

How many chapters in a book? **by Wen Spencer**

On the Forward Motion forum at www.fmwriters.com, a person asks:

Is few chapters better?

They go on to explain:

My novel (now in final edit) currently has 83 chapters even though I'm only at about 100,000 words. Many chapters are only a coupla pages long. I think I could merge them down to about 42 chapters total. What are the advantages of fewer chapters?

I posted this reply to this question:

I believe that while there is nothing actually **WRONG** with lots and lots of short chapters, I think that perhaps that you're confusing scene with chapter.

Scenes are one unit of action: a conversation, a fight, sex, an argument.

A chapter is a set of scenes grouped together as a unit.

Just as it's not a great idea to have a scene be all one-sentence paragraphs, or one paragraph that runs for pages, it's also not really a great idea to have each scene be a chapter. Chapters are great tools for theme and pacing by how you group together various scenes. For example, if you group together several short scenes together in one chapter, they feel less choppy because you're presenting them as a unit. Similarly, if you have one sprawling scene that runs for pages and pages -- you can break it unnaturally and call it a new chapter, and people will go with that.

My 100,000 novels usually have about 20 chapters of 5,000 words each. Each chapter has many scenes in it. Usually I write out the scenes and later decide which ones will be grouped together. I try to find a natural cliffhanger and make that the end of the chapter. People often tell me that they can't put my books down because when they get to the end of the chapter, they **HAVE** to find out what happens in the next.

If I let each scene be a chapter, then they would all have equal weight. Unless I made each one a cliff hanger (bad idea) there would be more times the reader would hit the end of a chapter, feel no need to start the next chapter, and put the book down.

If you have 83 chapters and each are many scenes long, I'm wondering if you're not doing some kind of mega outlining.