

An Oh Zoe!  
Guide



# Published!

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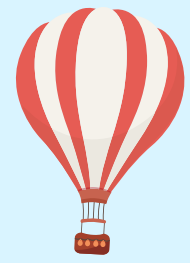


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Oh Zoe! Limited is a company registered in England and Wales with company number 10657789 and registered offices at 28 North Parade, York, YO30 7AB.

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# Welcome!

**W**e believe the world to be a generous place where we can all help each other to do lovely things. We're an open, welcoming bunch and don't think that anyone should feel that the publishing world is a closed book, impossible to figure out, so welcome to the Oh Zoe! guide to getting your work published.

We hope you find this guide useful; if you do, please keep on spreading the love and share it too.

Obviously there is no silver bullet, no guarantee we can offer, but there are plenty of things you can do – and avoid doing – to help pave the way to getting your book out there.

We'll take a look at preparing your work, how to query an agent / publisher, just what agents do, and additional steps you can take to make yourself a more attractive partner to publishers.

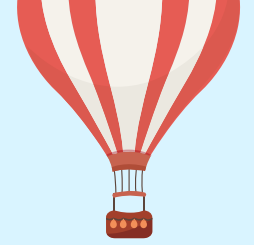
We're a picture book company, so we've focused here on picture books with a nod to other children's categories, but

the lessons here broadly hold true for all kinds of publishing, from picture books to adult non-fiction.

*Katharine*

Katharine Harbord





# First things first

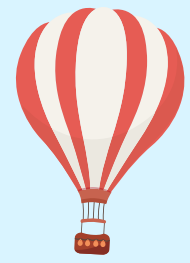
**T**his may seem obvious, but one of the first things to think about is whether your story is ready to submit. Unless you have written something particularly timely, there is no rush to send your work off to an agent or publisher. Make sure you're as confident as you can be in your writing, and that you know you are sending in your best work.

There are some simple steps you can take to make sure your work is in top condition:

- Put it down! Stick it in a drawer and forget about it for a while. Come back afresh and redraft it, rewrite it, proof it. Then proof it again.
- For picture books, reading it out loud is a must. Taste the words, roll them around, speak them, shout them, whisper them. Your story will be spoken aloud so make sure you're familiar with how it sounds. Rework the sentences that don't scan well. If you can, test it out on a child or two – they're pretty honest critics!

- Seeking unbiased feedback will almost certainly prove enlightening and constructive. Try joining a writing group. The SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators - [britishscbwi.org](http://britishscbwi.org)) is a great way to find a critique group to meet face to face or online.
- If you are thinking about paying for feedback we would recommend you join a critique group first. Paying for a 'review' is not necessary. If you do choose to engage with a paid reviewer or editor, seek recommendations from other authors before jumping in.



