

About the Romance Genre

From Romance Writers of America

Romance fiction is smart, fresh and diverse. Whether you enjoy contemporary dialogue, historical settings, mystery, thrillers or any number of other themes, there's a romance novel waiting for you!

Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending.

A Central Love Story: The main plot centers around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel.

An Emotionally-Satisfying and Optimistic Ending: In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.

Romance novels may have any tone or style, be set in any place or time, and have varying levels of sensuality—ranging from sweet to extremely hot. These settings and distinctions of plot create specific subgenres within romance fiction.

Romance Novel Formats

There are two formats for romance fiction:

Series or "category" romances: books issued under a common imprint/series name that are usually numbered sequentially and released at regular intervals, usually monthly, with the same number of releases each time. These books are most commonly published by Harlequin/Silhouette.

Single-title romances: longer romances released individually and not as part of a numbered series. Single-title romances may be released in hard cover, trade paperback, or mass-market paperback sizes.

The Romance Genre: Romance Literature Subgenres

All romances have a central love story and an emotionally satisfying ending. Beyond that, however, romance novels may have any tone or style, be set in any place or time, and have varying levels of sensuality—ranging from sweet to extremely hot. Romance fiction may be classified into various subgenres depending on setting and plot elements. These subgenres include:

Contemporary Series Romance □ Series romance novels that focus primarily on the romantic relationship and typically set after 1945.

Contemporary-Single Title Romance □ Romance novels that focus primarily on the romantic relationship, released as individual titles, not as part of a series and set after 1945.

Historical Romance □ Romance novels set in any time period prior to 1945, and taking place in any location.

Inspirational Romance □ Romance novels in which religious or spiritual beliefs (in the context of any religion or spiritual belief system) are a major part of the romantic relationship.

Novels with Strong Romantic Elements □ A work of fiction in which a romance plays a significant part in the story, but other themes or elements take the plot beyond the traditional romance boundaries.

Paranormal Romance □ Romance novels in which the future, a fantasy world, or paranormal happenings are an integral part of the plot.

Regency Romance □ Romance novels in which the majority of the story is set against the Regency period of the British Empire.

Romantic Suspense □ Romance novels in which suspense, mystery, or thriller elements constitute an integral part of the plot.

Young Adult Romance □ Novels with a strong romantic theme geared toward young adult readers.

Romance Literature Statistics: Overview

Explore the results of Romance Writers of America's market research study on romance reader demographics and the romance fiction industry. These statistics offer insights to help you share in this billion-dollar-a-year industry.

Popularity of Romance Fiction

(source: *Business of Consumer Book Publishing 2009*)

- Romance fiction generated **\$1.37 billion** in sales in 2008.
- **7,311 new romance titles** were released in 2008.
- In 2008, romance was the **top performing category** on the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Publishers Weekly* best-seller lists.
- Romance fiction sales are estimated at **\$1.36 billion** for 2009.
- **74.8 million people** read at least one romance novel in 2008. (source: RWA Reader Survey)

Market Share of Romance Fiction

(source: *Business of Consumer Book Publishing 2009*)

Romance fiction was the **largest share of the consumer market** in 2008 at 13.5 percent.

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Romance Market Share Compared to Other Genres

(source: Simba Information estimates)

Romance fiction: **\$1.37 billion** in estimated revenue for 2008 □ Religion/inspirational: \$800 million □ Mystery: \$668 million □ Science fiction/fantasy: \$551 million □ Classic literary fiction: \$446 million

Romance Literature Statistics: Industry Statistics

2008 ROMStat Report

Romance fiction sales remained strong in 2008

The U.S. economy slid into recession in 2008, and book sales were down to \$10.175 billion from \$10.714 billion in 2007.(1) **Romance fiction sales were strong in 2008 at \$1.37 billion**—though down slightly from \$1.375 billion in 2007.

Popularity of Romance Fiction

Not only did romance fiction generate \$1.37 billion in sales in 2008, but also it remained the **largest share of the consumer market** at 13.5 percent. R.R. Bowker's Books In Print shows 7,311 new romance titles were published in the United States in 2008 (out of a total 275,232 new titles). With 7,311 new romances published in one year, "no fiction category can rival romance in terms of sheer size."(2)

What makes romance so popular? The diversity of the genre, titles aimed mostly at women, who read 90.5 percent of all romance novels,(3) and the low price point helped make romance the number one category on best-seller lists in 2008. According to Simba Information's consolidated rankings, **350 editions of 340 titles by 171 authors under 53 imprints appeared on the lists**—with 90 percent appearing on the lists for the first time.(4) The top performing romance subgenres included historical, suspense, and paranormal/fantasy titles.

Romance Fiction Readership

RWA's 2009 Reader Survey reports 74.8 million Americans read at least one romance novel in 2008, with the core of the romance fiction market at 29 million regular readers.

