines, publications vary widely in content and audience. It's a good idea to check out submissions policies, but it's an even better idea to read the magazine. As you read published articles, you will get a sense of editorial taste, which varies across publications. You'll also see what not to write—i.e. the recent topics have already been covered. Study a publication very carefully.

Decide whether your topic is a good fit. When you start writing the article, it is helpful to have a comparable published piece in front of you to use as a writing model. This will give you a sense of sentence length, paragraph structure, and even syntax. Also, it will give you an idea of whether or not the article would "fit" in this publication. Do you have too much material? Or too little? Having a "model" article to look at, you'll be able to figure out whether your submission is realistic—or a stretch.

Now begin writing. You'll want to focus on how to develop the idea point by point. Sometimes it's effective to draw readers in with a question, an anecdote, or an interactive activity. It's essential to "hook" the reader quickly, just like a novelist would do on the first page. The only difference is that you are working on a smaller canvass. As you write the first draft, don't worry too much about making mistakes. You can fix grammar and mechanical errors later on. After you finish writing, put the piece aside for a couple days, so you can return to it with fresh eyes.

Then it's time to work on individual paragraphs. Each paragraph should contribute to the overall narrative of the article. As you rewrite the piece, focus on refining your ideas. You may discover that using topic sentences to open each paragraph is a good way to introduce your points. The second sentence should elaborate on the idea. The third sentence will help the reader transition into the next paragraph.

At the sentence level, every word counts toward either providing interesting information, helping the reader progress forward, or enhancing the overall piece. Each sentence must contribute to the narrative you are presenting. When you only have 500-1000 words, there's no room for information that doesn't support your points, or for extensive use of adjectives and adverbs. Instead, it's time to cut out the extra words until the article is fun to read and cohesively written.

Your job is to share information in a clear and coherent way, enchanting young readers while staying true to the facts in far less space than an adult source would allow. With some planning and a willingness to revise, you can accomplish this task. So, what are you waiting for? Start writing now!

The Art of the Interview

by Jane McBride Choate

Sooner or later, most working writers need help. We need expertise or knowledge beyond our own. Where do we go for help? How do you conduct an interview? What are the rules of etiquette? How do you prepare for an interview? Should you record it?

* Depending upon your relationship with your chosen expert, call or email and ask when it would be convenient to hold the interview. Don't presume and just show up. This is a business meeting and should be treated as such.

* Be respectful of her time. If your interview promises to be lengthy, explain that and ask if her schedule will allow her to spend an hour or so with you. If the answer is no, respect that and limit your questions to the most important. By narrowing your focus, you will probably have a tighter article.

* If you have only a few questions, you can probably hold the interview over the phone. Prearrange a time to call, keep it short, have your list of questions ready. Nothing is more annoying than someone who stammers out haphazard and disjointed questions.

* Ask if you can send your questions by email. This has the advantage of allowing the person to answer at his own convenience and in his own time. I have conducted many successful interviews via email and feel that I get more information in this way than over the phone or in-person.

* Send a thank-you note afterward. A handwritten note is a rarity these days and is always appreciated. You want to maintain good relations with your experts and sources. Your mother was right: good manners count and never go out of style.

* Ask if you can record the interview. Do not try to interview someone without receiving his permission to record what he says. That is just plain rude and smacks of dishonesty. No excuses. If the person isn't comfortable with being recorded, be prepared to take detailed notes. Don't trust your memory. Even the best memory can play tricks on a person.

* Be certain to give credit in your article or story for the help. Many writers have an acknowledgments page where they gave credit to the people who helped with expert advice.

* If you are writing a story or an article for a magazine, let your expert know about any time constraints or deadlines you may have. Also, you may well need more direct quotes for a magazine article. Be meticulous in quoting your source. Don't substitute your words for his. Use standard rules in punctuating any quotes.

* Do your homework. Come prepared to ask intelligent questions. Don't insult the person by asking foolish questions that show you didn't take the time or interest to do the necessary research. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. If you are going to the trouble of interviewing someone to strengthen your article or book, take the time to formulate questions that will provoke thoughtful, insightful answers. If you show that you have taken the time to prepare, your expert may share stories with you that he wouldn't ordinarily.

