

## “How Long Should My Book Be?”

I get this question from authors a lot, and my first response is, “Oh, about eight and a half inches.” (Just a joke there—and not a very good one!) No, what they really mean is word count, and the answer to that is somewhat elusive.

Different genres have different limitations on length and number of chapters. The following list gives some general parameters of what defines each genre, which of course are not hard and fast.

### **Nonfiction Christian Living**

Number of Words: 25,000 to 75,000 (2,500 to 5,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 6 to 16

### **Nonfiction Gift Book (“little” books)**

Number of Words: 10,000 to 25,000 (1,000 to 3,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 4 to 10

### **Academic/Textbook/Reference**

Number of Words: 50,000 to 120,000 (3,000 to 6,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 10 to 20, plus appendices, reference notes and other back matter

### **One-Year, Daily Devotional**

Number of Words: 90,000 to 250,000 (250 to 750 words/entry)

Number of Chapters: no chapters, 365 entries

### **Novella or YA Novel**

Number of Words: 25,000 to 45,000 (less than 1,000 to more than 3,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 6 to 20

### **Novel (especially one from a first-time author)**

Number of Words: 40,000 to 80,000 (less than 1,000 to more than 3,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 10 to 25

### **Epic Novel (Saga)**

Number of Words: 60,000 to 120,000 (less than 2,000 to more than 4,000 words/chapter)

Number of Chapters: 15 to 30 or more

I have based this list on the feedback I have received from various book publishers. And yet, if you show this list to the editor of any publishing house, they are likely to give you a little different set of figures for word count. The consensus seems to be that *there is no consensus*. The word counts I have listed above are probably good ballpark figures, however.

So, a practical answer to our original question, “How long should my book be?” seems to be that no matter what length your book is (well, *almost*), there is probably a market for it—you just have to find it. And that means looking carefully at the publisher’s guidelines for submission. Just know that if your word count is way above or way below these general guidelines, it may be hard to find that market.