



Children's Book Industry Standards

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Children's books can be a confusing genre. The notes below explore genre standards among different children's books and provide resources for further research. These notes were created for UNG Press's panel, "Children's Book Publishing From Start To Finish" at the 2019 Dahlonega Literary Festival.

General

- Children's is a genre that relies on gatekeepers, even for young adult books. Teachers, parents, and librarians determine what children read.
- The Golden Rule: *Children want to read stories about other children who are a little bit older than themselves.* (Jenny Bowman)
- Children's books are exploratory in nature

Board Books

Age: prereaders

Word Count: 300 words or fewer, may only have 10-20 words max

Page Length: 10 pages or less

- Designed to be read by an adult to a child
- Covers early learning concepts such as colors, counting, letters, etc.
- Light on text, heavy on illustration
- Made from thick cardstock or cardboard

Example: First 100 Words

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Picture Books

Age: 2-7

Word Count: 500 words or fewer, max of 900

Page Length: 32 pages standard, but can be 40, 48, or 56 (at max)

- Designed to be read by an adult to a child
- Short on text; rely equally on illustration
- Introduces universal theme that are approachable
- Features one main character, one plot or idea, and one storyline
- Should offer a (simple) question and provide the answer at the end

Example: A Bad Case of Stripes; Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Easy Readers/Beginning Readers

Age: 5-8

Word Count: 750 – 1,500 words

Page Length: 32 – 64 pages, depending on the reading level

- Written for children learning to read on their own
- Introduction of chapters
- Short sentences with limited vocabulary
- Simple, repetitive text with simple sentence structure
- Slightly more text than in an average picture book
- 2-5 sentences per page
- Every page or every other page has an illustration
- Topics and themes are lighthearted and usually explore one idea, subject, or theme

Example: Elephant and Piggie, Henry and Mudge

Chapter Books

Age: 7-10

Word Count: 4,000 – 12,000 words

Page Length: not typically longer than 100 pages

- The first “real” book for children
- Written for children becoming fluent readers
- Protagonist is around 8 or 9 (the upper age range of the readers)
- Contains a plot with setbacks

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- Start to see subplots and more complex story lines
- Few to no illustrations
- More complex sentences and plot development
- Paragraphs are still short, about 2-4 sentences each

Examples: Magic Tree House, Charlotte’s Web

Middle Grade (MG)

Age: 8-12

Word Count: 20,000 – 40,000 words, depending on publisher

Page Length: over 100 pages

- Longer chapters than found in chapter books
 - Often no illustrations
 - Content categories similar to adult fiction
 - mystery, adventure, humor, historical, fantasy, etc.
 - Series are popular
 - Plot lines directed to 10-12 year olds because kids read above their age
 - Intense subjects may bump the book into an older age category
- ❖ US bookstores don’t differentiate between levels; must choose between MG and YA or YA and Adult
 - ❖ UK bookstores do differentiate and have a “between” category

Example: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Holes

Lower Middle Grade

Age: 7-10

Word Count: 20,000 – 35,000

- Themes will be complex but approachable
 - no kissing, no gory violence, subtle politics, if any at all
- Have a subplot or two
- Uses elements like humor, fantasy, or magic realism, or explores factual, science-based ideas and historical events

Upper Middle Grade

Age: 10-13

Word Count: 45,000 – 55,000

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- Themes are more complex and mature, explored in an age-appropriate way from the protagonist's point of view
 - Still not as detailed or 'angsty' as young adult
- Sometimes referred to as "tween" especially if the themes explicitly explore pre-tween issues

Young Adult (YA)

Age: 12 to adult

Word Count: 40,000 – 75,000 words

Page Length:

- Content categories similar to and read like adult fiction
 - mystery, adventure, humor, historical, fantasy, etc.
- Explore issues and topics that teens can relate to
- Heavy with "Firsts"
 - First kiss, starting high school, entering the adult world, etc.
- Characters must be 13+ for Barnes & Noble to shelf it under Young Adult and not kids
- Includes more adult content (such as sexuality, mental illness, politics, etc.)
 - How explicit/what the message is depends on the publisher. Some publishers seek these topics out, others avoid them.
- Emerging category of New Adult that targets readers between 18-30

Examples: The Book Thief, The Hate U Give, The Fault in Our Stars, Ready Player One

Sources

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Ellen Jackson, author of over 60 children's books

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Jenny Bowman, children's book editor, creative writer, and specialist in Children's Literature

<https://www.jennybowman.com/what-genre-is-my-childrens-book/>

Summer Edward, Children's Literature and Publishing Consultant

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