

Descriptions of Popular Fictional Genres

taken from "[Genre: A Novel's Flavor](#)"

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1. **Fantasy** – a world of magic and magical creatures. Subgenres include: high fantasy involving fictional worlds; low fantasy in worlds closer to ours; high magic having a structured magical system with rules; and low magic with less rules and more “just because” magic.
2. **Science Fiction** – a world ruled by advanced technology and scientific concepts. Subgenres can be classified as either hard sci-fi where the focus of the world is on tech, versus soft sci-fi which has tech as an afterthought and the plot is more character-driven. This genre has loads of subgenres you can read more about [here](#).
3. **Romance** – the focus is on romantic relationships between at least two people. The romance can range from idealism to eroticism, but don't confuse erotic romance with erotica. To read more about different romance subgenres, click [here](#).
4. **Action/Adventure** – this genre is filled with fast-paced plots, which involve car chases, fights, and/or travel to different geographic locations. The reader is placed at the edge of their seat always wondering how the protagonist will get out of this scrap or that. This genre is usually combined with other genres, such as fantasy, sci-fi, crime, or suspense.
5. **Speculative Fiction** – bends the rules of our world and takes the reader into a world that's very different from ours. Because of this it lends itself to the world of fantasy, sci-fi, and horror. The main question asked in this genre is “what if...” For example, what if magic existed? What if you were teleported to another world? What if the Nazis won WWII?
6. **Suspense/Thriller** – at least one character is in a state of constant peril, which can be physical and/or psychological. There are many instances of cliffhangers, near misses, and fights for survival. There are many thriller sub-genres [here](#).
7. **Historical** – historical locations are used as the backdrop in this genre with historical characters given fictional lives and stories. It combines well with other genres, such as romance.
8. **Westerns** – the setting is in the old American West, usually between 1865 to the early 1900s. The main characters involve cowboys, Indians, and miners with themes of conquest, search for gold, and surviving hardships. Can be mixed with other genres.
9. **Mystery/Crime** – these are also referred to as “whodunits” and involve something unknown that must be revealed by the end of the novel. It can be finding a killer, solving how a crime was done, and/or revealing someone's identity or importance. These can range from the amateur sleuth to police procedurals. Find more sub-genres [here](#).
10. **Horror** – these involve scary elements as characters encounter ghosts and supernatural beings, such as demons (occult sub-genre), werewolves and vampires. There is a general feeling of suspense as the protagonist is pursued and must escape these monsters and creatures.
11. **Family Saga** – generational stories chronicling the lives and experiences of one or more families, their hardships, feuds, curses, loves, and triumphs.
12. **Women's Fiction** – stories in which the central protagonists are women, usually a group of women. Conflicts revolve around their gender as it relates to societal restraints, personal and governmental.
13. **Magical Realism** – magic within a contemporary, real world setting. The fantastical is mixed with the mundane in such a way as it blends together naturally. The characters within the story see magical happenings as normal and ordinary.
14. **Literary Fiction** – focus is more on characters and theme than plot. The human condition is dissected and spilled on paper with all its ugliness and beauty. It lends more to winning awards, but it may be harder to sell in today's literary market, which focuses more on popular fiction.

Descriptions of Audiences

1. **Picture Books** – highly visual with some text. Ages 5 – 9 (50 – 2,500 words)
2. **Chapter Books** – short novels with simple themes and some pictures. Ages 7 – 10 (10,000 – 12,000 words)
3. **Middle Grade (MG)** – deals with middle school themes, such as handling bullies, school life, siblings, and parents. Ages 8 – 12 (20,000 – 25,000 words)
4. **Young Adult (YA)** – stories can be in different genres as with Adult novels. The difference is that the protagonist(s) is/are aged 12 – 18. (35,000 – 45,000 words)
5. **New Adult (NA)** – characters are college aged and plot focuses on college themes, such as going into the world for the first time, independence, new romances, and sexual encounters.
6. **Adult** – main characters are adults dealing with adult hardships, romances, family life, etc. These stories can be any of the genres listed below. The rules on word length vary by genre. Romance would be 80,000 words, while fantasy can be up to 130,000 words.