



WORKSHOP: CRAFTING KEYWORDS

By Casey Blair

Hi everyone, welcome to Keywords craft talk! I'm so excited to help everyone level up their keywords and generally feel more comfortable with how to even do this.

This will be broken up into two weeks. This first week is the reading assignment week, where you read this post:

<https://kindlepreneur.com/kindle-keywords-fiction-author-strategy/>

And then we talk dive into it and make it make sense. =)

NEXT week will be Keyword Q&A, aka you take what you learned this week, show us your keywords, and we'll fine-tune them for maximum effect.

So first things first:

WHAT'S EVEN THE POINT OF KEYWORDS?

METADATA baby. ✨

Amazon, for all its many, MANY foibles, has a super powerful algorithm to help customers find what they're looking for, because Amazon succeeds when customers are happy aka making purchases.

Keywords are information you give Amazon to help it help you. The better your keyword game, the more work the Amazon algorithm can do to sell your book organically without you having to lift a finger.

Some background on why I am the one talking about this: In 2022, I published my first trilogy. The third month it was out, I learned how to do keyword and category strategy correctly. I fixed my categories first, and my income tripled. When I fixed my keywords, my income skyrocketed.

Within a week, I had gone from making \$500/month to \$4000/month. My income literally *octoupled*. (Is that a word? We're going with it 😂) That series maintained that level of income with no new books released in it for more than two years.



So you will hear people say that keywords don't matter anymore, and I am here to tell you this is absolutely false.

What keywords aren't: A magic bullet.

If you're not getting *any* sales, keywords aren't going to solve that for you on your own. Amazon's algorithm *magnifies* traffic; it doesn't generate it from nothing. This is the same reason you can't just upload a book and watch the sales come in. You need to have traffic for the algorithm to magnify. Multiplying by 0 gives you 0.

But if you *do* have traffic (and a solid product page, with professional cover and blurb; we're going to assume that's the baseline we're all working from here), keywords can *amplify* it.

And anything that automatically helps more people interested in my book find my book without me having to keep putting in effort is worthwhile, in my opinion. 😊 Make Amazon work for you! Passive marketing is the best.

What keywords are: A way to help the right readers find your book continually, but without continual effort from you.

Keywords are what you tell Amazon about your book that will help readers who would like it find it. Is your book for gaslamp fantasy readers? For enemies to lovers readers? For spicy readers? These are the kinds of things you can use keywords to tell Amazon.

Keywords are *also* what readers search for in that search bar. Readers will type in shit like "enemies to lovers spicy fantasy romance," and Amazon will show them a list of books that have that in their keywords. So even though that reader didn't know about your book when they came to Amazon, in searching for keywords they can find it. *That's* the real power.

Of course, that only matters if the keywords you give Amazon actually result in your book getting shown to them.

That means a few things.

Your KDP keywords should be words or phrases that:

1. Shoppers actually type into Amazon



(If no one is searching for "cat ear mmc" it doesn't matter if they're objectively wrong, Amazon won't be able to show your book to anyone, and you've wasted keyword real estate.)

2. A big enough quantity of shoppers type it into Amazon

(If only 5 people each month search for the term, sorry to these 5 people with excellent taste but they're not enough to sustain a career on. You need a bigger pool.)

3. Shoppers will actually pay money for.

(If lots of people search "cat ear mmc" but then don't actually spend money, those are not the kind of customers you want! These are either freebie seekers or, more likely, what they want from that term isn't what their keyword search is turning up in results. Either way, to make money you need to reach people willing to actually spend money.)

4. The competition isn't too hard.

(If you just put "fantasy romance" by itself into a keyword slot, bad news, readers will never see your book. They'll see SJM. This is because there are so many authors using this keyword, and so many who have really established followings already, that your book won't get visibility on this term—at least, not at the beginning.)

RANKING FOR KEYWORDS

That brings us to what it means to "rank" for a keyword.

Rank in this case is not like sales rank! It's not a specific number or value.

When we say a book ranks for a keyword, what we mean is that your book shows up—ideally high up on the first page—when someone searches for that keyword.

The reason your book won't rank for "fantasy romance" (or at least not rank high enough to matter) is because there are too many thousands of authors trying to rank for it, and many of them probably have better sales than you—at least at the beginning.