When readers acquired new romance titles, 50.1 percent purchased them from mass merchandisers (like Wal-Mart and Target), and impulse purchases out-numbered planned purchases. In addition, 60 percent of romance readers bought at least one new romance novel in 2008.

Of all formats survey respondents used to read romance novels, **90.6 percent of**

romances were read in softcover/ paperback format, 47.2 percent read in hardcover, 6.5 percent listened to audiobook versions, and 5.4 percent read in electronic/e-book format. Although net sales of electronic books increased 68.4 percent in 2008, only 8 percent of U.S. adults bought at least one e-book in 2008 (while 15 percent read one).(5)

Bowker's 2008 PubTrack Consumer Survey reports the average age of a book reader is 44, and that American women "are more likely to be book readers than men." RWA's Reader Survey supports these figures: the heart of the U.S. romance novel readership is women aged 31 to 49 who are currently in a romantic relationship.

Challenges in 2008

The publishing industry struggled in 2008: some publishers posted profits, others losses; imprints were reorganized and employees fired. Booksellers strove to survive, and mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart continued to dominate the bookselling scene.

Other challenges facing the publishing industry include(d):

- Proliferation of used books
- Fewer bookstores
- Book piracy
- Increased competition for consumer leisure time

Americans only spent 3.9 hours per week reading books in 2008, while they spent 15 hours online and 12.1 hours watching television.(7) The biggest challenge for the publishing industry to overcome may be increasing the perceived value of reading. Industry analyst Simba Information believes: "The book business should remember that the future of content isn't about whether it is seen but whether it is valued."(8)

Publishers

How did the major romance publishers fare financially last year?

- Hachette: Hachette Book Group's U.S. revenue increased in 2008 to an estimated \$670 million.
- Harlequin Enterprises: Earnings were up 11 percent, and 2008 was the third year in a row of business growth. Book publishing revenue was up 2.2 percent to \$379 million. Robert Prichard, President and CEO of Torstar (Harlequin's parent company), believes the "outlook for 2009 is mixed and marked by uncertainty due to the economy...we expect continuing stable results building on the success and growth of the last three years."
- HarperCollins: Worldwide revenue fell 3.4 percent to \$1.27 billion, and U.S. revenue was \$840 million.
- Penguin Group USA: The U.S. division of Penguin Group had strong gains in 2008 to \$1.085 billion.

- Random House: Worldwide revenue fell 6.3 percent with U.S. revenue at \$1.280 billion.
- Simon & Schuster: Sales decline for 2008 with publishing revenues down 3.2 percent to \$857.7 million. U.S. revenue came in at \$730 million.

2009 Estimates

Publishers are cautiously optimistic in 2009, but worries about the U.S. economy remain prevalent. Sixty-two percent of respondents to RWA's Reader Survey said the economy has affected their spending on romance novels, and Simba Information forecasts a slight decline in romance fiction sales to \$1.36 billion in 2009. Overall net consumer book sales are predicted to go down to \$9.78 billion.⁽¹⁰⁾ However, as of June 2009, the most recent Association of American Publishers report says book sales are up 1.8 percent for the year.⁽¹¹⁾ The future still looks good for romance fiction, as readers (especially in tough times) continue to turn to romance novels for respite and a "happily ever after."

Romance Fiction Sales from 2005–2008

(source: Simba Information)

2005: \$1.4 billion

2006: \$1.37 billion

2007: \$1.375 billion

2008: \$1.37 billion

Romance Subgenres Published in 2008

Of the romance releases tracked by RWA in 2008:

Contemporary (series): 25.84 percent

Contemporary: 18.37 percent

Historical: 15.91 percent

Paranormal: 12.65 percent

Romantic Suspense: 8.4 percent

Inspirational: 7.82 percent

Romantic Suspense (series): 4.79 percent

Other (chick-lit, erotic romance): 3.78 percent

Young Adult: 2.34 percent

Quarterly Romance Fiction Sales

(source: Nielsen BookScan)

Quarter Romance Sales in Units

Q1 2008 (12-31-07 through 3-30-08): 9,641,000

Q2 2008 (3-31-08 through 6-29-08): 10,133,000

Q3 2008 (6-30-08 through 9-28-08): 9,827,000

Q4 2008 (9-29-08 through 12-28-08): 8,893,000

Q1 2009 (12-29-08 through 3-29-09): 9,789,000

Q2 2009 (3-30-09 through 6-28-09): 9,887,000

Nielsen BookScan's U.S. Consumer Market Panel currently covers approximately 75 percent of retail sales and continues to grow. BookScan does not track sales from Wal-Mart/Sam's Club or BJ's.
RWR

Romance Literature Statistics: Readership Statistics

Romance Writers of America commissioned InfoTrends, Inc. to perform the creation, implementation and analysis of the 2009 RWA Reader Survey. The 2009 RWA Reader Survey was a Web-based survey of romance fiction readers. (May 2009)

Romance Fiction Readership Continues to Grow

The Readers

74.8 million people read at least one romance novel in 2008.

