How to Make Sure Your Book Cover is Successful

A checklist for busy authors

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What a successful book cover should do:

1. Grab a reader's attention

2. Give visual form to the written content by conveying:
   - the genre of the book
   - the tone of the book
   - subject matter (characters, setting, or objects) described in the book
   - one or more themes in the book

Scenario 1: *Your cover designer gives you cover options to select. How do you select the best choice? Try this checklist:*

When selecting book cover comps, consider the following questions:

- Put yourself in the shoes of your target reader and ask yourself:
    - o Is the genre clear?
    - o Is the tone clear?
    - o Is the subject matter clear enough to be intriguing?
- Would you be proud to carry that book cover around with you in front of large audiences?
- Does it stand out and is the title legible…
    - o As a 1" thumbnail on Amazon?
    - o On a shelf in a bookstore?
- If there are images:
    - o Can you tell what is being shown?
        - -->If not, does it feel like an intentional design choice?
    - o Is the image sharp and high-resolution?
- Is the text sharp and high-resolution?
- Do the fonts match the tone of your book?
- Does the cover convey a clear focus?
    - o Is the cover's aesthetic focus in conversation with the subject, theme, tone, or genre of the book itself?
- What information is conveyed by the cover?
    - o Does the cover convey intriguing subtext?
    - o What is said/unsaid?
- If what your designer provides does not live up to your expectations, ask yourself:
    - o Am I bringing a sacred cow to this process?
    - o If there are elements you believe are essential to have in your cover design, ask yourself what would happen if they were tossed out the window
    - o Would I benefit from having my designer provide a whole new concept from scratch?

Scenario 2: *You don't have a cover designer yet, but you want to start thinking of what your cover will look like. Try this worksheet to help you better conceptualize what you want (and need) in a cover.*

Step 1: Answer these questions...

Who is your target reader? (Give as many details as you can think of)

What is the genre of your book?

How do the covers of books published in your genre telegraph the genre you're writing in? List 3 specific details you can think of. Use at least one of these details in your drawing (see step 2).
1.
2.
3.

What are the most important themes in your book?

What do you want your cover to feel like? What emotions or tone should be evoked?

List 3 key pieces of information you want your cover to clearly convey:
1:
2:
3:

Can one or more of these key pieces of info be clearly conveyed without being explicitly shown? How?

What design elements are you most drawn to? All text? A central photo? An illustrated cover?

Step 2: With the above info in mind, sketch or collage a cover that conveys (either overtly or subtly) one or more of the following elements from your book: tone, theme, subject matter, and/or genre

Bonus: *Here is a list of some key terms used in the world of book design to help you demystify the process.*

Book Cover Terminology
- o   Binding - How the book is put together
    - ☆   Ebook - electronic format
        - •   Ebook covers are only the front cover, no spine or back cover
        - •   Should always be JPG format
    - ☆   Perfect Bound - pages glued to the spine. Most common format with small print runs and print-on-demand.
    - ☆   Saddle Stitch - pages stapled together through the spine. Most common with poetry chapbooks or other short pieces.
    - ☆   Hardback - most hardbacks are printed by traditional publishers
        - •   Dust Jacket - paper wrapper on which a hardback book's design is printed

- o   Main elements of the perfect bound book cover (most common type of book)
- o   Front Cover
    - ☆   Mandatory Copy: title, author name (sometimes books may not include these on the front cover, but they are the exception, not the rule)
    - ☆   Optional Copy: Subtitle, tagline, blurbs, reading line ("a memoir", or "second edition"), author byline ("author of…")
- o   Spine
    - ☆   Title, author name, sometimes publisher name and logo
- o   Back Cover
    - ☆   Back cover copy is like the movie trailer for your book. It should grab your reader's attention, putting forward the most appealing aspects of the book (sometimes this will be the synopsis, sometimes the blurbs, sometimes the author herself).
    - ☆   May contain some or all of the following: blurb (endorsement quote), synopsis, author bio and head shot, ISBN number and bar code, publisher info, price, genre/category (to help determine where book belongs in bookstore or library).