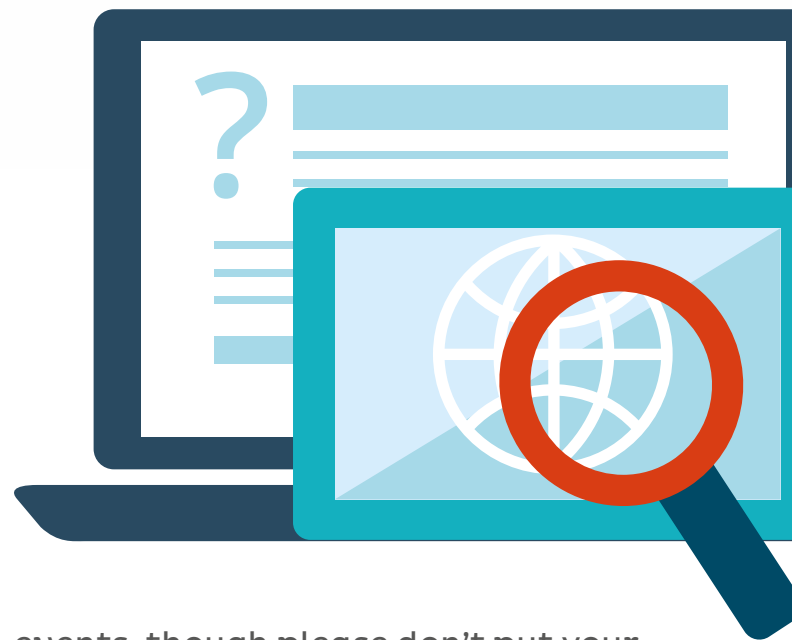


# So you're ready to send your story out into the world. Who to? An agent? A publisher? And how?

**T**here are two general routes to finding a publisher: submitting your work directly or finding an agent to submit on your behalf. Generally speaking an agent is your best bet, but there are plenty of writers who have been taken on by publishers directly. Our advice is to focus on getting your work in front of the *right* agents as a first priority – direct approaches to publishers can come later.

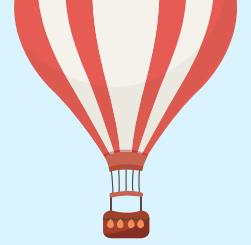
There is a very strong children's picture book community of friendly, amazing authors out there who will offer their help and support in exchange for the same from you. We cannot stress enough how valuable these groups can be – not only as critique groups for your work, but also as a source of advice, knowledge and support.

Being active within a community of authors shows agents and publishers that you are committed to your writing and want to improve and progress. It may also give you exposure to agents through networking and pitching



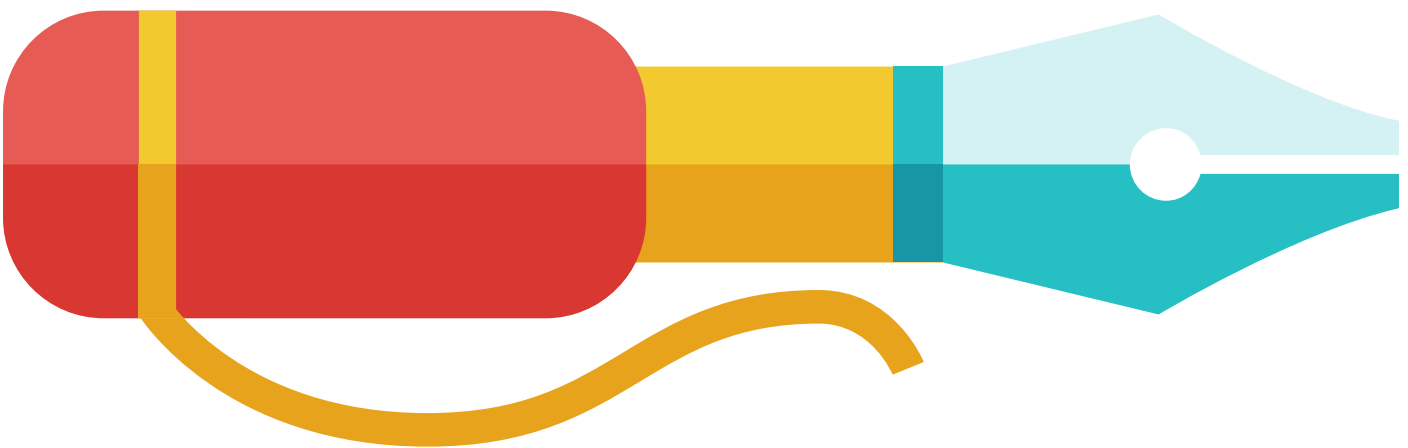
events, though please don't put your new-found friends under pressure to introduce you directly to their agent.

For budding picture book authors in particular, it is also advantageous to have more than one story ready to submit. This shows off your writing more broadly and demonstrates that you are more than a one-hit-wonder; that your idea has the potential to be a series, or that you have more than one great idea up your sleeve. Agents and publishers are far more likely to invest time and money in a writer with long-term potential.

