

**EPISODE 31***Do Word Count Goals Matter  
with Rapid Releasing?*

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Hello again and welcome back to the Author Revolution Podcast. I'm your host, international bestselling indie author, Carissa Andrews and CEO of Author Revolution, the author's source for all things rapid releasing.

Hopefully you had a wonderful Memorial Day weekend. Here in Minnesota, it was a bit unusual. Typically, Memorial Weekend in the Lakes Area is the kickoff to summer. Thousands of people make their way up into our area to visit cabins and have big family BBQs together. While some were certainly doing that, you could tell it was far quieter than in normal years. We had a nice time with a couple of friends who have been as quarantined as we've been, and yes, even with our large family, we didn't exceed the 10 people limit.

It was a nice get away from all the hustle and bustle of things to do and think about. I don't know about you, but this rapid releasing stuff isn't for sissies. Just when you think you have it down, something new pops up, demanding some attention! Amiright?

So, one of the questions that's been playing on my mind is word count. I'm mapping out my 2021 strategy for Diana Hawthorne's series next year and I'm at the stage where I'm having to decide just how long I want her novels to be. What's the precedent I want to set? All of these questions will help guide me as I start outlining AND writing.



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So, in today's podcast episode, I want to talk a little bit about word counts - why they matter, how to leverage them, and when to ignore the rules.

I get asked the question a lot about how many words a book should have. In my opinion, this question is kind of loaded, because it depends on a number of factors. What age bracket are you aiming for and what genre? Without knowing that information, you won't have a clear goal for your book.

But sometimes, what people are really asking is... how do you know if you've written a novel or a novella? To help out, here are the guidelines for adult fiction in terms of wordcount classifications.

#### Fiction Novel Word Count Goals

- . Short Stories - 7.5K or less.
- . Novelettes - 7.5K to 17.5K.
- . Novellas - 17.5K to 40K.
- . Novels - 40K or more.

Now, to break this down further, let's go on to talk about the difference between age brackets and genres of some of the main genres.

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Middle Grade - 12K to 80K. If I had to give it an average, I'd say it's somewhere in the 20K to 35K realm, but there's a lot of wiggle room based on how you write and what your story needs. Charlotte's Web was 32K but then there are more advanced books like Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone that sit at almost 79K.

YA – 55K to 80K. You could go as low as 47K, but it could cost you in worldbuilding and for this age bracket, characters and world are key. Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher came in at 62K, but The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Twilight were all heavy hitters going up to or past the 100K mark.

Mystery – 70k to 80K. Most of Sue Grafton’s Alphabet Series fit into this range. Traditional mysteries were always on the shorter side, though. Agatha Christie’s novels all averaged 40K – 60K.

Thrillers – 70k to 125K. Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn came in at roughly 80K. But then she wrote Gone Girl, which I have personally read and love, sitting at almost 146K. And another thriller I love, the Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown was 139K.

Romance – 47K to 100K. The Notebook by Nicholas Sparks was just 49K. Where Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen comes in at 119K. However, I think you’ll find the majority of books in the romance category come in between the 70K-80K range like the mystery novels. You need time to develop the characters and set up the romance right.

Fantasy/Scifi – 90k to 125k. Ender’s Game by Orson Scott Card was 100K and Ready Player One was a whopping 136K. But there are always exceptions to the rule, too. The Time Machine by HG Wells was 32K and The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams was 46K.

Urban Fantasy – 40K to 80K. This is where I tend to fit in the most. Because my books are supernatural fantasy based and take place in an urban setting, I aim to have my books right in the middle at 60K. However, I’ve written them to be anywhere from 50K to 75K. My Windhaven Witches Series is averaging 60K and is a great example. Next year, my Diana Hawthorne series will be aiming for the 55K – 60K range as well.

Epic Fantasy – 90K to 125K. You'll find most epic fantasy readers want a longer story, and even expect it. Now, epic fantasy's name does already imply something bigger than, right? Books that fall into this subgenre of fantasy include the Lord of the Rings, which ranged from 130k to 190K or the Wheel of Time Series by Robert Jordan which were anywhere from 238k to 393K. That's a lotta words.

Now, with all of this info, does word count actually matter much? Well, it depends on your author perspective. Are you trying to rapid release? Or are you just trying to publish a single book. What genre do you want to write in? Because if you're mapping out an Epic Fantasy, maybe rapid releasing isn't the best fit for you. Unless of course you can consistently pump out 15K words a day, then go for it.

So, how do you go about using the word counts as a goal for your rapid release series? Well, for starters, you have to set a goal and keep track of it.

Are you already doing this? Or do you just kinda wing it and hope for the best?

