

LEARN THE TERMINOLOGY OF THE WORLD OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

(updated 4/26/25)

These are *general* definitions. Keep in mind that the Children's Book industry is always evolving so definitions can change. Stay on top of your knowledge; continue to research the most current information. These are very basic definitions below to get you started on learning about specific topics. Make it your goal to find the layers embedded in each definition. For example, what is a good sample query letter? How would you submit a query to an agent? That information can be found online via regular searches, or shared by experts in webinars or at conferences. You will learn the world of Children's Books over time. Have fun with it.

Publishing Terms:

- **Query Letter:** A one-page letter pitching your book to an agent or editor.
- **Manuscript (MS):** The complete written draft of your book before it's published.
- **Illustrator Notes:** Special notes added by authors to suggest visuals (only when absolutely necessary!).
- **Advance:** The upfront payment an author/illustrator gets when signing a book deal.
- **Royalty:** A percentage of book sales that an author/illustrator earns after the advance is paid back.
- **Critique Group:** A small group of writers/illustrators who exchange feedback to improve their work.
- **Agent:** A professional who helps authors and illustrators sell their work to publishers.

Book Types:

- **Board Book:** A book printed on thick cardboard pages, made for babies and toddlers (ages 0–3).
- **Picture Book:** A heavily illustrated book for young readers, usually under 1,000 words (ages 2–7).
- **Early Reader / Easy Reader:** A book for children just learning to read on their own (ages 5–8).
- **Chapter Book:** A book for early independent readers; short chapters, often illustrated (ages 6–9).

- **Middle Grade (MG):** Novels for ages 8–12, usually focusing on friendships, family, and growing independence.
- **Young Adult (YA):** Novels for ages 12–18, often dealing with deeper emotional themes and identity.

Key Concepts:

- **Read Aloud:** A book written with rhythm, repetition, and voice, perfect for being read out loud.
- **Picture Book (PB) Dummy:** A mock-up version of a picture book, usually created by illustrators to show pacing and layout.
- **Pagination:** How pages are laid out and counted (especially crucial in picture books, usually 32 pages).
- **Wordless Book:** A story told entirely through illustrations, no written text.
- **Anthropomorphism:** Giving human traits to animals, objects, or nature (very common in children's books).
- **Rhyme and Meter:** Poetic devices that bring musicality to picture book texts.
- **Hook:** The unique concept or first line that immediately captures a young reader's (and publisher's) interest.

A **genre** is a category or type of literature (or any other form of art, such as film or music) that shares certain characteristics, themes, or conventions. In literature, genres help classify books based on similar features, such as tone, style, plot structure, or subject matter.

If you like refer to 4/26/25 presentation file for a detailed list of Genres & Sub-genres. Google each one and finish the definitions list that I started below: When you do this I recommend you also look at actual examples of each type of genre at your local bookstore or library, or online.

STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. It's an educational approach that blends these subjects together to encourage creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking, rather than teaching each subject separately.

Example: "Rosie Revere, Engineer" - CHILDREN's PICTURE BOOK

Written by: Andrea Beaty

Illustrated by: David Roberts

What it's about: Rosie is a shy young girl who dreams of becoming a great engineer. She invents all sorts of gadgets, but when a project flops, she almost gives up — until her great-great-aunt (who was inspired by the real-life women of WWII's Rosie the Riveter) teaches her that failure is just a step toward success.

Dystopian describes an imagined world where life is miserable, unfair, and often controlled by a harsh government or other powerful force. It's the opposite of a perfect (utopian) society. Dystopian stories usually show themes like oppression, poverty, and loss of freedom.

"The City of Ember"

Written by: Jeanne DuPrau

Published: 2003 – MIDDLE GRADE BOOK

What it's about: The story is set in the underground city of Ember, which is running out of resources like power and food. Two young protagonists, Lina and Doon, discover that the city is in danger of collapsing, and they embark on a quest to find a way out and save their people from the dying city.

Types of Publishing:

See general definitions below to give you a feel for the different publishing models. Remember that things change *fast* in this industry. So, stay current by doing your own ongoing research for information about the types of publishing. Business models are complicated so dig deep as you continue to research the publishing models in which you may be interested.

Traditional publishing is the process in which authors work with established publishing houses (large or small) to produce, distribute, and market their books. In this model, the publisher handles most of the production and distribution processes, including editing, cover design, printing, and promoting the book. Here's a breakdown of how traditional publishing works:

Key Features of Traditional Publishing:

- **Publisher-Author Relationship:** The author typically submits a manuscript to a publisher (more often this is done through a literary agent). If the publisher is interested, they offer a publishing contract.