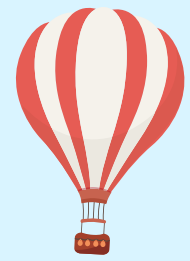


## Doesn't an agent just take a massive cut of my earnings?

Having a good agent is an effective way to get published because they know the industry; they will target their submissions to the right editor at the right time. They will know who is looking for what, and who might like your work. Then, if an editor bites, they will negotiate contracts and continue to look out for you, acting as a buffer between yourself and the publisher, championing your interests and taking a keen interest in the marketing and sales of your title. Agents in the UK typically charge 15% commission.



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# The *right* agent

**C**hoosing the right agent or publisher to submit to is about looking for those that already publish titles in the field in which you are writing. For example, there is no point submitting a picture book to an agent or publisher that doesn't actively work in this field. More specifically, there is no point in submitting your MG vampire coming-of-age story to agents who have clearly stated they're not interested in either of those genres.

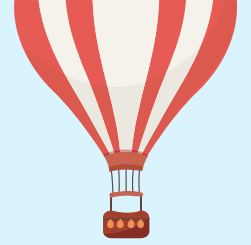
Publishing is a business, and publishers will only trade in books they think have a market. If you submit to a publisher that isn't in your market you simply don't have a chance of being published by them. If you do submit to agents who don't work in your field you are not only wasting your own time, but

also the agent's time – publishing is a small industry and you should take care to protect your reputation in every communication you send.

You can search online for publisher and agency listings, but the *Writer's and Artist's Yearbook* and the specialist *Children's Writer's and Artist's Yearbook* are the go-to titles. You can often find a copy in your local library. This is also where writing and critique groups come in handy for advice from other writers who may be working with, or may have approached, the agents and publishers that might be right for you.



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# Crafting your submission

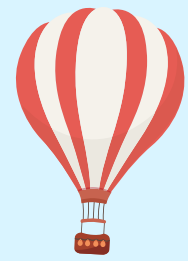
All agents (and publishers accepting unsolicited work) will have submission guidelines on their website. If there is a submission form, use it (without tweaking it!). If the publisher wants it in a specific format, send it in that format. There is always a reason for these requests – if it's not in the right format it will either not get read at all, or if it gets past the initial reading someone's then got to spend ages undoing your chosen formatting to make it appropriate to share internally.

You may think you are too busy to spend time filling in the submission form, or that your work is so brilliant it's not necessary for you. If you do feel this way let us be the first to tell you that you are wrong, or at least severely hampering your efforts to be published.

Whatever the guidelines are, there will be some form of cover letter/ query letter required. This is your chance to grab attention as well as to be informative about what you are submitting.

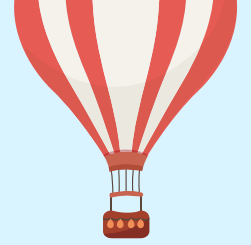






### Some basic rules:

- Keep it brief, maximum one side of A4.
- Keep it professional – address it and sign it off appropriately.
- Think of it in three general parts – introduction, story pitch and your bio.
  - \* Your intro should be specific to the person you are writing to, including why you are submitting to this particular agent/publisher.
  - \* Clearly state the title of your story, word count and also spread count.
  - \* Your pitch should summarise the plot and at the same time encapsulate the voice and character of your story, much like a blurb. Keep this brief; just three sentences should do the trick.
  - \* Your bio should include whether you are already published, any awards you may have won, relevant qualifications and whether you are a member of relevant groups like SCBWI. Whilst most of us squirm with embarrassment when asked to pitch ourselves, it's important: your agent or publisher is looking to work with you as a person too, and see the potential in you for a strong working relationship.
- YA or MG queries will be different to those for picture books. These queries generally mean sending in the first three chapters; you'll be submitting your whole manuscript for a picture book. Bear this in mind when pitching.
- If you are an author-illustrator, there may be specific guidelines for sending artwork. In general, include a link in your query to an online portfolio. Do not attach illustrations separately.
- There is a lot of conflicting advice out there on whether to set your picture book idea out as a dummy. Again, submission guidelines supplied by your chosen agent/publisher may specify what to do, but if not we would recommend that you simply include spread breaks rather than putting a full dummy together. This demonstrates that you have considered how the rhythm and pace of your story fits into a standard picture book format.



