

Writing a pocket novel

Pocket novels are 30,000 word novellas; short books that can be read from cover to cover in a few hours. The largest publisher of pocket novels is *My Weekly*, and Maggie Seed is the commissioning editor there. In a recent interview for the magazine 'Writers' Forum', Maggie talks about how great pocket novels are for writers who want to find a way to bridge the gap between short stories and full 100,000 word novels. She states that; 'the 30,000-word novellas, published at a rate of two a fortnight in a floppy A5 format, are the perfect stepping stone to longer fiction for writers who have cut their teeth on short stories for women's magazines. They're also an excellent starting point for writers aiming to move on to other publishers in the field, such as Mills & Boon.'

So if you think that writing a pocket novel could be the opportunity that you are looking for to progress your writing career, below are a few tips to get you started:

- Pocket Novels are predominately based within the realms of romance. But this does still give you quite a lot of freedom in terms of subject matter, plot line and setting. You can look to write a book that is modern or historical, set at home or abroad, and plots could revolve around children, work, travel, parents, crime, mystery or even a seasonal event. Be imaginative in your setting and have a look at what the current trends are in setting and subject matter before you get started, to ensure that your book will still appeal to the main audience.
- You only have 30,000 words which in the land of fiction really isn't all that many! So focus your story on characters and diction as opposed to descriptive language. Work hard on building 'real', likeable characters that will interest the reader, and ensure thought has been given as to how the characters will interact with each other too before you start writing.
- The word count also means that you do not have the luxury of providing background information to characters and setting – the reader has to be dropped right into the action and the pace needs to be fast enough to move the reader from A-Z in 30,000 words.
- Ultimately a romance book will have a hero and a heroine (or perhaps 2 heroes and 2 heroines), and whilst they need to face some sort of struggle before they can get together and become an item, they do need to (a) find a way to get together in the end, and (b) actually know or like each other a little throughout the book. The storyline will become unbelievable if two strangers or two individuals who really do not like each other suddenly form a passionate romance at the end.

- Try not to make any of the characters too annoying or boring. Reading a pocket book should almost feel like a guilty pleasure; it should be un-put-down-able. So keep the reader entertained and not too frustrated.
- There can be romantic or sexual scenes within a book of this nature, but they shouldn't be too explicit.