* Show that you are a professional. Arrive promptly. Unless you are interviewing a rancher who raises llamas and you will be tramping through fields, dress as you would for any business meeting. Remember, you have only one chance to make a first impression.

Where do we find experts?

* Look in your own backyard. Chances are you have friends, co-workers, members of your church, parents who serve on the PTA with you, or neighbors who have a wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects. Are you writing a book about World War II? What about asking your grandfather? Or the elderly man who sits next to you in church? Are you penning a book about a child spending the summer on his grandparents' apple orchard? Go to the owners of the orchard who live down that country road you've been promising yourself that you'd explore someday and explain your quest.

* Google. Type in the subject you are interested in. Two good sources are The Journalist's Toolbox (<http://www.journaliststoolbox.com/newswriting/expert.html>) and ProfNet (<http://www.prnewswire.com/profnet/>)

* Make use of your library. Librarians are wonderful sources. If they can't put you in touch with an expert, they have resources who can help steer you in the right direction.

Start a file of experts. Don't limit yourself. Who knows? Someday you may need an expert on the mating habits of alligators!

Writing for the Special Education Market

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

Many writers never consider writing for the special education market, but it can be a wonderful way to break in with a publishing company while providing an invaluable resource for parents, teachers, and students. When you write for this market, it is critical to have life experience and to cater your work to specific audiences.

How exactly do you write for the special education market? There are many ways to do it — from writing a fictional book to creating a nonfiction resource for parents or an educational book for students and teachers. Depending on your area of interest, you may write a novel with an autistic character, create a book for parents of children with learning disabilities, or write an activity book for children with special needs. Before you start, consider your expertise. If you've never known a child with special needs, it is going to be hard to write an authentic product. Similarly, it is going to be difficult to write a resource for parents if you have never had this life experience. Solid research and getting to know a person with special needs is essential.

It's also important to know the specific market. In this day and age, Down syndrome has significantly declined, while autism has risen to new levels. I never met an autistic child in elementary school during the 1980s, but today special education classes are filled with autistic children.

Here are a few more tips:

1. **Study the market.** You'll discover it is quite diverse. Publishers like Prufrock cater to high-ability children who have disabilities. On the other side, some publishers cater to parents of children whose autistic children will never live independently.
2. **Break with the stereotypes.** Many people stereotype autistic children as looking and acting a certain way. A child with autistic tendencies could have the inventing ability of Edison, but on the other end of the spectrum a young person with autism may have difficulty speaking and can get frustrated easily. If you're writing fiction, will the character's disability be the focus of the plot, or will it just be a part of who this character is?
3. **Be up-to-date in your perspectives.** Even if you have known a child or adult with the disability, it does not by any means constitute expertise. You run the risk of generalizing too much across a diverse audience, so use your knowledge as a launching point to acquiring greater expertise.
4. **Keep in mind that in these changing times, it is not politically correct to use certain terms.** It is important to define the character as a person, not as a disabled figure in your fictional narrative. And when you write a nonfiction book, you need to

be aware of the latest trends, technology, and educational advancements that allow children with special needs to live more fulfilling lives than in the past.

5. **As you begin writing your narrative, you may develop connections with parents and children that will lead toward new perspectives.** While you may already have some knowledge and expertise, it's essential to keep an open mind. You will meet people who surpass your expectations, and these individuals may become part of your text. You may discover people with disabilities can be far more sensitive and creative than we give them credit for being.
6. **Edit toward excellence.** Keep reading, conversing, observing, and writing. Study the niches of publishers you hope to work with. And remember that you can never understand every detail about this disability; we are all working with imperfect knowledge that is, to some degree, limited.

A few publishers of special needs material:

Prufrock Press, <http://www.prufrock.com>

Woodbine House, <http://www.woodbinehouse.com>

Other publishers are listed on the website for the National Association of Special Education Teachers, <http://www.naset.org/481.0.html>

A list of fiction with special needs characters can be found at <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/learning-disabilities/reading/5316.html>

How to Organize and Pitch Your Nonfiction Book

by Catherine DePino

Before I started writing my book, *Who Says Bullies Rule?: Common Sense Tips to Help Your Kids Cope*, I knew that I wanted to provide a book for parents with tips that were both practical and easily implemented. Moreover, I wanted to offer ideas that would prove helpful to parents who are striving to help their kids deal with the physical and psychological effects of bullying.

