Canva x Wattpad
Covers 101

The basics for winning
at DIY cover design

Covers! As the gateway to your story, it can be paralyzing to try to sum up all of your words and ideas into a single image. And for that reason, many writers are intimidated by the cover process. Our aim with this module is to give you a few practical steps to build your cover creative confidence.

The DNA of a Cover:

Typeface

Layout

Imagery

Flow (incorporating author name, tagline, etc)

Think small.

Most readers on Wattpad—over 85%, in fact—read on mobile. While covers are uploaded at 512 x 800px, your cover may be viewed in thumbnail size (meaning, literally, the size of a thumbnail). So, when designing for Wattpad, design for the thumbnail and work up.

How to design small:

• Create contrast between the title and image. Colours that are too close together become blurred and hard to discern in small sizes.
• Choose a typeface for the title and your author name that can be legible even at 7 or 8 point size.
• Less detail might be in your favor here— make your imagery something that can be understood, even tiny!
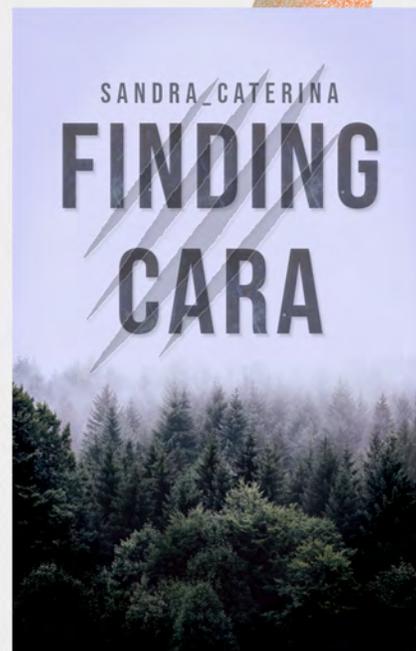
Be bold!

Iconic designer Dieter Rams put it best when he said, "Good design is as little design as possible." While he wasn't a book designer per se, his advice holds up. Try to stick with simple, bold imagery that speaks to the content within your story. If we're staying with the less-is-more design philosophy, it's a good idea to ask yourself: is everything you've included absolutely essential? If not, scrap it. Also, you use your words to create a tone within your story, your imagery should too. Angsty drama? Try something moody and dark. Cute and feelgood? Try something bright and sweet.

Make your title legible

This isn't an eye exam, so choose your typeface (or font) carefully. The title should pair perfectly with the imagery. It can be tough to pick a type when you're not a professional designer, but as a starting point, use a more 'traditional' font for traditional, straight-forward images, or a more evocative or playful font if the story and imagery calls for it. Google and Canva both offer a starting set of striking typefaces for most genres. If you feel you need something extra, fonts can be purchased and imported into design software (or Canva Pro) from places like YouWorkForThem and Creative Market. Type design is important and font use is governed by licenses. It's illegal to use stolen fonts from freebie sites unless explicitly stated by the creator that the font is free to use.
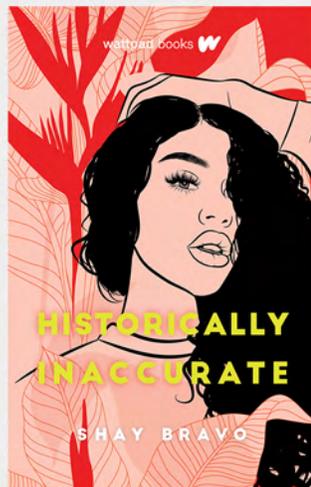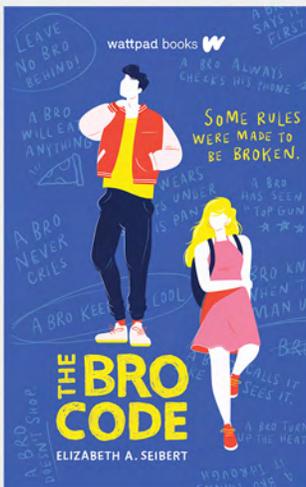
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FINDING CARA

Get feedback—or run experiments

Wattpad is a great way to test the waters on what appeals most to people. With the help of our community, you can learn, iterate, and improve upon your story's appearance until you've reached perfection, or close to it! Try variations of your cover to see what style or mood attracts more eyeballs, or turn your friends or fans into an ad-hoc focus group by asking them which would draw their eye on a bookshelf.

Get inspired

Take inspiration from other covers in your genre and beyond. Take a walk through your local bookstore, flip through your Wattpad library, look at your own bookshelf. What draws you in? What are the common elements in your genre? Start to notice patterns. For example, you might find yourself noticing that fantasy YA covers use a lot of emblems as their imagery. What is the emblem from your story? Can you find something that would look striking on your cover? Or for romance, you might discover that sweet, illustrated covers pull you in. In which case, can you find a stock illustration that tells the story you're trying to convey?

Resources abound

The Wattpad community has tons of free resources and services for writers looking to up their cover game. Graphic storytellers and groups, photoshop phenoms, and creative peers are everywhere. If you want to take a crack at it yourself, Canva is an excellent free image editor. Bonus: it has a Wattpad cover section, with exact sizes and proportions.