

# 10 Tips for Designing a Cover

By Corrie Thompson, Hazel's Virtual Intern

Everyone repeats the phrase “don't judge a book by its cover”, but let's not lie. The cover and title are the first things you see. This puts pressure on the designer and while many artists prefer outsourcing this job, some still chose to create their own cover. For those first-timers, here are a few tips.

## 1. **Fonts can be fatal.**

Decorative fonts are usually reserved for dystopian or fantasy novels, script fonts are usually for teen and romance books, and serifs and sans serifs are used for any genre. Furthermore, the opacity has to be set correctly. You don't want the words to fade out, which would immediately deter readers. Never use more than two fonts because it looks unclean and unprofessional.

## 2. **Title placement is key.**

Usually the cover draws the eye to the title for emphasis. Use the rule of thirds to keep the reader on the page. If the title is too close to the edge, the viewer will be lead off the page instead of further down to the byline. The placement of the author's name is also important. It should be viewable, but not overpowering and using a concordant font as the title.

## 3. **Set the tone through color.**

The onlooker should be able to assume whether it is a vibrant children's book or dark ominous thriller novel by the colors of the cover. Soft tints can set a happy, self-help theme, while shades can accentuate mystery and turmoil. If you are not using an image, try to stick to three colors or less. For some kids stories more colors are more acceptable, but if you look at Dr. Seuss books he usually sticks to two contrasting colors occasionally outlined in white.

## 4. **Don't clutter the page.**

The worst thing is inundating the viewer. Keep it simple; don't add too many quotes to the cover.

## 5. **Know your audience.**

Fonts, colors, images, and graphics all point to a specific age group. Keep it for an open audience.

## 6. **Save your work often.**

Save the document often, yes learning to save from all those years of video games will come in handy, and know how to save it. TIFF is typically a better way to save than JPEG, but TIFF can refuse to open depending on what program you are using. Illustrator is the best for graphic work, because then there is no problem enlarging it for later projects.

## 7. **Gradients are great mistakes.**

Do not use gradients—a seamless color transition—on the font, on images, on the background, or anything else. Gradients distract the eye and are not appealing or professional.

## 8. **Don't forget about binding and back page.**

You are not only creating a front, but a color and scheme that will wrap around to the side and the back. This can be tricky when you use images because you either have to cut the image off around the flaps and it can get messy when there doesn't seem to be a clear line. The title, fonts, and color all have to apply to all three parts without seeming overused.

**9. Play with a few ideas.**

You can't please everyone, but you have to please the author and the editor. Creating the cover can be fun. Try a couple of different styles that would either emphasize a particular point in the book or theme. Never be afraid to break rules as long as you are purposefully doing so.

**10. Most of all keep it professional.**

A simple clean page can be more attractive to the eye, like using white space on a magazine spread. Usually subtle backgrounds with bold titles draw the eye. Emphasize the genre and keep it appropriate for your audience.



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Below is a Sample of a Cover Corrie Created for *The Upside Down Insect With No Name Tag*.