# Hitting 'Send'

**A**fter selecting agents/publishers to submit to, put them in a preference order and submit in small batches. This a) means you are not taking a 'scatter gun' approach and can genuinely personalise each submission and b) means you can respond to any feedback in your next submission. Agents understand you will want to approach more than one agency at a time, but don't make it look as if you want to work with just anyone. Take the time to send a personalised email to each agent.

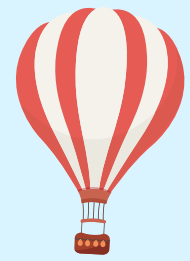
Once you've submitted to your chosen publisher/agent be prepared to wait a fair while for a response (a standard waiting time is often mentioned on their website). Unfortunately if your submission is unsuccessful you are unlikely to hear back, due to the sheer volume of submissions being received.

If you do get a rejection but also compliments then take them and be encouraged! Amongst squillions of submissions, if you are complimented it's for a reason. Plus a rejection may

be to do with a publisher's business goals, not necessarily the quality of your writing.

If you're thinking about resubmitting work previously rejected, then it is OK to resubmit, but only if you have made genuinely significant changes since sending it in previously, and you must make it absolutely clear to the agent/publisher that they have seen it before.





# Approaching publishers

**F**undamentally there is very little difference in how you approach a publisher compared to an agent.

Research the market you're looking to be a part of – which publishers and imprints are making books that yours would sit alongside? Note them down and get to know their lists and styles. All publishers have swathes of information on their titles online, but actually reading some of them is vital to understanding what is out there and where your book will be most likely to find a home.

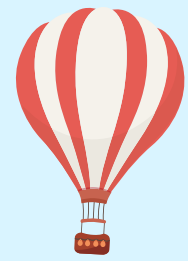
Check on the publisher's website to see if they accept unsolicited manuscripts. If it doesn't say, pick up the phone and ask (you're much more likely to get an answer this way than sending an email).



*Research the market you're looking to be a part of – which publishers and imprints are making books that yours would sit alongside?"*







# Submitting to Oh Zoe!

## What makes an Oh Zoe! book?

Oh Zoe! makes beautiful, personalised children's picture books that have joyful, engaging stories and visually stunning illustrations. For us, personalisation isn't a gimmick that can be fitted into any old story, it's an integral part of each story that adds a certain something. We want our books to bring moments of sheer joy, become cherished stories and withstand the demands of "again, again!".

Our stories all feature a principal child character which may be personalised by varying the gender, hair colour, skin tone and other characteristics of the child, so stories which rely on any of these properties remaining fixed would not be suitable for Oh Zoe!.



As with other publishers – take a look at our website to get a feel for the type of work we seek, and if you have something suitable then take a look at [ohzoe.com/submissions](https://www.ohzoe.com/submissions) for further information.

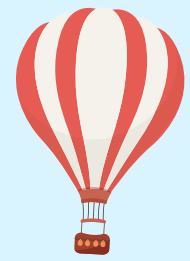


*Oh Zoe! makes beautiful, personalised children's picture books that have joyful, engaging stories and visually stunning illustrations."*









# It's about you too!

**G**etting your work published is also about marketing yourself. You can be a reclusive artiste if you want to, but it makes life a lot harder! To win an agent or publisher it helps to give your writing, and yourself, exposure. Here are some ideas to get yourself noticed:

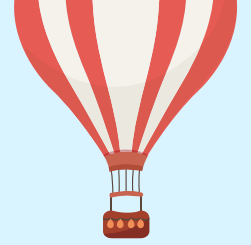
- Enter stories to magazines and competitions.
- Write a blog.
- Engage on social media.
- Put together your own website (there are free templates out there you can use). This can act like an online CV or portfolio.

These activities get your voice out there, potentially get you seen by the powers-that-be in the industry, and also show you will be active and integral in marketing the book if it does get published.

A word of warning: whatever you do, don't over-stretch yourself. It's better to just be active in one social media space and do it well, than to spread



yourself too thinly to manage a high quality, regular output. And if you're a social media or online newcomer, don't worry, it can take a little while to get the hang of things but as with anything a little research goes a long way. Search online for beginners' guides, ask around, and just give it a go.



