

Table One

Fiction Genres* **

Adventure: Emphasis is on a plot centered on a chase or retrieval of some object from a hostile environment. **Popular author:** Clive Cussler. **Word count:** 100,000-140,000.

Historical: Emphasis is on the setting, which is true to some time in the past, usually 100 years ago or more. **Popular authors:** James Michener, Patrick O'Brien. **Word count:** 100,000-140,000.

Inspirational: Fiction focused on the affect of God and religion on the characters; typical stories include spiritual themes (Christian), the mission of the church, religious prophecy, and spirituality in daily lives. **Popular authors:** Tim LaHaye & Jerry Jenkins. **Word count:** 80,000 to 100,000.

Juvenile: Fiction written for children and adolescents.

Subgenres: Middle grade: Aimed at children ages 8-12, about others like themselves who are the hero and the main problem solver in the story. **Popular author:** Gary Paulsen. **Word count:** 10,000 to 15,000.

Picture books: Dominated by illustrations with typical themes of family, friendship, animals, and monsters, aimed at ages birth to 8. **Popular authors:** Bernard Waber, Mem Fox. **Word count:** 200-800.

Young Adult: Novels written with teenagers as the focus of the story; typical stories deal with adolescent problems, angst, insecurities, and maturing. Aimed at ages 12 and up. **Popular authors:** Laurie Halse Anderson, Judy Blume. **Word count:** 35,000 to 50,000

(**Note:** See www.scbwi.org for more information since juvenile titles tend to be based on page counts, not word counts, because these books are usually less than the standard 250 words to a page.)

Literary: Characterized by an eloquence of expression and a philosophical bent. Stories tend to be about human failings and interaction and are not plot driven. **Popular authors:** John Updike, Joyce Carol Oates. **Word count:** 100,000 to 120,000.

Mainstream (General): Novels about ordinary life written in language that doesn't challenge the reader, novels aimed at the broadest possible audience, and extremely popular novels. **Popular author:** Jan Karon. **Word count:** minimum 80,000 to 120,000.

Subgenres: Women's Fiction: Dealing with women's issues, like families, sister relationships, etc. **Popular author:** Alice Walker, Rebecca Wells. **Word count:** 75,000 to 90,000.

Chick Lit: Modern, twenty- or thirty-something heroine looking for the perfect relationship, told usually in a sassy, irreverent voice. **Popular authors:** Helen Fielding, Jane Green, Sophie Kinsella. **Word count:** 65,000 to 95,000.

Mystery: A who-dun-it. Centered on crime, usually murder, it's the author's job to create a puzzle for the reader to solve and not unveil the answer until the end. **Popular author:** Sue Grafton. **Word count:** 50,000 to 65,000.

Subgenres: Cozy or Amateur Sleuth: A "traditional" mystery usually in a domestic setting with little violence shown to the reader and solved by an amateur sleuth or eccentric professional. **Popular authors:** Diane Mott Davidson, Agatha Christie. **Word count:** 60,000 to 90,000.

Hard-Boiled: Hero is usually a private detective (a loner) solving violent crimes, lots of action. **Popular author:** Robert Crais. **Word count:** 80,000 to 100,000

Police Procedural: A team of police officers solve case(s) emphasizing the technical aspects of investigation. Modern police procedurals often develop the characters and interactions of the police in great depth. **Popular author:** Ed McBain. **Word count:** 60,000 to 80,000

Romance: A story about a woman and a man overcoming obstacles to end up happily together.

Subgenres: Romantic Suspense: Mix of Romance and Suspense with emphasis on Romance. **Popular author:** Anne Solomon, Tami Hoag. **Word count:** minimum 40,000 to 120,000.

Historical Romance: Mix of Romance and Historical with emphasis on Romance. **Popular author:** Jodi Thomas. **Word Count:** 40,000 to 95,000.

Single Title Contemporary Romance: A romance set in a modern time with everyday characters, but not part of a series. **Popular author:** Susan Elizabeth Phillips. **Word count:** minimum 70,000 to 140,000.

Series Romance: Romance novels that together form a continuing story, such as the marriage of each brother in a family, and usually involves characters who have long-standing relationships. **Popular authors:** Nora Roberts, Joan Johnston. **Word Count:** 80,000 to 140,000

Futuristic/Time Travel/Paranormal: Mix of Romance and future settings, time travel or paranormal with emphasis on Romance. **Popular author:** Jayne Castle. **Word count:** 80,000 to 100,000.

Inspirational Romance: Mix of Romance and Inspirational with emphasis on Romance. **Popular author:** Francine Rivers. **Word count:** 80,000 to 120,000.

Romantic Comedy: Mix of Romance and Comedy with emphasis on Romance. **Popular authors:** Shari MacDonald, Jennifer Crusie. **Word count:** 40,000 to 70,000.

(**Note:** See www.rwanational.com contest category and judging guidelines for more subgenre definitions and word counts.)

Suspense: Plot centers around the commission of a crime and the protagonist struggles against a strong villain and crummy odds to win. **Popular authors:** Patricia Highsmith, Harlan Coben. **Word count:** 65,000 to 75,000.

Speculative Fiction: Fiction built around subjects or settings around which there is speculation.

Subgenres: **Science Fiction:** Characterized by an emphasis on the future and often on technology. **Popular author:** Frank Herbert. **Word count:** 80,000 to 120,000.

Fantasy: Stories with an emphasis on magic, imaginary things, and/or other worlds. **Popular author:** Anne McCaffrey. **Word count:** 75,000 to 100,000.

Horror: Dark stories designed to illicit fear, dread and sleepless nights in the reader. **Popular authors:** Stephen King, Dean Koontz. **Word count:** 100,000 to 120,000.

Paranormal: Supernatural abilities on the part of the characters, especially the protagonist. **Popular author:** Anne Rice. **Word count:** 80,000 to 120,000.

Thriller: Like suspense, we see the villain at work and the protagonist is up against long odds, but the pace is break-neck and the stakes are people's lives. **Popular author:** Patricia Cornwell. **Word count:** 80,000-120,000.

Subgenres: **Medical Thriller:** Thrillers where the crime is medical in nature. **Popular authors:** Tess Gerritsen, Michael Crichton. **Word count:** 80,000 to 120,000.

Legal Thriller: Thrillers where the crime is legal in nature and involves lawyers and the courts. **Popular authors:** John Grisham, David Baldacci, Scott Turow. **Word count:** 80,000 to 120,000.

Western: Emphasis is on the setting in the American West, usually in the past. **Popular authors:** Richard S. Wheeler, Elmer Kelton, Louis L'Amour. **Word count:** 65,000 to 75,000.

*Genres are in alphabetical order, not order of popularity. This is by no means a comprehensive list. And these are general definitions based on research; individual opinions of authors, agents, editors and publishers can and will vary.

**Author's acknowledgment: Many thanks go to Pam McCutcheon and Laura Hayden for their time and expertise in contributing to this table.