The core of the romance fiction market is 29 million *regular* readers.

24.6 percent of all American read a romance novel in 2008, versus 21.8 percent in 2005.

29 percent of Americans over the age of 13 read a romance novel in 2008.

Women make up 90.5 percent of the romance readership, and men make up 9.5 percent.

The heart of the U.S. romance novel readership is women aged 31–49 who are currently in a romantic relationship.

Reader Marital Status

Romance readers are more likely than the general population to be currently

married or living with a partner.

Geographic Location of Romance Readers

Northeast 15.7%

Midwest 25.6%

West 21.6 %

South 37.1%

Location of romance readers in the United States (see map above)

The percentage of people in each geographic area who read romance novels:

Northeast: 21.5 percent

Midwest: 28.8 percent

South: 25.1 percent

West: 23.6 percent

The Age of Romance Readers

The mean and median age of romance novel readers is very close to that of the general population.

Mean: 44.6 years

Median: 44.9 years

Those aged 31 to 49 are more likely to read romance and comprise 44 percent of the readership.

Purchase Behaviors

Purchase Behavior/Influences

Impulse purchases outnumber planned romance novel purchases.

About 12 percent of romance novels are either purchased as gifts or received as gifts.

Most critical purchase influences:

Author

Description of the book

Word from friends/acquaintances

The most popular resource romance readers use to learn about new/upcoming romance titles is *a romance novel*. Readers learn about new romance titles most often by reading the advertisements for other books contained

in the books they are currently reading.

The most popular online resource for a reader looking for information on a romance novel is a retailer Web site

Description of Romance Novel Purchases: Impulse vs. Planned

Planned Purchases 13.7 %

Impulse Purchases 26.4%

Impulse Purchases Outnumber Planned Purchases 21.4%

Planned Purchases Outnumber Impulse Purchases 15.5 %

Impulse and Planned Purchases are roughly equal 23.0%

How Romance Readers Obtain Their Novels

60 percent of romance readers bought at least one new romance novel in 2008.

50 percent of romance readers bought at least one used romance title in 2008.

Mass merchandisers such as Target and Wal-Mart remain popular, but book superstores such as Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Books-a-Million challenge the mass merchandisers in terms of where romance readers obtain romance novels.

Type of Retailer Used Most to Acquire Romance Novels*

*New book purchases only

Mass merchandiser: 50.1 percent

Book superstore: 48.8 percent

Freestanding, independent bookstore: 31.1 percent

Online book merchant: 26.4 percent

Grocery store: 24.3 percent

Warehouse clubs: 21.7 percent

Mall bookstore: 21.3 percent

Drug store: 16.1 percent

Book club: 12.4 percent

Mail order: 10.5 percent

Other online: 9.6 percent

Airport bookstore: 9.4 percent

Convenience store: 8.1 percent

Department store: 7.7 percent

Other: 13.9 percent

Reading Behavior

The most popular places romance novels are read are at home or while traveling or on vacation.

29 percent of romance readers usually carry a romance novel with them.

Romance readers typically begin and finish a romance novel within 7 days.

Mass-market paperbacks are currently the most preferred romance novel format.

More than half of romance readers who read romance in electronic format do not use a dedicated e-book reader, and, instead, read romances from laptops, desktops, cell phones, etc.

Book Formats Used to Read Romance Novels*

*Respondents were asked to select all formats used to read a romance novel in 2008.

90.6 % Softcover/paperbacks

47.2% Hardcover

Settings Where Romance Novels Are Read

At home: 90.3 percent

While traveling: 33.9 percent

On vacation: 31.1 percent

Spare time at work: 20.2 percent

While commuting: 10.8 percent

At a library: 7.2 percent

Other: 9.9 percent

Subgenres

There is no consensus indicating one subgenre over another as a favorite among romance readers.

50 percent of romance readers are somewhat or extremely likely to try a new subgenre in the next 24 months.

Authors & Readers

Of the survey respondents:

70 percent are likely to follow an author they like into a new subgenre

Half have favorite romance authors

91 percent are likely to seek out an author's previously published titles after reading a novel from an author they like

88 percent are open to trying new authors

What makes readers try new authors? Recommendations from friends or acquaintances and seeing the book on the retail or library shelf.

45.1 percent were not aware that authors receive no royalty payment for the purchase of used books.

RWA's statistics result from two studies commissioned by the association. □□ One study—on the **sales of romance fiction**—is compiled by RWA from Simba Information (an independent market research firm that studies the publishing industry), R.R. Bowker's Books In Print, the AAP, and other named sources. This study is updated every 12 months. □□ Another study focuses on **reader demographics, book content, and book-buying habits**. The 2009 survey was conducted by InfoTrends, Inc. This first version of this study was conducted in 1998. The follow-up surveys were conducted in Summer/Fall 2002 and Winter 2005.