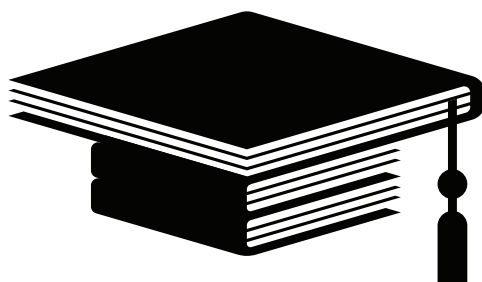


# EXISLE ACADEMY



# MANUSCRIPT MINEFIELDS





[www.exisleacademy.com](http://www.exisleacademy.com)

## THE 7 MOST COMMON FIRST-TIME AUTHOR MISTAKES THAT COULD STOP YOUR BOOK FROM GETTING PUBLISHED, AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

**Distilled Advice by Senior Publishing Experts from Exisle Publishing and EK Books**

Over the years Exisle and EK Books have received thousands upon thousands of manuscripts. Many of the ones that don't quite make it hold themselves back by committing one of the common errors below. These mistakes come up over and over again, but are easily avoided once you know to look out for them.

Some of the points below will apply to both authors of non-fiction books and children's books. Some, like **Mistakes #2** and **#3**, are mostly targeted at children's authors, though the lesson of understanding how your market works can be applied to all writers. **Mistake #6** was written with non-fiction authors in mind, though children's authors should take heed if your book addresses mental health themes.

Before we jump in, please note that if your manuscript makes one or more of these mistakes, it does not necessarily mean all hope is lost! It might just mean that some more work is needed before your book is ready for commercial publication.

As an Exisle Academy student or client, your assigned publishing guide will be able to point out specific instances in your manuscript where changes could be made, and provide examples on how to make those.

### **MISTAKE #1: NOT BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND**

We recommend that you 'begin with the end in mind' and plan out your book so that it will match the most popular formats that serve the market you're writing for.

For example, children's authors would be well advised to plan out your manuscript over the standard picture-book format of 32 pages. (Some picture books are 24 pages for this age group, but the majority are 32.) You will need to allow either 3 or 4 pages for publishing and title information, and then the story will need to be laid out over the remainder. By plotting your story in this manner, you'll be able to see whether it's the right length for a picture book, and you'll also see clearly where the page turns fall, enabling you to maximise the opportunity they afford to create humour and suspense.

### **MISTAKE #2: NOT LETTING THE ILLUSTRATOR TELL THE STORY**

If you're writing an illustrated children's book, then keep in mind that at least 50 per cent of the story is going to be told by the illustrations. So you need to leave room for the illustrator to add to the story rather than simply reflecting what you've written in the text. This means that much of the purely descriptive text can potentially be cut from the manuscript, as it will be shown in the pictures.



### **MISTAKE #3: WRITING A SERIES BEFORE YOU HAVE WRITTEN A BOOK**

It's rare for picture books to evolve into a series. This generally happens with junior fiction, when children become more interested in following characters through multiple stories. There are some exceptions to this, of course (especially with branded characters such as 'Dora the Explorer'), but generally publishers expect picture books to be standalone titles, and would only consider a series once the first book had established itself as a success. This means that your story can't be written as if it is an introduction or preface to a greater story. It must have a self-contained beginning, middle and end, with a clearly defined narrative arc. There needs to be a clear plot that requires resolution and that is actually resolved to the 'black and white' satisfaction of a child of this age.

### **MISTAKE #4: SUBMITTING AN OVER-FORMATTED MANUSCRIPT**

When submitting manuscripts to a publisher, it's always best to use the minimum of formatting and present it as a straight text-only document in MS Word. Any accompanying photos or illustrations should be submitted separately, not embedded in the manuscript file. Publishers receive many thousands of manuscripts to assess, and by keeping to a clean, straightforward presentation, you make it easy for them to assess the manuscript quickly and easily — which will always work in your favour!

### **MISTAKE #5: DON'T DO THE RHYME IF YOU CAN'T COMMIT THE TIME**

Rhyming books are popular with children, but they are incredibly difficult to do well. It's not just sufficient to have the final word of each line rhyme with another; it's also vital that the rhythm of the sentences works and that the text flows naturally. And word choice needs to sound natural too, not as if the words and phrases were chosen just for their rhyme. So, as a starting point, read your manuscript aloud. Wherever you pause or hesitate, or have to repeat the line with different emphasis in order to create the right rhythm, this is an indication that the text needs further work.

### **MISTAKE #6: CITE YOUR SOURCES AND ESTABLISH YOUR CREDIBILITY**

For books on mental health, publishers always want to know what relevant qualifications the author has. Psychologists, counsellors and other mental-health professionals are preferred as authors in this area, because they bring with them that solid expertise that is both reassuring to the publisher and to the potential buyer. If the book is based on personal experience, then that has merit too, but you might want to think about including a list of references or resources at the back of the book to provide that professional backing to the text.

### **MISTAKE #7: YOUR FIRST EVER FULL-LENGTH MANUSCRIPT MAY NOT BE THE ONE THAT MAKES YOU FAMOUS**

Many first manuscripts are cathartic in nature, clearing the ground for future work. We have, over decades, encouraged people to not force their first manuscript into publication (they tend to fail) but use it as a resource for future work.