# And finally...

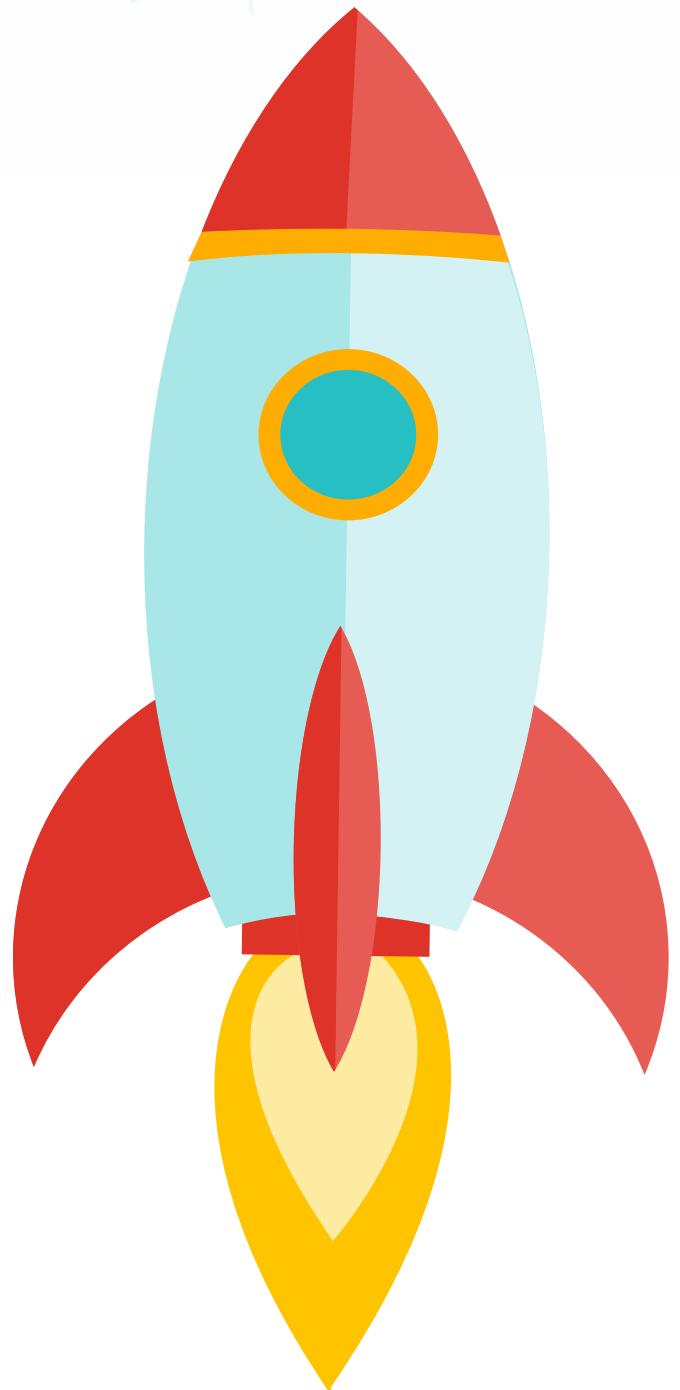
**A** big and hearty good luck from us all at Oh Zoe! We know that for most of you writing isn't just a hobby, it's a compulsion and driving force in your life that will hopefully one day also become a profession. While it's wonderful to be published, don't lose sight of why you started writing in the first place (we're guessing because you love it); above all, enjoy yourself!

Once you've submitted to your chosen publishers/agents... well, that's it really! Keep yourself busy, and try not to worry. Easier said than done, but we'd recommend a well deserved glass of your favourite tippie and a dance around the living room. Go on, no-one's watching.

To submit your writing to Oh Zoe! visit us at [ohzoe.com/submissions](https://www.ohzoe.com/submissions)

Email us at [words@ohzoe.com](mailto:words@ohzoe.com) or if you're an illustrator at [pics@ohzoe.com](mailto:pics@ohzoe.com)

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