10 Tips for Effective Book Cover Design

Remember: Most people in book publishing believe that a cover is a book's No. 1 marketing tool.

1. **The title should be big and easy to read.** This is more important than ever. (Many people will first encounter your cover on a screen, not on a shelf.) This is such a well-worn cliche of cover design that I have a designer friend with a Facebook photo album called "Make the Title Bigger."

2. **Don't forget to review a thumbnail image of the cover.** Is the cover compelling at a small size? More people are buying books on a Kindle or mobile device, so you want the cover to read clearly no matter where it appears. You should also anticipate what the cover looks like in grayscale.

3. **Do not use any of the following fonts (anywhere!)**: Comic Sans or Papyrus. These fonts are only acceptable if you are writing a humor book, or intentionally attempting to create a design that publishing professionals will laugh at.

4. **No font explosions! (And avoid special styling.)** Usually a cover should not use more than 2 fonts. Avoid the temptation to put words in caps, italics caps, outlined caps, etc. Do not "shape" the type either.

5. **Do not use your own artwork, or your children's artwork, on the cover.** There are a few rare exceptions to this, but let's assume you are NOT one of them. It's almost always a terrible idea.

6. **Do not use cheap clip art on your cover.** I'm talking about the stuff that comes free with Microsoft Word or other cheap layout programs. Quality stock photography is OK. (iStockPhoto is one reliable source for quality images.)

7. **Do not stick an image inside a box on the cover.** I call this the "T-shirt" design. It looks extremely amateurish.

8. **Avoid gradients.** It's especially game-over if you have a cover with a rainbow gradient.

9. **Avoid garish color combinations.** Sometimes such covers are meant to catch people's attention. Usually, it just makes your book look freakish.

10. **Finally: Don't design your own cover.** The only people who should consider designing their own covers are professional graphic designers—and even then, it's not advisable.

Bonus tip: No sunrise photos, no sunset photos, no ocean photos, no fluffy clouds.