



Module 4: Selecting an Age Group Point of View: Who's Telling the Story

- The importance of writing for a particular age group
- How to choose an age group
- The most common age groupings used by publishers
- The various points of view you can use to narrate your book

In this chapter we will cover the following topics in detail:

- The importance of writing for a particular age group
- How to choose an age group
- The most common age groupings used by publishers
- The various points of view you can use to narrate your book
- How to choose your point of view

4.1 Introduction



There are specific categories that all children's literature falls into, and before starting to write your book you will need to decide which of these you are aiming for.

As a new author, publishers are unlikely to accept your manuscript unless it fulfils the needs of a given readership, and books that straddle age brackets are much less likely to be accepted. Plus, a book written for a five year old will hardly be appropriate for a 13 year old and vice-versa. You must consider language, style, tone, format, length, subject matter, plot, and illustrations in your decision.

Before you even begin to write your plan, consider the elements of your story. If you have an idea of your story, write some character descriptions and a brief outline of the plot. Then use the descriptions of each age bracket below to decide which your story would sit best in.

It is a lot easier to decide on your target market at the outset and write the book to satisfy its specifications, rather than write your first draft and realise, for example, that your writing style and use of language is suitable for a first chapter audience, and your treatment of subject matter is more fitting for young adult readers.

If you have not got any ideas about the outline of your story or your characters yet, don't worry; we will discuss those things later. Think about the type of books that have inspired you to write children's literature, and research online which age range they are aimed towards. Write some descriptive passages or short stories in the style that comes easily to you and gauge who your writing is likely to be suitable for. If you are still not sure, which is fine, just read through this information and let it start to help you have ideas about your intended readership; it is always here for you to refer back to later.

Here are the categories normally followed by publishers. These will vary slightly from one to the next and have the frustrating habit of being constantly in flux, so make sure you research the recent publications of each company you send your manuscript to before specifying your target age range in your submission. You will also see that there is some overlap in the ages specified for each; this is partially due to differing levels of reading ability and individual maturity, and also because a child could be having a fairly complex picture book read to them by an adult at age six, as well as tackling an early levelled reader.

4.2 Toddler Books: 0-3 years old

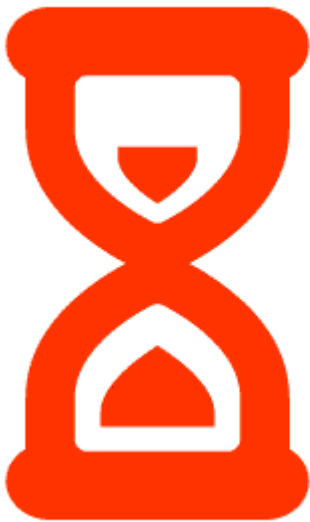


These books are for the youngest children.

They are also called board books because they are often printed on thick cardboard for durability. Some will have no words at all and can range from a word a page to a few hundred words, but rarely more. They can have a plot, or could simply be a word on each page in combination with a picture.

The most famous of these is undoubtedly Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which has become a classic despite its simplicity.

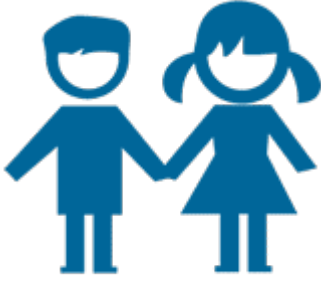
FACT



On average, a copy of Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is sold somewhere in the world every minute.

Metro.co.uk

4.3 Picture Books: 3-8 years old



As you can see from the age range, picture books can vary massively in complexity.

The defining characteristic of this category is the emphasis put on illustration, which creates visual appeal for the child and gives information about plot, setting, theme, and character. These books will generally run from 200-1,000 words, have a simple plot and often a central character, although sometimes just a theme.

The more complex of these books can be quite involved, as they are often designed to be read by an adult to a child. An example of a successful picture book is *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson, whose combination of fear and security have drawn children to it across the globe.

Another are the Dr. Seuss books, whose whimsical rhyming and off-the-wall subject matter make them great fun for adults and children.

4.4 Early Levelled Readers: 4-9 years old



These are the books used to teach children how to read; they use simple words, beginning at one syllable long at the lower levels and increasing in difficulty.

They are often used in schools and usually have a plot and illustrations, which are used to help the reader deduce what the words might be, and give impetus.

The storylines are often more simple, and the word counts lower than in the more advanced picture books, as these are designed for children to read for themselves with the help of an adult. The difficulty here is balancing simplicity of language and style while still keeping the story engaging enough for a child to be motivated to keep reading.

4.5 First Chapter Books: 6-9 years old



These generally come into their own when children have a basic grasp of how to read and are able to concentrate for a longer period of time.

Generally running between 5,000-10,000 words, they are split into chapters (hence the name) and always have a plot. They are usually illustrated, but unlike picture and early reader books do not rely on these for comprehension of the story. The tone of these books is often quite external, with little self-reflection on the part of the characters, and they focus mainly, but not exclusively, on positive and hopeful themes.

