Tips for Editing Your Children’s Book

At some point after you have a solid draft of the children's book you’re writing, you must begin the editing process. Here’s a quick overview of the salient points to keep in mind.

- If a sentence doesn’t contribute to plot or character development, delete it.
- Make sure your characters don’t all sound the same when they speak.
- If you have a page or more of continuous dialogue, chances are it needs tightening.
- When changing place or time, or starting a new scene or chapter, provide brief transitions to keep your story moving smoothly.
- Make sure to keep the pace moving from action to action, scene to scene, chapter to chapter.
- If you find yourself using a lot of punctuation (!!!), CAPITAL LETTERS, italics, or bold, chances are your words aren't working hard enough for you.
- When you can find one word to replace two or more words, do it.
- Be careful with changing tenses midstream. If your story is told in the past tense, stick with it throughout. If present tense, then stick with that. Be consistent.
- Watch excessive use of adjectives, adverbs, and long descriptive passages.
- After you choose a point of view for a character, stick to it.
- If your character hasn’t changed at the end of your story, chances are he isn’t yet fully fleshed out.
- If your character talks to himself or does a lot of wondering aloud, he needs a friend to talk to.
- If you’re bored with a character, your reader will be, too.
- If you can’t tell your story in three well-crafted sentences: the first one covering the beginning, the second one alluding to the climax (the middle), and the last one hinting at the ending — you may not have a complete story yet.
- If you find yourself overwriting because you’re having trouble expressing exactly what you mean, sit back and say it aloud to yourself, and then try again.
Tips for Writing Books for Younger Children

The rules for writing books for younger children (ages 2–8) are different from the rules for writing books for middle graders or young adults. Keep the following 12 commandments in mind. (As with most commandments, you may be able to dance around one or two, but you'd better have a good reason.)

- It's okay to be different from others, but it's not easy.
- Bad guys never win.
- The good guy must come out on top in the end.
- Extremes rule (the world is black or white, not both — most children ages 10 and under can be quite literal).
- All characters should be drawn with both good points and weaknesses. No one is just one or the other — even the good and the bad guy.
- It's fine for something to be scary, but it can never touch a little kid's body.
- Little people can triumph over big people.
- Poopoo, peepee, tushies, passing gas, burping, underwear — they're all hilarious.
- Turning things upside down is funny — as long as those things make sense in the first place right side up.
- Magic can occur as a logical reaction to an action.
- Regular children can perform extraordinary feats.
- Regular children can go on implausible missions sanctioned (or not) by adults in charge.