After thinking about my experiences as an educator who witnessed bullying daily, I remembered how common sense could help bring about a resolution to most problems, whether the child was a preschooler or an older student.

I also thought about how important it was to forge strong ties between the child, parent, and school system so that each important player working to prevent and stop bullying would keep the other informed of the problems the child faced. I believed that if children, parents, and the school system worked together closely, they would have a better chance of ending the child's bullying dilemma. I also remembered the importance of parents knowing how to navigate the channels in their school systems in order to help their children with their bullying issues. I've found that before beginning to write your proposal, you'll need to be sure about the main points you want to stress in your book. If you have narrowed down the topics you want to deal with before you begin to write, you can structure your proposal around these important points.

Keeping all this in mind, I outlined sample chapters for the book, did a review of the related literature (what was out there already and what gaps needed to be filled), and sent the proposal out to the same editor who had published my teacher resource book about bullying.

Before you flesh out your proposal, first think about some new angles for a subject that interests you. Then write out a tentative table of contents. Summarize each chapter in a few words. Make it conversational and practical. Once you have a working table of contents with chapter summaries, rearrange it into what you think is the best order, and the book will easily take shape from these brief chapter summaries.

After the editor accepts your proposal and you begin to write your nonfiction book, you'll find that you have to make many decisions. One is what tone you plan to use to get your information across. I've found that a one-on-one conversational tone (the same one used in the proposal) works for me. I like to pretend I'm talking to my audience (in this case, parents) in a relaxed manner, offering my best advice as I would at a parent/teacher conference.

If you plan to present case studies or opt for fictitious examples, you'll have to decide whether you want to use real life situations or fictitious examples based loosely upon your

personal experiences with the subject matter.

If you decide to use actual examples, you'll need to obtain permission from your sources, which may prove time-consuming, and possibly, expensive. However, if you use fictitious examples, you'll have to make them sound realistic enough that readers will be able to apply the information to their unique situations.

It's also important to represent a variety of ethnic groups and lifestyles in your examples. Offering this variety gives more people the chance to identify with the people and situations in your examples. (In my book, for example, not all of the children come from two-parent families. Some parents are divorced, a grandparent is raising a child, one child lives in a group home, and a father is the custodial parent in another anecdote.)

Remember to make writing decisions about subject matter and style before you begin your proposal and you'll be one step ahead in writing a bestselling book.

Exploring the Education Market: An Interview With Evelyn B. Christensen

by Kimberly Hutmacher

As the author of more than 40 books and games for education publishers, Evelyn B. Christensen knows her way around this niche market. Longtime readers might remember an article CBI did with Evelyn a few years ago. We decided it was time to revisit this topic and couldn't think of a better person to fill us in on what's stayed the same, and more importantly, what's changed.

Can you begin by sharing with our readers the types of books that are published in the education market?

A large portion of books in the education market are textbooks and the kinds of books you find in the nonfiction section of a school or public library. Some fiction is also published; these are mostly leveled readers with controlled vocabulary and reading difficulty levels, or hi/ lo books (high interest, low reading level). A third category is supplementary books. These include things like workbooks, puzzle books, and teacher resource books.

Do you have to be a teacher to write for this market?

Fortunately, no. A few educational publishers use only teachers to write their materials, but most don't care. They want excellent writers who can write to guidelines (such as reading levels or curriculum standards), can do good research, can meet deadlines, and are easy to work with. A teaching background is a plus, but not a requirement.

What sparked your interest in writing for this market?

I'm a teacher, both at heart and from training (I have a doctorate in education), so it was a natural place for me to find my niche. I love seeing kids get excited about learning, and I enjoy thinking up new ideas to encourage that excitement. Fortunately, publishers have liked lots of my ideas.

How did/do you approach these markets?