NaNoWriMo is a great example of how to set a goal and keep track. For the month of November, you pledge to write 50K words, equaling out to be 1667 words per day. This gives you a clear goal to be working toward. But you can do this for any word count.

Let's take my example of 60K for the Diana Hawthorne novels. I plan to write one of them every 6 weeks. So, 60K divided by 42 (which is 7 days times 6 weeks), you get 1429 words a day.

Now, what if you don't want to write every day? No worries, I'm in the same boat. I can't write in my books on Mondays right now. It's just too crazy of a day. So, I take those 42 days, minus 6 days. That's 36. 60K divided by the 36 now brings me back to the NaNo goal of 1667 words a day. Since I already know that's easy peasy for me, I'm set to go. And honestly, I'll likely write a chapter a day anyway – which, for me is closer to 2K. So, this means I'll likely be done early.

Does that make sense?

So, to repeat, you'll want to know your final word count goal, divided by deadline length, minus days off to get a daily word count goal.

Now, if you don't know your chapter length goal, a good rule of thumb is to stick within the 2K-3K per chapter range. It's not a hard and fast rule, but when you keep your chapters short and concise, it makes it easier for your reader to stop when needed, but also to keep going faster because you're constantly in the role of hooking them so they keep reading. Studies have shown that longer chapters have a negative psychological effect on readers when they think they won't have enough time to finish it in the one sitting. Where, the opposite is true of shorter chapters. They trick themselves into, "just one more chapter" over and over again.

If you're just starting out and creating a writing habit is more your speed, you can start the opposite direction. Rather than choosing a word count goal for your book, you can decide on how many words you want to aim for daily, weekly or monthly.

For example, you might want to start at 500 words every day, just to get your mind into the habit of writing. That works out to over 5K words per week and more than 20K words per month. That's nothing to sneeze at, for sure. In just 500 words a day, you could have that 60K novel done in 3 months, my friend. See how having a clear goal can set you up to succeed?

Now, be sure to keep track of those goals. When I first started writing, I jotted my goal of 50K on a piece of paper and every day, I wrote down my ending wordcount so I could see it rise toward my goal number. This was during the days of NaNoWriMo 2010 and before I had Scrivener.

These days, I plug in all of my details into my Scrivener project target and let it do the work for me. I can tell it I'm aiming for 60K words, let it know my deadline and which days I plan to write and it automatically tells me how many words I have to write today to stay on target. If I miss a day or miss my mark for any reason, it automatically adjusts when the new day resets and my daily goal reflects it. The same is also true if I go over and write more words than it targeted. The overall daily wordcount is lowered, which can be a double-edged sword, if you're not careful.

If word counting goals are new to you, don't worry. You'll get the hang of it once you start applying them. Especially if you get yourself hooked up with Scrivener.

So, to recap, knowing your age bracket and genre is the key to knowing where you want to aim your word count goal at as you get started. But more than that, it helps you break down your goals to daily writing goals, giving you a clear number to strive for, as long as you apply a deadline to it. Remember 60K in 36 days means 1667 words a day. 50K in 30 days is also 1667 a day. But just 500 words written every single day is 60K in 3 months.

Sometimes goals can be scary. Especially when we're applying a deadline to it. But remember Parkinson's Law - Work expands to fill the time available for its completion. Do you want to say in 6 weeks or even 3 months that your book is done? Or do you want it to take 3 years? The choice is yours.

Okay, so next week, since we've been talking about standards... let's chat about book covers. This is another part of my own author career that I'm working on and I think it might shed some light into things for you as well. We all know the saying "don't judge a book by its cover" - yet we all do it. So, what about rapid released titles? Do they matter as much? Or can you let their quality slide? We'll answer all of that and more in the next episode.



Don't forget, you can always listen to the podcast again, download the transcript, or find links to anything we discussed today by heading over to the show notes at: [authorrevolution.org/31](http://authorrevolution.org/31).

Come join in the writerly conversation on Facebook. Our Author Revolution Online Community is open to anyone who wants to talk about the wonderful, crazy world of writing. Writers are a unique bunch and it's fun to have friends who get you. Stop by and say hello.

Oh, and one last thing. If you liked this episode or the Author Revolution Podcast, leave me a review or a rating. In the coming months we're going to be doing some big, big things, like bringing on guests and hosting interviews of some of the big names in our indie industry. So, you're not going to want to miss out on those discussions.

Alrighty, my friend. That's a wrap for today. I hope this chat about word count goals and how to break them down has made things a bit clearer as you map out your rapid release series and writing goals in general.

Until next time...

Go forth and be awesome.



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