



## Rejection

---

Juliet Clare Bell

**I**F YOU NEED TO GROW a thicker skin, and get used to rejection, you should try writing picture books. They're quicker to write than novels so you send them out to publishers more frequently, and that means *more opportunities for rejection*. I know — it's what I do.

Before I started writing for children, I worked in research at a university. Although I loved my job, and would happily run clinics, do research, give talks, I was paralysed with fear when it came to showing anyone anything I'd actually written, even after I'd got my PhD. I finished papers which I didn't even submit to journals. I still sometimes have nightmares about it. It's hard to believe when I look back at that time that I've ended up writing, the part of my former job that I found painfully stressful.

As soon as I started writing for children, I made a deal with myself: that I would join a critique group — in order to get over my fear of being rejected (and improve my writing, of course) or I would have to quit. So I joined the SCBWI (the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators), and because there wasn't a critique group in our area, I created one with a local writer I met through SCBWI. Sixteen years later, I'm still running the group — and lots of other critique events.

At first, each critique session felt like a rejection. If there were ten positive comments and one negative, I'd focus on the negative. But I was determined to grow a thicker skin and get over the pain of rejection from fellow critique-group members — so that I could subject myself to



rejection from editors. And we were also growing a community where we could talk about rejection and so make it feel less personal and lonely. These days, I'm really used to it. Rejection is part of the job that I've chosen and although my hit rate of acceptance to rejection has improved over time, it still happens often (though more often than not these days, via my agent).

I no longer think of my manuscripts as my babies. That's too painful, and I wouldn't be open to making important edits on them. I need to get writing again as soon as I've sent one off and with picture books, I can easily have written several new manuscripts by the time I find out about an older one. If it's rejected, that really helps in taking the sting out of it. I suspect I'm going to find it harder when I start receiving rejections for my first novel which I'm currently editing. It's so much bigger an emotional and time commitment — but at least I've had lots of practice.

And remember — you can't get a rejection if you don't put yourself out there and submit. Submitting is something in itself. Speaking as someone who really let myself down in my former job because of my paralysing fear of rejection, and who has now received literally *hundreds* of rejections from editors (as well as acceptances!) I promise you, it gets better.