Educational publishing has two basic types of publishing and you approach those two types differently. With the first type, which is what I've done personally, the writer comes up with the book idea, and you send either a submission or a proposal. With the second type, the publisher or book packager comes up with the idea and gives you an assignment to write the book according to their specifications.

Do you submit an entire manuscript or just a query with sample chapters?

If you've already written the book, you send sample chapters and an outline or table of

contents. Many authors send a proposal instead of a submission. The advantage to a proposal is that the publisher may have ideas about directions they want the book to take and can have input before you spend a lot of time on the writing.

About how long do you get to complete each book?

The length of time you're given to complete a book will vary widely with different publishers and different projects. Sometimes the deadlines can be quite short. I've had a proposal acceptance with about a six-week deadline to complete two books.

How does the pay generally work for this market? Flat fee? Royalty? Advance plus royalty?

A majority of the work for this market is done for a flat fee, and usually it's done as work-for-hire which means the writer turns all rights over to the publisher; you might not even get your name on your work. Some educational publishers do give royalty contracts, but these often do not include an advance.

Do these kinds of publishers expect you to do a lot of promotion?

No. One of the advantages of writing for this market is that, unlike trade publishers, educational publishers usually don't expect a lot of author promotion. Most sell primarily through their catalogs or sales reps directly to schools or libraries, not to the general public. If you like to do school visits or other author events, you certainly can, and many writers supplement their income that way, but you don't have to.

You've written for this market for a long time. How has this market changed?

One way it's changed is that the poor economy has made it more difficult to get published in this market. Budgets for most schools and libraries have been cut, so some publishers have also had to cut back. Another big change is the current emphasis on school testing and on state and national curriculum standards. When I was starting out, if a manuscript provided fun ways to challenge kids to think and improve their logic skills, it had a good chance of being published. Today, it would also need to be tied to specific curriculum standards. And, of course, the other big change that's just beginning is all the digital possibilities.

Are you still approaching new publishers with your work or do you have a stable of publishers that you've been able to work with over and over again?

I do both. I just got a new contract today from a publisher I've never worked with before, but I've also done over 20 books for a single publisher. When I have a new idea, I usually first query the publisher I've worked with the most. If they aren't interested (and that happens a lot), then I look for another publisher.

Evelyn's advice for new writers trying to break into the educational market:

- * Since it's easier to get published in nonfiction than fiction, you might want to start honing those writing and research skills by doing articles for children's magazines. My website has a list of magazines with links to their submission guidelines that might be a help to you:[http:// evelynchristensen.com/mags.html](http://evelynchristensen.com/mags.html).
- * Read lots of recent children's nonfiction books so you can get a feel for what kinds of books various publishers are currently publishing.
- * Become familiar with curriculum standards so you can submit or propose books that match up with them. Here are some links to get you started:
<http://www.corestandards.org>, www.socialstudies.org/standards, <http://www.educationworld.com/standards/national/science/index.shtml>
- * Most educational publishers publish series books. Study their catalogs and look for gaps in the series for a title idea you could propose to them. Nancy I. Sanders in her book, *Yes! You Can Learn How to Write Children's Books, Get them Published and Build a Successful Writing Career*, gives helpful tips on how to do this, suggesting that you send an initial letter to the editor asking if she would like to see a formal proposal on the topic.
- * If you want to do work-for-hire, prepare your resume and your very best writing samples, and start sending those out to publishers and packagers. A list of them with website links and contact information can be found at <http://evelynchristensen.com/markets.html>.
- * And finally, be persistent. It may take a while to break in, but once you do, you'll have the joy of knowing your writing is making a positive difference in the education of countless young lives.

What If You Want The Publisher To Come Up With The Idea?

As Evelyn mentioned, on the other side of the education market coin, the publisher or packager comes up with book ideas and assigns them to writers they feel would be able to do the job. In order to be considered for this type of assignment, you would need to send an introductory packet to the publisher. This packet might include some or all of the following:

1. Include a cover letter that introduces you and why you are contacting this editor. Share your areas of expertise, what subject matter you would like to write about and what grade levels you would like to write for. You can also use this opportunity to let the editor know that you've done your research by sharing a few of their books or series that you particularly enjoyed. Let the editor know that you are a professional who meets his/her deadlines and can work in accordance with specific guidelines. Invite the editor to contact you at his/her convenience and thank them for their time.

