Information Sheet: Book covers and design

Yes. Readers really *do* judge books by their covers.

Covers are designed to do one thing: to entice readers to either pick up a book and flip it over to read the back cover blurb, or to encourage readers to click on a cover and read more about what's between the pages.

In traditional publishing, you won't get to decide what your cover looks like. The publisher employs a team of designers and marketers who will use their expertise to create a cover that will sell. Book covers aren't about your preferences as the writer: they need to appeal to readers and to work as a marketing tool.

If you're not going through a traditional publisher and deciding your own cover, here are some things to consider:

What makes a good cover?

A title, author name and sometimes subtitle: bestselling authors' names are usually bigger than the title of the book. That's because they're well known and often their name alone will sell a title. Have a look at a Stephen King or Liane Moriarty book cover and you'll see proof of this.

Aesthetic appeal: simple, clean book covers are often the most effective. Designs shouldn't be overly cluttered. Typefaces should be easy to read in size and design. Consider how a cover will look both in print and online.

Appropriateness: a cover should hint at the genre, themes and tone of your book. You might notice crime thrillers use red type, dark locations and dripping blood to communicate to the reader what kind of story is between the pages. Misleading images and colours are likely to confuse readers as to what the story is about and dissuade them from picking up your book.

Quality image: Don't use dated or low resolution images (if an image is low resolution it will blur or pixelate). Typefaces and colours can also age quickly, which will turn off some readers.

Speaks to an audience: An image might be personal to you, but it may not translate to the reader. The challenge is to speak to your audience.

Size: Covers need to work as a thumbnail, as they will appear on online retailers sites.

Tip: Don't design your own cover unless you have the necessary skills and eye for design. Covers really do sell books. Set yourself up for the best chances of success with a professionally designed, appealing and accurate cover.

If you want to do it yourself

These websites allow you to design your own cover using templates and easy-to-navigate tools.

Website to design your own cover:
Canva https://www.canva.com/
Cover Design Studio https://www.coverdesignstudio.com/
PicMonkey https://www.picmonkey.com/
Pinwords http://www.pinwords.com

Where to find stock photos:
Images have automatic copyright in Australia. Don't assume that just because you find an image online that it is copyright free. It is possible to search on many websites, including Google and Flickr. For images with Creative Commons licenses (legally free to share) go to http://creativecommons.org.au/learn/licences/.

Some free stock photo sites:
Free Images https://www.freeimages.com/
Pexels https://www.pexels.com/
Pixabay https://pixabay.com/
Thinkstock http://www.thinkstockphotos.com/
Unsplash https://unsplash.com/

Search by license:
123RF https://www.123rf.com/
Flickr https://www.flickr.com/
Google Images https://images.google.com/

Sites where you can buy images for use:
Big Stock, Can Stock Photo, CreStock, Corbis Images, Deposit Photos, Fotolia, Getty Images, iStock, Master File, Media Bakery, Pond5, Shutterstock, Stock Photo Secrets, Yay Images.