

# Age and Format Charts for Younger Readers

When writing for kids, start by figuring out your reader's age, and thus the level of reading ability and sophistication your story can include. You'll also want to understand the interests, concerns, and problems that readers in this age group experience. After you identify your reader, factor in that kids often read about kids who are slightly older than themselves. This means that ten-year-olds are likely reading about twelve- or thirteen-year-old protagonists.

Age categories for children's books aren't written in stone because various publishers have established their own categories, and several book categories might lie within broader age groups. Also, not all bookstores classify books in the same way. Some will have a "chapter books" section, while others will have a "middle-grade reader" section, and other stores lump most books for teens under "young adult." While "young adult" readers are broadly categorized as children ages twelve to eighteen, obviously within this broad group there are subgroups of readers. You can imagine that a story aimed at a twelve-year-old will be quite different than one aimed at an eighteen-year-old.

Here are the main age and format-related categories of books for children, preteens, and teens.

CATEGORY	PROTAGONIST'S AGE	READER'S AGE	WORD COUNT
Early picture book	3–8	3–5	300–1,000
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> simple plot, few locales, one theme, words that make pictures in the imagination, artwork that enhances the story line, usually a picture on every page or every other page, a character is often changed or coping with an event, such as the birth of a new sibling.</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> P.D. Eastman's <i>Are You My Mother?</i>, Don Freeman's <i>Corduroy</i>, Maurice Sendak's <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>, Eve Bunting's <i>Fly Away Home</i></p>			
Picture book, older reader	6–12	6–10	100–1,500
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> illustrations that add to the plot, more complicated topics and situations, including realistic situations and deeper conflict, sometimes humor.</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> Sherry Garland's <i>The Lotus Seed</i>, Jerdine Nolen's <i>Big Jabe</i></p>			
Easy reader	6–9	5–8	350–1,550
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> simple plot aimed at children in early grades learning how to read on their own, can feature several characters, including an antagonist or villain.</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> Dr. Seuss's <i>The Cat in the Hat</i>, Susan Hood's <i>Bad Hair Day</i>, Shelley Moore Thomas's <i>Good Night, Good Knight</i></p>			

Chapter book	8–12	7–10	1,500–3,000
<p>(some chapter books can range to 10,000 words with illustrations)</p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b> complex sentences, short paragraphs, humor, simple language, short chapters with cliffhangers, often written as a series aimed at emerging readers, may have subplot, but generally focuses on a single story line with a surprise or twist at the end, explores issues such as friendship, family, and school.</p>			
<p><b>Types:</b> mainstream, fantasy, science fiction, adventure, mystery, historical, sports, Western, manga</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Beverly Cleary's <i>Henry Higgins</i>, Dav Pilkey's Captain Underpants series, Johanna Hurwitz's <i>E Is for Elisa</i>, Mary Pope Osborne's Magic Tree House series, Jim Benton's Dear Dumb Diary series</p>			
Middle-grade novel	9–14	8–12	10,000–40,000
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> increasingly sophisticated and complicated language, plots, and situations; conflicts with more potency and real danger; characters who remain children; includes subplots, secondary characters, and descriptive details; endings are not always happily ever after.</p>			
<p><b>Types:</b> mainstream, chapter, mystery, historical, fantasy, science fiction, adventure, horror, sports, Western, graphic novel, manga</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> Jane Kurtz's <i>I'm Sorry Almira Ann</i>, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Gail Carson Levine's <i>Ella Enchanted</i>, Carl Hiaasen's <i>Hoot</i></p>			

Young adult	13–18	12 and older	30,000–60,000
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> bridges the stories of childhood and adulthood; characters often face adult-like problems and conflict, or mature subjects like addiction, sexuality, racism, abuse, and violence are depicted; subplots intensify conflict; sometimes characters mature into young adulthood; characters are often searching for identity and facing new responsibilities.</p>			
<p><b>Types:</b> mainstream, historical, mystery, adventure, science fiction, fantasy, thrillers, horror, sports, Western, manga, graphic novels</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> K.A. Applegate's <i>Animorphs</i> series, Gennifer Choldenko <i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i>, Cynthia Kadohata's <i>Kira-Kira</i>, Neil Gaiman's <i>The Wolves in the Walls</i></p>			
Teen lit	16–19	14 and older	40,000–80,000
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> protagonist embroiled in situations and dilemmas; characters mature into young adulthood, or it is a coming-of-age story; endings often are hopeful, but can also be realistic or bittersweet; realistic issues such as racism, sexuality, abuse, depression, and suicide can be depicted.</p>			
<p><b>Types:</b> mainstream, historical, horror, mystery, romance, science fiction, fantasy, thrillers, horror, sports, Western, manga, graphic novels</p>			
<p><b>Examples:</b> Stephen Chbosky's <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>, Laurie Halse Anderson's <i>Speak</i>, Joyce Carol Oates's <i>Big Mouth &amp; Ugly Girl</i></p>			