

Recommended Manuscript Lengths – Report # 113

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Because I edit books for publishers and for individuals, one of the most asked questions I get from writers is this one: “How many pages should my manuscript be?” The answer depends on what you write. The following information should be a guide.

Publishers have recommended lengths, and if you stick to them, you have a better chance of selling your manuscript. Publishers do not think in terms of manuscript pages, because manuscripts have too many variables. They think in terms of word count (yes, your computer will count for you—go to Tools, then Word Count). From the total word count, which should be typed on the cover (title) page of the manuscript, publishers can envision the size of the resulting book. Word count is one of the first things publishers examine when they look at a manuscript.

Novels

For a first-time author of fiction, the recommended length is between 50,000 and 100,000 words. If the word count gets too high, the book will cost too much to print, and publishers are not eager to make too big an investment in an unproven author. Writers of fantasy, however, can push the word count to 110,000 without worrying as much.

Nonfiction Books

Nonfiction manuscripts should also be between 50,000 and 100,000 words, unless you have created a reference book that absolutely must be longer.

Children’s Books

Writers of children’s books have guidelines to follow, as well.

Picture books aimed at ages four through eight are usually thirty-two printed pages long, so the word count should be 3,000 or under.

Chapter books aimed at middle readers, ages eight through twelve, should be 20,000 to 30,000 words.

Young adult books for ages twelve and up should come in at 40,000 to 50,000 words. Yes, I know that the Harry Potter series pushes that envelope until it pops. It proves that if you have a fantastic, irresistible book, some publisher will be willing to take the risk.

The information above is excerpted from *Ask the Book Doctor: How to Beat the Competition and Sell Your Writing* by Bobbie Christmas, available online in e-book form and soon available in printed form. To order the e-book for only \$8.95, go to <http://www.booklocker.com/books/1906.html>.

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Books by Bobbie Christmas

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