And that's okay. Because the more sales you get for the keywords you DO rank for, the more work Amazon will do for you—and that might mean you rank highly for something that's less competitive but still makes a gazillion dollars, or it might mean that over time you start ranking higher for the more competitive keywords as Amazon's algorithm decides your book can compete with them.



And that brings us to what you actually put in the dang keyword boxes.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

There are four categories of "types" of keywords. You should try to research some from each category.

- Time Period and Settings
 - e.g. Victorian, medieval, small town, castle, wild west, enchanted forest
- Character Types or Roles
 - Mage, warrior, badass fmc, dark knight, fae, alpha male
- Plot Themes or Special Events
 - War, tournament, ball, murder, kidnapping, heist
- Style and Tone of Your Genre
 - Epic, dark, cozy, heartwarming, action-packed, spicy

Multiple terms for your genre, or genres your book can qualify for? Search for them all.

Tropes? Every single relevant one you can think of.

Not all of them will be good keywords, by the criteria discussed earlier! But you don't know which until you search. And depending on *why*, you might still get use out of them.

Which brings us to...

HOW TO SEARCH AND ANALYZE KEYWORDS

I highly recommend KDP Rocket.

I am not earning affiliate income lol, but to the best of my knowledge this is the only program designed for book keyword research and it literally changed my career.

Dave Chesson explains how to research manually if needed, but Rocket saves so much time and makes everything a lot easier. If you don't have it yet, it is a worthwhile investment.

You type your keyword into Rocket, and it will return with every iteration of that keyword. So if I just type in "adventure," I'll get back "action and adventure," "adventure fantasy," "action-



packed adventure," and a whole lot of other variations. The broader the keyword, the more results it will come back with.

These results will tell you how many authors are using that keyword, how many people are searching for that keyword, how much money it makes, and it will give you a color-coded score for how competitive the keyword is.

It will also tell you how many pages on average books using this keyword usually apply to, as well as average price. This is mostly useful in the case of extreme outliers—for instance, when I searched keywords related to "tea" I came back with a bunch of really high-priced books, because the books ranking for that keyword are nonfiction hardcovers. Which means that's not where I want my book to rank, because the people using that keyword are searching for a different kind of book, and I won't make money off of them.

Rocket also has a button you can click for each keyword iteration that will bring up the top books ranking for that keyword. So you can see if your book belongs in their company. Sometimes a keyword that seems good (idk, assassin's blade) will refer to one thing in particular (the bestselling assassin's blade series) and so even if it's appropriate to your book, even if you can rank for it, it's not *useful* to you because all the people searching for that term and spending money on it are looking for something specific that your book isn't.

Rocket also now has a tool where you can reverse-ASIN search. This means you can pull the ASIN for comp books, say ACOTAR, and look up what keywords that book is ranking for.

If you're totally stumped on brainstorming keywords, this can be a tool to give you ideas—and some of those keywords you might be able to compete on.

In general, the more specific, the easier to compete.

"Fantasy romance": hard

"Cozy fantasy": medium hard

"Cozy spicy fantasy romance": a lot easier

"Fall autumn spicy cozy fantasy romance reads": WAY easier, but at a cost (see next section)

I export all the terms I search—even the ones that are bad so I remember not to use it lol—and compile them into a spreadsheet.



(Honestly compiling is the most time-consuming part for me, and probably someone knows some spreadsheet wizardry to be more efficient. I just do it at like 10pm when my brain is done for the day anyway but I'm not tired enough to sleep yet lol.)

I usually want at least 100 rows in that spreadsheet to make sure I have enough variety to fill all my keyword real estate and to have enough gems. This gets easier over time—these days I usually clear 200 easy. And to be clear, that's not 100 keyword searches—searching "cozy" is going to result in like 10 keywords I want to consider on its own.

Then it's time to cull the herd.

KEYWORD STRATEGY

The basic idea is you want 3-4 highly targeted ones, and 3-4 that have as many words in the box as you can fit.

Why? Dave Chesson and the Kindlepreneur team have done some interesting experiments with keywords; if you'd like, you can read some of it here:

<https://kindlepreneur.com/7-kindle-keywords/>

Essentially, the fewer words in the box, the more "weight" the algorithm is going to give them. So if I want to make absolutely sure to rank for "cozy fantasy," I might want to put that in its own box.

But also, the experiments show that the algorithm will rank you for *every combination* of words in a keyword string.

So if I type in "spicy cozy fantasy romance," I'll rank for "spicy fantasy" and "cozy fantasy" and "fantasy romance."

