

Even though a good children's picture book serves as an effortless read to adults, aspiring authors have challenges to face when constructing their stories. A writer may have a great idea for a plot, main character or lesson but need to consider structure as it relates to both the child reading and the publisher considering the story.

Craft a driving conflict for the main character to overcome, thinking about separate events that will convey the struggle to the reader.

Group the story's events into beginning, middle and end sections.

Storyboard three major events or incidences. Often in picture books the first and third suggest a polarity in event sequence or theme. The butterfly can begin the story making a foolish decision and end the story making a wise one or the mother rooster's journey might begin at dawn and conclude at dusk.

Frame the incidences with an introduction and conclusion. Use the introduction to establish some sense of time and place and introduce your leading character, while having the conclusion give a sense of closure while returning characters to a similar setting.

Begin a draft of the story, moving around individual events for a better flow as needed.

Use short sentences in the draft. One way to do this is to focus on using rhythmic language. Aaron Shepard of [writingpicturebooks.com](http://writingpicturebooks.com) explains two rules for keeping language rhythmic while defining beat as "every syllable that is "stressed" or "accented." Shepard encourages writers to reduce both the number of beats and the distance between them.

Construct sentences so that they begin with words of the second-greatest stress and end with the greatest stress. Both of these should be phrases that need to be emphasized naturally in the picture book's story.

Review the arrangement of words in a sentence to adhere to the rules of rhythmic language. Try writing sentences several ways to find the simplest, most rhythmic flow.

Combine lines of dialogue with action and descriptive language when possible to reduce the amount of sentences. Shepard suggests dialogue represent one third of the overall text.

Utilize repetition when appropriate to engage young readers. This applies to both the repetition of words and phrases and the patterns of beats in sentences and paragraphs.

Organize paragraphs so they contain as few sentences as possible by combining similar ideas into one sentence and deleting extraneous sentences. A good number of sentences in a paragraph is three.

Devise a final sentence to the picture book that will lyrically "wind down" the story while clearly indicating that it is over. Popular examples of strong finishing sentences are "And it was just right" or the classic "Happily ever after."

Revise to make sure the structure clearly reflects separate events, that you have been economic with your word choice and that it has a finality such as, "And then we read the book all over again."

Rather than focus on notating in the picture book manuscript where the pictures should be or the pages should be divided, authors stress crafting a story where these elements will be intuitively figured out by publishing professionals.