Great video explaining parts and jargon of a hardback book: https://youtu.be/DQyntYcGwik

- •   **Trim** - Trim size refers to the exact measurements of a book in its final form. The edge of a book is called the trim because that's where   it is cut.
    - o   Common Trim Sizes:
        - ☆   Mass Market books (mostly fiction) — 4 ¼" x 7"
        - ☆   Trade paperback — Anywhere from 5 ½ x 8 ½ to 6" x 9"
        - ☆   General nonfiction — 6" x 9" to 7" x 10"
        - ☆   Manuals, Workbooks, some Magazines — 7" x 9" to 8.5" x 11"
        - ☆   Books or Magazines — 8.25" x 10.875" to 8 ½" x 11"
        - ☆   Coffee table books — 13" x 11" to 14" x 11"

- •   **Bleed** - Designers create an extra margin around a book cover in the design files, usually .125" on each side. Without bleed margins,   you might see a thin white strip on the edge of your book cover where the print does not fully extend to the trim edge.

- •   **Crop Marks** - These are small black marks in the design file that indicate where the printer should make the cut for the trim. Usually   you don't need crop marks on interior pages of a book, just the book cover.

Book Interior Terminology

- Frontmatter - the stuff that comes before the meat of your book:
    - ☆ Flyleaf or Fly page - first very first page of a book (in hardback books, this is one of the free endpapers).
        - Can display "half title", blurbs, previous books by author, the book title, or be blank
    - ☆ Copyright page
        - Publisher info - even if a book is self-published, there is usually some kind of publishing statement
            - Note: KDP, IngramSpark, and other publishing services are not the publishers, they are more or less printers and distributors
        - ISBN number
        - Copyright info
        - Disclaimers (optional)
        - Credits for photography, design, etc. (if applicable)
        - Edition (optional)
        - Library of Congress info (if applicable)
    - ☆ Dedication Page (optional) - the author thanking someone
    - ☆ Epigraph (optional) - short quote
    - ☆ Table of Contents (optional)
    - ☆ Acknowledgments (optional) - can be either in frontmatter or in backmatter
    - ☆ Foreword (optional) - usually an introduction by a different writer than the author of the book
    - ☆ Preface (optional) - written by author about how the book came to be, or other situations surrounding the book
    - ☆ Introduction (optional) - written by author about the contents of the book

- **Presentation terminology**
    - ☆ Leaf - 1 sheet of paper, both front and back
    - ☆ Page - 1 side of a sheet of paper
    - ☆ Spread - 2 pages side by side

- **Margin** - Margin is the blank space around the type area on a page. Ensure your book does not have margins that are too   narrow, you don't want your text to take up the whole page because this looks cheap.

- **Pagination** - The process of assigning and applying numbers to the pages of a book.
    - ☆ "Page 1" of a book is not always the first page. Some books paginate frontmatter, introductions, and prefaces with roman numerals. This varies by publisher.

Fonts and Type

- **Serif vs. Sans serif fonts:**
    - ☆ Serif definition: "a slight projection finishing off a stroke of a letter in certain typefaces."
    - ☆ Serif fonts: Times New Roman, Baskerville, Palatino, etc.
        - Used more for print. Improves readability in print. Used for book interiors. Conveys higher sense of importance or sophistication.
    - ☆ Sans serif fonts: Calibri, Helvetica, Arial, etc.
        - The most common font for digital print (websites etc). More readable than serifs on a screen. Used for headers in print. More casual font.

- **Dingbats** (special ornamental symbols) and **Flourishes** (ornamental lines) - special characters used as part of the interior design of a book, usually at chapter or part headings

- **Leading** - is there enough space (or too much) between the lines of your book?

- o **Tracking** - the distance between words

- o **Kerning** - the distance between the letters of a word

Colors Space
- o **CMYK** (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) - This color space is used for physical printing. Also called full-color or 4-color printing because it uses 4 colors that combine to create all other colors in the print spectrum.
- o **Grayscale** - Also called Black and White printing. Prints using shades of flat black ink, no other colors in the CMYK space will be used.
  - ☆ Flat Black vs. Rich Black
    - • **Flat Black** is used for grayscale printing and utilizes only the Black color from CMYK color space. Flat Black is good for text and grayscale images.
    - • **Rich Black** is used for full color printing. This black is deeper and darker than Flat Black because it utilizes all 4 colors in the CMYK print space. Rich Black is used in images and for solid black elements on book covers.
- o **RGB** (Red, Blue and Green) - This is the color space for digital formats and screen displays. The 3 colors combine to make all colors in the color spectrum.