- **No Upfront Costs:** The publisher usually pays for the costs associated with editing, design, and printing the book. The author doesn't need to invest money upfront in these areas.
- **Editing & Design:** The publisher provides professional editing and design services (e.g., book layout, cover art).
- **Distribution & Marketing:** The publisher handles book distribution to bookstores, libraries, and online retailers, along with marketing efforts.
- **Royalties:** The author typically receives royalties (a percentage of the book sales) after the publisher takes their share, which is often lower than what an indie author would earn in self-publishing. (Remember, your agent gets a percentage of your royalties).

Benefits of Traditional Publishing:

- **Widest Distribution:** Publishers often have strong networks for placing books in bookstores and other retail outlets, and usually have the widest distribution “channels”.
- **Professional Support:** Authors benefit from expert editing, design, and marketing services.
- **Credibility & Prestige:** Being published by a well-known publisher can give a book more credibility, making it easier for it to be taken seriously in the market.
- **Advances:** Authors are often paid an upfront advance against royalties, meaning they receive some payment before the book is even published. (Remember, your agent gets a percentage of your advance).

Challenges of Traditional Publishing:

- **Lower Royalties:** Authors typically receive a smaller percentage of sales compared to self-publishing or hybrid publishing models.
- **More Control for the Publisher:** The publisher has significant control over things like the cover design, title, and marketing approach, which can limit the author’s creative freedom.
- **Longer Process:** The process from manuscript submission to publication can take longer because of editing, design, and approval timelines.

The Process of Traditional Publishing:

1. **Manuscript Submission:** The author submits the manuscript to publishers (usually via an agent).
2. **Review & Acceptance:** If accepted, the publisher offers a contract.
3. **Editing & Design:** Professional editors and designers work on the book. Authors are often included in the editing process, but not always so check your book contract.
4. **Production & Printing:** The book is printed and prepared for distribution.
5. **Marketing & Sales:** The publisher handles marketing, sales, and distribution.
(Note: Unlike in the past, publishers no longer spend large amounts of money to market an author's books. The days of their paying you to travel on long book-signing tours are gone—unless you are a celebrity or a well-established author with a proven history of selling large quantities of books. (This is because they have limited budgets and need to focus on those “proven” authors who will invariably make them the most money.) So in today's world, many authors help promote and market themselves to increase the sales of their books. There are many ways to do this. Consider taking webinars, attending conferences who share their experiences and tips on what they did to do this. Or find a great book on this topic and start absorbing...ultimately, *you* will be the one comes up with your self-promotion and marketing plan—and acts on it.

This model is most common for established authors, but it can be challenging for new or indie authors to break into due to the competitive nature of the industry and the selective nature of publishers.

Indie Publishing: The term "**indie**" refers to being independent, especially in the context of creative industries like books, music, film, and art. In relation to **books**, an **indie author** or **indie publisher** is someone who produces and publishes their work independently, without the backing of a large, traditional publishing house.

Key aspects of "indie" in publishing:

- **Self-publishing:** The author handles all aspects of the book's production, from writing to editing to distribution (including designing the book itself and getting it printed).
- **Creative control:** Indies often have more freedom to produce unique or niche works that may not fit into mainstream publishing trends.

Indie books are often produced with a personal touch, with authors having direct control over the content, design, and marketing, allowing them to make more personalized decisions in every step of the process.

Hybrid Publishing is a model that combines elements of both traditional publishing and self-publishing. In a hybrid publishing setup, authors work with a company or platform that provides professional publishing services (like editing, design, distribution, etc.) while the author still retains a significant level of control over their book and usually has to share the costs.

Here's how hybrid publishing works:

- **Author Involvement:** The author contributes financially to the production process (typically for things like editing, cover design, printing, and marketing).
- **Professional Support:** The hybrid publisher offers professional services and expertise, similar to traditional publishers, but the author keeps more control over the process.
- **Revenue Split:** Unlike traditional publishing (where the publisher takes the majority of the revenue), in hybrid publishing, authors usually keep a larger share of royalties than they would in traditional publishing, though it varies by contract.

Benefits of Hybrid Publishing:

- More control over creative decisions.
- A higher royalty share than traditional publishing.
- Professional publishing services and resources.

Challenges:

- Authors typically need to invest upfront, which can be risky.
- There's often less distribution power than in traditional publishing.

It's an option for authors who want professional help but also want to maintain a degree of control and ownership over their work.

CAUTION: Do your research! There have been some instances of scammers posing as professional “agents” or “services”. So research carefully.