

Word-count

The Craft of Writing · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

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FIRST question is . . . how many words should be in your article?

I don't know. But you can easily make a decision. Your article should be ABOUT the length of your kind of article in the publication you are writing for (that, targeting). So, you must count up the words in a "similar" article in your target publication to determine ABOUT how long your article should be.

SECOND question is . . . how do you indicate the word-length?

It's important to put your article's word-count close to the article's title, like this: 1,232 words Don't write "Number of words: 1,232" or other expressions. Just "1,232 words" will do. It is impolite to your editor not to inform him immediately how long your article is.

THIRD question is . . . how do you count the words in a publication?

Well, some publications have websites and indicate the word-count on each article. But some don't. You should count the words in an article to understand how many words your target publication uses in an average article (or in an article "like" yours).

Sadly there's no quick or interesting way to do it. You must individually count each word, pointing at each word with the point of a pen. Count ALL words including "a", "the" and "23". A date such as 23 December 2006 is counted as three words. Two hyphenated words such "accident-prone" counts as two words not one.

DON'T use some wacky "estimating" or "averaging" method. Use the time-consuming, boring old method of counting word-by-word.

FOURTH question is . . . how do you count the words in your own article?

A word-count of your own article presents no problems with a computer. All word processing packages (like the world's most prolific, Microsoft Word) have the ability to instantly count words for you. In Microsoft Word you "select" or "block" all the words you want to count.

Include your heading and your byline.

Click on "Tools" at the top of your screen, click on "Word Count" and a screen will pop up telling you the number of words in the selected area.

It will also tell you information you're not interested in like the number of pages, the number of characters not including spaces, the number of characters including spaces, and the number of paragraphs and lines.

A word-count must always be expressed exactly

for example, as 799 or 801, not "800".

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