2. If you have some writing credits, be sure to include a list of publications.
3. If you've worked in the areas of publishing, teaching or a subject area that you want to write about, be sure to include a resume.
4. Include 2-3 writing samples. Before you write your samples, take a trip to the library. Read several books done by your chosen publisher. What subject areas does this publisher delve into? Note the grade levels of the books, how many page spreads there are, how many sentences are on each page, how many words are in each sentence and the level of vocabulary used. Use this information to write the best and most appropriate samples you can for this publisher.
5. Include a business card. Business cards are an inexpensive professional tool by which you can easily be contacted.
6. Don't forget your SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope for the editor's reply).

Evelyn B. Christensen is a teacher who has a passion for developing materials that help children enjoy learning and that help make the teacher's job easier. She has a master's degree in mathematics and a doctoral degree in mathematics education. Evelyn has authored 41 educational puzzle books which have sold over 400,000 copies. To learn more about Evelyn and her books, visit her website at <http://evelynchristensen.com>.

Using Fictional Techniques to Enhance Your Nonfiction

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

Many writers believe the best way to write nonfiction is to start with facts and figures. But the real goal of any writer is to draw the reader in. You can use what you have learned from writing fiction (plot, character, setting, theme) to enhance nonfiction pieces, particularly biographies and stories about historical events.

So, what exactly is nonfiction? Many people remember back to the dry textbooks they read in school, an educational landscape in which facts and figures were presented to young readers. No matter how dull the reading was, children still had to master the material in the textbook. In recent years, nonfiction for young readers has become more interesting. Indeed, you can open a typical biography and find yourself in the middle of a compelling story. Or you can read an exciting narrative in a children's magazine. Nonfiction has borrowed many techniques directly from fiction. Today's kids are drawn in through suspense, *in media res*, plot, and dynamic characters. How can you do the same with your nonfiction piece?

Take the reader into the present tense. Rather than writing about something that takes place in a distant time, why not take your reader there? In her *Applesseeds* article "A Chat with Thomas Jefferson," Barbara Hall writes, "You are there, strolling down Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg, Virginia. You hear and feel the crunch of cobblestones and oyster shells underfoot."

Tell a story that young readers can relate to. In "A Career in Crayons," for *Highlights*, Sara Matson describes Lu Ann Foty's career as beginning by chance: "Years ago, Lu Ann Foty and her kids did a fun craft project. They melted broken crayons and poured the wax into holiday-themed candy molds. They gave the recycled crayons as gifts to friends and family." In just a few lines, Matson presents a scenario that is tangible and real to young readers—recycling crayons into beautiful gifts for family and friends.

Create a setting. In *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*, James Swanson writes, "It looked like a bad day for photographs. Terrible winds and thunderstorms had swept through Washington early that morning, dissolving the dirt streets into a sticky muck of soil and garbage." Before Lincoln enters the scene, young readers step back in time to the morning of his inauguration.

Develop a plot. Many nonfiction narratives are written with a plot in mind, a series of events that draw the narrative forward. In the very first lines of *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*, Jim Murphy gets the ball rolling, "Saturday, August 3, 1793. The sun came up, as it has every day since the end of May, bright and hot, and unrelenting." The plague drives the narrative forward, leaving death and destruction in its path.

Create a character. How do you take a real person and make him step off the page into the imagination of a young reader? Can you write about the past in an exciting way, without straying away from the facts? In *Who Was Helen Keller?*, the eminent woman is described as learning how to read and write in an era when many people who were deaf and blind often ended up in institutions. Young readers can imagine Helen's world through these lines, "Imagine that your ears are stuffed with cotton. You can't hear anything—not even someone shouting. A blindfold covers your eyes. You can't see anything, either." In just a few lines, the author defines Keller as someone children can relate to, even though she lived and died before her readers were born.

