**Do’s and Don’ts of Writing for Children**

Rachel Pfeiffer, *Clubhouse* magazine

1. Do’s:
   1. Be Real
      1. Kids can spot a fake a mile away.
      2. Don’t be condescending or patronizing.
   2. Know Industry Trends
      1. Know the trends in kid literature and kid entertainment.
      2. Newbery Medal/Honor winners
      3. National Book Award winners
   3. Be Creative
      1. We get a lot of the same stories—new kid at school, dealing with a bully, butterflies, etc.
      2. Need a new twist on these or a storyline that is much less common
   4. Research
      1. Objective sources
      2. Multiple sources
      3. Reliable/accurate sources
      4. Authoritative sources
   5. Think Visually
      1. Remember your story will be illustrated
   6. Develop a Gripping Opening
      1. As with all writing, opening is important to draw reader in so that they don’t flip to something else.
   7. Play by the Rules
      1. Typical rules of writing apply—quality of writing doesn’t change because it’s for children.
      2. Include a good cover letter.
      3. Especially make sure to proofread.
   8. Use Humor
      1. Kids love to laugh! So use humor, even in pieces like how-tos and quizzes.
      2. Example: *Dead End in Norvelt*
   9. Use Vibrant, Active Verbs
      1. Show don’t tell.
      2. Avoid passive verbs.
   10. Leave Your Readers With a Nugget of Truth
       1. We are, ultimately, trying to teach our readers something.

Fiction Specifically:

* 1. Write Compelling Characters
     1. Make sure they’re realistic, relatable and reliable.
     2. Example: *The Penderwicks*
  2. Use Interesting and Realistic Dialogue
     1. Make sure what the characters are saying actually moves the story forward.
     2. Examples: *The View from Saturday, From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
  3. Write a compelling, appropriate conflict

1. Don’ts:
   1. Underestimate Your Audience
      1. Kids are imaginative and smart. The story needs to make sense and engage them in a new way.
   2. Let Adults Solve All Problems
      1. Let the kid in the story struggle with the problem and come up with a solution. It’s meaningless if an adult does.
      2. Example: *When You Reach Me*
   3. Go Crazy With Adjectives
      1. Use strong nouns and verbs instead.
   4. Get Stuck in Clichés
      1. There’s a reason that clichés are cliché, and kids don’t appreciate them any more than adults do.
   5. Wrap Up Everything in a Bow
      1. Wrap up the main problem but leave a few loose ends or less than perfect endings.
      2. Examples good endings: *Other Words for Home, Genesis Begins Again*
2. *Clubhouse* and *Clubhouse Jr.*
   1. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/clubhouse-magazine/>
   2. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/clubhouse-jr-magazine/>
3. Submit to:
   1. *Clubhouse*: Rachel Pfeiffer, rachel.pfeiffer@fotf.org
   2. *Clubhouse Jr*.: Grace Kelley, grace.kelley@fotf.org