

How long should it be? The word and character counts that actually matter

Most length advice hands you a magic number, and most magic numbers are wrong. Word count is not an SEO ranking factor, search snippets truncate by pixel width rather than characters, and only a few limits, such as an SMS segment or a form field, are genuinely hard. Here is what actually governs length in 2026, and where a target number really helps.

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The length question comes up for almost everything you write: a blog post, a meta description, a social caption, a slide, a talk. Most advice answers it with a magic number, and most magic numbers are wrong, either because someone made them up or because the platform in question does not measure length the way the number assumes. Here is what actually governs length in 2026, which limits are real, and where a target number genuinely helps.

The blog-post myth: word count is not a ranking factor

Start with the length question people worry about most, and the one where the common answer is flatly wrong. Word count is not a Google ranking factor. The people at Google have said this plainly and more than once: John Mueller has stated that word count is not a ranking factor, and Danny Sullivan repeated the point at WordCamp US in 2025, saying word count does not matter and that Google is not looking for anything other than quality.

So why do the studies keep showing longer posts ranking higher? Correlation, not cause. A page that fully answers a query, with the relevant facts, subtopics and detail, tends to be both longer and better ranked, but the length is a side effect of the completeness, not the reason for it. Inflating a complete answer with filler to hit two thousand words does nothing, and trimming a genuinely thorough page to hit a shorter target would hurt. The target that works is not a number: cover the topic well enough that the reader has no reason to go back to search, then stop. The subject sets the length.

Meta title and description: pixels, not characters

Search snippets are the place people most often reach for a character count, and here the count is only ever a rule of thumb, because Google truncates by pixel width rather than by characters. A capital W is far wider than a lowercase i, so two titles with the same character count can cut at different points. Two practical ranges hold up:

- Title: Google shows roughly 580 pixels on desktop and less on mobile, which works out to about 50 to 60 characters in most fonts. Put the important words first, because anything past the cut still counts for relevance but the reader may never see it.
- Description: desktop shows around 920 pixels, roughly 155 characters on average, and

mobile shows less, nearer 120. Aim for about 120 to 155 characters so it reads as a complete thought on both.

Neither the title nor the description is a direct ranking factor. What they decide is the click: whether your result, sitting next to nine others, reads as the one worth tapping. So write them for a person, keep the meaning in the first half, and treat the character figure as guidance, not a hard cap.

The limits that are actually hard

Some length limits are not display guidance at all, but real technical or platform caps where going over costs you something concrete. These are the ones worth counting to:

- SMS: 160 characters in the standard GSM-7 alphabet before a message splits into multiple parts, each billed separately. Add a single emoji or certain accented characters and the whole message switches to Unicode, where each part holds only 70 characters, so one emoji can double your segment count.
- Bluesky post: 300 characters, counted by grapheme, so an emoji is one character. A pasted link counts as its visible text, which eats into the 300 fast.
- Form fields and database columns: a field capped at, say, 255 characters will reject or silently cut anything longer, unlike a search snippet, which simply displays less.

The distinction that matters: a meta title or description that runs long is merely trimmed on screen, so it is a soft limit. An SMS segment, a hard form field or a strict API field is where the extra characters actually break something or cost money. Count carefully for the second kind, and relax about the first.

Length is also time: reading and speaking

For anything meant to be consumed in a sitting, a talk, a script, a voiceover, a newsletter, the useful number is not the word count but the time it implies. A common estimate is about 200 words per minute for silent adult reading and about 130 words per minute for comfortable speaking aloud. Both vary by reader, topic and delivery, so they are planning estimates, not stopwatches. The practical use is sizing to a slot: a 10-minute conference talk is roughly 1,300 spoken words, not 2,000, and a newsletter you want read in three minutes is around 600. Write to the time you have, then check the count against it.

The counter on this site shows words, characters, sentences, paragraphs and both reading and speaking time as you type, entirely in your browser, so nothing you paste ever leaves your device. Use a target number where it is a real limit, an SMS segment, a form field, a snippet you want fully visible, and ignore it where it is not, such as the length of a blog post. Match the length to the job first, then check it against the count.

Frequently asked questions

How long should a blog post be for SEO?

There is no ideal length, and word count is not a Google ranking factor. The people at Google

have said so directly: John Mueller has stated plainly that word count is not a ranking factor, and Danny Sullivan repeated at WordCamp US in 2025 that word count does not matter. The studies that show longer posts ranking higher are measuring correlation, not cause: thorough pages that fully answer a query tend to be both longer and better ranked, but the length is a side effect of the completeness, not the reason for it. Padding a complete answer with filler to hit a number does nothing, and cutting a genuinely thorough page to hit a shorter target would hurt. Write enough to cover the topic so the reader has no reason to return to search, then stop, and let the subject set the length.

How many characters should a meta title and description be?

Google truncates search snippets by pixel width, not character count, because a wide letter like W takes far more room than a narrow one like i, so any figure is a guideline rather than a hard cap. In practice a title fits in roughly 50 to 60 characters, about 580 pixels on desktop, and a description in about 120 to 155 characters, roughly 920 pixels on desktop and less on mobile. Front-load the meaningful words so the message survives if the tail is cut. Neither the title nor the description is a direct ranking factor, but both strongly influence whether your result gets clicked.

Why does my text message count as two messages?

A single SMS holds 160 characters in the standard GSM-7 character set. Go over that and the message splits into multiple parts, each billed separately. The catch that surprises people is encoding: adding one emoji, or certain accented or non-Latin characters, switches the whole message to Unicode, where each part holds only 70 characters. So a short message with a single emoji can cost more segments than a longer plain-text one. If you are billed per segment, count characters and watch what one emoji does to the limit.

What is the character limit for a Bluesky post?

A Bluesky post is capped at 300 characters. Bluesky counts by grapheme, so an emoji or an accented letter counts as one character even though it is several bytes underneath. A link counts toward the limit as its visible text, so a long URL eats into the 300 before you have written anything, which is why pasting a raw link into a short post can push it over. Trimming the visible link text leaves more room for the message.

How do I estimate how long my text takes to read or say aloud?

Divide the word count by a words-per-minute rate. A common estimate is about 200 words per minute for silent adult reading and about 130 words per minute for comfortable speaking. So a 1,000-word article reads in roughly five minutes and speaks in nearer eight. Both rates vary by reader, topic and delivery, so treat them as a planning estimate rather than a precise figure. For a 10-minute talk, aim for around 1,300 spoken words instead of trying to fill every second.

Count words, characters and reading time in your browser

Free, no signup: agent.mue.app/tools/word-counter

agent.mue.app/articles/how-long-should-it-be-word-and-character-limits

