2023 FCWC Children’s Writing Intensive

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**The Basics of Writing for Children…**

**What Are the Differences Between Age Categories?**

The Children’s/Juvenile Market goes from 0-18 years of age. Eighteen years is a massive age gap full of unique developmental milestones as children age. Publishers produce titles for each of these unique age groups specifically engineered to connect with the reader at his or her appropriate age level, concentration level, and comprehensive ability.

Be careful to adhere closely to these recommendations below. Publishers have standards for each of these categories and you’ll want to know exactly where your book fits in the juvenile market.

**First Books**

* Target Age Group is 0-2 years.
* Are often given before a baby is even born.
* Can be more complex because they are intended to be read by an adult to a child.
* Created so babies can hear and process words and concepts.

**Board Books / Novelty Books**

* Target Age Group is 0-3 years.
* Word Count is less than 100 words.
* Very thick pages made of cardboard so that children can play with them.
* Can be more complex because they are intended to be read by an adult to a child.
* Lots of images and simple words.
* Can include objects that stimulate a child’s sense of touch or wonder.
* Read by a parent to a child with some interaction by child.

**Picture Books**

* Target Age Group is 3-8 years.
* Word Count is up to 1000 words, although 500 words is the current norm.
* Beautifully illustrated and generally 32 pages.
* Meant to be easy for a child to comprehend.
* Read between a parent and a child.
* Great illustration is a necessity.
* Can be rhythmic or prose.

**Concept Books**

* Target Age Group is 3-8 years
* Word Count is up to 1000 words.
* Teach kids about the world surrounding them.
* Tackles sometimes difficult and challenging issues, like illness, learning to tie shoes, or death.
* Easy to understand and engaging for the child reader.

**Early Readers**

* Target Age Group is 5-8 years.
* Word Count is up to 3,000 words, but some publishers allow up to 5,000 words
* Created for developing readers.
* Use simple words and easy to comprehend grammar.
* Often have only 4 to 6 words on each line of text to help with readability
* Still includes illustrations along with the text.

**Chapter Books**

* Target Age Group is 7-10 years.
* Word Count is up to 10,000 words, but some publishers allow up to 12,000 words
* Created for developing readers.
* Utilizes more complex words and grammar.
* Often have multiple chapters with longer paragraphs to ease children into reading.
* Typically sold in series.
* Illustrations are reduced to around one per chapter.

**Middle-Grade**

* Target Age Group is 8-12 years.
* Word Count is between 15,000-50,000 words, although the category has been skewing longer recently. Fantasy books can be longer.
* Contains no profanity or graphic or persistent violence.
* Can be scary, but not horror.
* Romance is innocent and limited to crushes and first kisses.
* Main Characters are between the ages of 10 and 13 years old.
* Characters interact and react to/with their immediate world.
* Characters generally interact with family and friends.
* Books focus on real-life situations, typical of the target readers’ everyday life, like forming friendships and dealing with bullies.

**Young Adult Fiction**

* Target Age Group is 13-18 years.
* Word Count is between 45,000-80,000 words. Fantasy books can be longer.
* Coarse language and violence are permissible.
* Romance is allowed and can be risqué in the general market.
* Main Characters are between the ages of 15 and 18 years old, but not generally in college.
* Characters grow up and move beyond just interactions with their family and friends.
* Characters self-reflect and analyze as they integrate into an unfamiliar world.

Board Books: Up to 100 words – Sweet spot: 50 words

Picture Books: 50 to 1000 words – Sweet spot: 500 words

Early Readers: 1k–3k – Sweet spot: 1.2k

Chapter Books: 5k–12k – Sweet spot: 8k

Middle Grade: 15k–50k – Sweet Spot: 35k

Young Adult Fiction (YA): 50k–80k – Sweet Spot: 70k

\*To learn more about the basics of writing for kids in the Christian market, you might want to purchase this book that I coauthored with literary agent Cyle Young: “Writing & Selling Children’s Books in the Christian Market: From Board Books to YA” available here at the bookstore, yay! Or you can order via Amazon: <https://a.co/d/23FeARf>