Give your piece a theme. Usually themes are connected to fictional pieces, but why not use a theme to enhance your nonfiction work? In "Building a Dinosaur Double," Suzanne McIntyre presents the theme of her piece immediately: "In Washington, D.C., a dinosaur skeleton has retired after 100 years on the museum stage. Comptosaurus was a plant-eating dinosaur with short front legs and a horny beak." Why not start with a theme, using it to tie your piece together in a meaningful way? When you write a high-quality nonfiction piece, go beyond the facts and figures of yesteryear. Draw the reader in by telling a good story. Write to excite!

Draw from Life Experience to Write Nonfiction Books

by Dr, MaryAnn Diorio

So you want to write nonfiction books for kids, but you don't know where to start. You think, I'm not an expert on anything. What editor would even look at me, let alone offer me a contract?

Well, I have good news for you! Writing nonfiction books for children is not so difficult as you think. More than anything else, it takes a simple paradigm shift. Instead of focusing on what you don't know, focus on what you do know. Here are some proven tips to get you started:

1) Make a list of all your areas of experience and expertise. You may be an experienced gardener, a lover of classic cars, or an antique collector. Perhaps you know a lot about sharks or Italian cooking or woodcarving. Or maybe you ride horses, teach science, or play the violin. Any topic is potential grist for a nonfiction children's book. Childhood is a time of exploration and wonder. Children are hungry for new information as they come to terms with the world around them. You can have the joy of providing that information through your nonfiction book. As you make your list, you will be surprised at how much you already know about different topics. For instance, all those years of running high school track, all those hiking trips with the church youth group, all those summers working on a construction team may now pay off in terms of book topics. No experience is wasted, and virtually every experience can be turned into a nonfiction book for kids.

After you make your list, prioritize your topics according to interest level. Focus on the first topic and file the rest for later. Since a book is much longer than an article, you will need a topic that will sustain your interest over weeks, if not months, of writing.

2) Consult the latest edition of Books in Print at your local library or on the Internet (www.booksinprint.com). Published yearly by R.R. Bowker, this outstanding resource lists the most recent books published on a host of different topics. You can locate books by general subject (juvenile, history, sports) or by index (author, title, publisher). There is also a "quick search" feature for finding soon-to-be published books on various topics.

Note what books have already been published on your topic. Pay attention to the most recent ones and to the angle or slant of each book. Consider target audience, age level, and scope of material covered. Pay particular attention to gaps in information. For instance, you may find several books on astronomy, but none on how to become an astronomer.

Once you determine the need for a book on your topic, make a list of those books that appeal to you most, noting their publishers. When you have compiled this list of potential publishers, you are ready for the next step.

3) Prepare a query letter to send to each publisher on your list. In the query letter, include an overview of your book's subject, a proposed word length, and your qualifications for writing it (check the publisher's submissions guidelines to see if they also want a chapter outline and/or an analysis of the market for this book). By qualifications, I don't necessarily mean formal qualifications, like a college degree in a particular field. I mean whatever experience you have in the area of your subject.

You may have grown up on a ranch and know a lot about cattle. You may have worked with autistic children for the past twenty years, or you may have built a successful business from scratch. Do not discount such valuable experience. Of course, if you do hold a degree in your subject area, by all means mention that.

If, after doing your research, you still don't know what to write about, check market listings for current publishing needs. These needs may trigger a book idea that excites you. If so, hang on to that idea and explore its potential in light of your interests, experience, and background. When an email from a writer friend of mine alerted me to the fact that Enslow Publishers had launched a literature series for junior high school students, my interest was piqued. Since I have a strong background in literature, I immediately followed up on my friend's lead and landed a contract. Since then, I've written two more books for the same publisher.

Writing nonfiction books for kids can be great fun. Not only are you broadening the horizons of your readers, but you are broadening your own as well.

So, now that you know how to go about writing nonfiction books for kids, what are you waiting for?

Researching Your Topic

While you may rely on your own experience and expertise for much of your information, most nonfiction publishers still require research from a variety of sources. Do much of your research before querying publishers, which will help you find the particular tone and focus your book will take. Summarize your research highlights in your query, and include a bibliography of sources when you submit your manuscript.