4.6 Middle Grade Books: 8-12 years old



Ranging from on average 30,000 words to 45,000 words, this is a time where plot complexity and character development really start to develop.

Children at this age are starting to test the limits of their world and are using reading to explore this. Where young adult books are very involved in the interests of the lead character, middle grade books are still able to focus predominantly on the wonder and external implications of a scene or situation.

4.7 Young Adult Books: 12-18 years old



This bracket is often split into two.

The first is usually 12-14 years old and avoids graphic descriptions of violence and keeping sexual scenes vague. The 15 and over bracket usually treats these topics with a bit more freedom, although if you want to see your book on school reading lists and in the library, you will avoid using these gratuitously (as you should in any literature).

A guideline for this category is 55,000-75,000 words, although you will find many authors making free with this, especially in the fantasy genre.

Having said this, the difference between young adult and adult fiction lies less in subject matter and more in perspective. Young adult readers wish to empathise totally with the lead character or protagonist, and more adult perspectives are less welcome. Pace and language are also important in defining young adult fiction; a slower pace and stylistic language are often likely to put off a younger reader.

By this stage readers are often seeking a depiction of the challenges of reality, in perhaps a darker and more complex backdrop.

4.8 Don't Rush It

If you are still unsure about where your idea fits in, don't panic.

Your first stop is to read, read and read some more, keeping track of where each of the books fits into the age classification system.

A good rule of thumb is that the books that you enjoy reading the most represent the books you will most enjoy writing, and I hope it goes without saying that you will struggle to write a good book if you do not enjoy the process.

4.9 Points of View

Before you start writing you need to consider the point of view that you will tell your story from.

There are quite a few options, some easier than others:

First Person

This is where you are telling the story from the point of view of a character, usually the lead. An example would be:

'I walked up the stairs into the darkness. I could hear the thudding growing louder with every step.'

Not many new authors manage to pull this off successfully. It requires a very strong voice and some handling of the tricky situation of not knowing anything other than what the lead is actually experiencing. Some authors even manage to pull off multiple points of view, writing a section of the book from the perspective of one character, then the next. It can produce a strong empathy for the lead character, but is pretty disastrous when done badly.

Second Person

A book written in the second person would sound like you were speaking to somebody directly; for example:

'You walked up the stairs into the darkness. You could hear the thudding growing louder with every step.'

This is rare in any published fictional literature and incredibly difficult to do well.

Third Person

By far the most common of the points of view available to authors, the third person version of our example sentence would be:

'He walked up the stairs into the darkness. He could hear the thudding growing louder with every step.'

This point of view can be split into three categories:

Third Person Limited

This is similar to the first person point of view, as the narrator or author sticks with the lead and follows the plot with them. Although the narrator still describes things from a 'he' or 'she' perspective, they do not disclose the future and generally cannot get inside other characters' heads to narrate what they are thinking and feeling.

Third Person Omniscient

This is where the narrator is all-powerful, floating above the story with the plot spread below them. They can see into the future and into the mind and intentions of every character.

Third Person Multiple

This is similar to the third person limited, in that the narrator sees the story from the character's perspective, but instead of moving alongside only one character, they leap from one, to another, multiple times. This can be complex and difficult to utilise while keeping clarity of plot and

movement.

4.10 How to Choose Your Point of View



This can be difficult, especially if this is your first novel.

The key is to try things out and make sure that once you start on your book you stay consistent throughout. Before you embark on the great project of your first entire book, experiment with the different points of view. You could think of a plot for a short story and try writing it from each of the different perspectives.

Afterwards, analyse what you have written: which point of view did you find it most enjoyable to take? Which creates the greatest sense of tension, flow and accuracy of what you were trying to portray? What were the difficulties with each?

If you have a patient volunteer in the age range you are aiming for, get their opinion on this. Failing that, ask a peer whose opinion you trust to give you their thoughts, or use one of the online writing support forums or support groups to get feedback. Put the stories aside for a week or so and read through them again with fresh eyes, being critical about the positive and negative points of each point of view and how well you have executed them.

Go back to books that you have particularly enjoyed, that are withdrawn often from the library, that hit the top of reader-driven ratings, and that are recommended by children you know, and read them again.

What point of view have they used? Was it effective? Why? Try rewriting a particularly effective passage from one of these books from a different point of view. What does it change about the effect of the passage? Does it improve it or make it worse?

Assignment

Planning

Time: 30 minutes

This task will get you to think about what type of book you want to write and how you are going to go about creating it.

Download the worksheet below and print out and complete.

[Download Worksheet](#)

In Summary

It is important to decide who your target audience is before embarking on a detailed plan for your book. The best way to do this is to look at your current ideas and see where they fit into the age brackets determined by publishers. If you have not got any ideas yet, experiment with writing for different age groups, and don't worry, there's no rush.

Remember that each publisher may have different boundaries for their age groups so research these before submitting a manuscript.

You will also need to decide on a point of view for your book, based on your observations of other books you deem successful (or otherwise), and your experimentation with writing from different perspectives.

[Tweet "I just completed Module 4 of the Children's Story Writing Diploma Course"]