And if I'm selling well and ranking highly, the more iterations Amazon will rank me for: "spicy fantasy romance" and "cozy fantasy romance" and "spicy cozy fantasy" etc. But not *highly... unless* my book is making money.

If my book is performing well with those, the algorithm will start spinning out related keywords that *aren't even in the box*. This is why, if you reverse-ASIN search a bestseller, you'll see pages and pages of keywords they're ranking for.

And this is where the strategy comes in.

You have to decide which keywords need extra weight, and which can be combined in a useful way for you.



Maybe I want to make sure I rank for "cozy fantasy," but the keyword is too competitive. But if I add "romance," it'll increase the chance I can rank for it, and that's still few enough words that I can rank highly.

Maybe I can rank easily for a bunch of tone adjectives—"heartwarming" and "feel good" and "humorous"—so it doesn't matter if I stuff them all in the same box, I'm still going to rank.

Maybe I have a lot of keywords that work better when you append "mc." So I can combine "overpowered badass mage fighter mc" and rank not only better for all of them, but ALSO more efficiently use my keyword space.

IMPORTANT NOTES

1. *Amazon won't rank you for the same keyword twice.* You're not punished for repetition, but you want to minimize it as much as possible because those characters could be used for more keywords.
2. *Amazon will rank you for iterations of a word though!* Mages is the same as mage, as far as the algorithm is concerned. So you don't need to include both words or agonize over which version is better.
3. *Amazon will give more weight to keywords in your title and subtitle.*

This is why you see people stuffing their subtitles with like "A Dark Fae Enemies to Lovers Romantasy With High Spice" or whatever. I don't recommend overfilling that space, but Amazon's algorithm does give more keyword ranking weight to title words.

It's also a great trick for giving your book an extra rank boost on a competitive keyword.

You do not have to do this. But the option is there if it makes sense for your case.

(In theory the words in your blurb are supposed to help too, but I haven't really seen evidence of that. I think that info may be used for helping target category, and the algorithm definitely uses your keywords for that. So there's no point in keyword-stuffing your blurb imo.)

So when I go through the keywords I've researched, I remove any that don't make money or that no one searches for. I remove any that aren't actually a good placement for my book. And I remove any that are simply too competitive for me to rank for on their own, because usually something like "fantasy romance" will have come up in other keyword slots too.



That leaves me with a still pretty sizable list that then I get to be picky about—choosing keywords I WANT to rank for, and keywords that I can easily rank for to make bank.

As an example, here's the seven keywords that in 2022 gave me my boost:

1. cozy fantasy books
2. low stakes fantasy
3. gaslamp fantasy books
4. political intrigue fantasy
5. secondary world urban fantasy
6. new adult fantasy of manners books
7. optimistic lighthearted hopepunk fantasy

I wouldn't use a lot of those now! And in fact I've updated since. I don't know how often this is worth doing, but keyword competition does change over time as the market shifts—and over time I've published more books so have gotten more practice!—so I updated in 2024 to these (and I also did a reverse-ASIN search on my book first to make sure I didn't remove a keyword that was doing good work for me):

1. cozy tea fantasy
2. fantasy shop novel
3. fantasy full of heart story
4. lgbtq cozy romantic fall high fantasy books
5. magic high fantasy novels with dragons
6. happy humorous feel good optimistic fantasy
7. sweet engaging swoon worthy warmhearted fantasy

But that just goes to show your keywords don't have to be ""perfect""—you're not going to rank for every keyword no matter how strategic you are. But if you can rank for *some* of them, you can boost your income.

FAILURE MODES

Let me show you what my first keywords for that book were so you can cringe with me lol.

It's not that I put no thought into them. It's just that I didn't do actual research. And I didn't know anything about the strategy. Here you go:

1. Dragons
2. Magic
3. Friendship



4. Tea
5. Cozy fantasy
6. Hopepunk
7. Fantasy of manners
8. Political

I die. In fact there are 8 there, I must have just chosen on vibes when I actually got there lmao.

These are all things that are in that book, or accurate ways to describe it! But they are, for the most part, not good keywords.

Magic and dragons are too vague. No way I'm ranking.

Tea is going to bring up nonfiction about how to brew tea.

No one searches for friendship or hopepunk, it turns out!

This was just an obvious misunderstanding about what keywords are, right? Like no one goes to Amazon and searches "tea" if they want a cozy fantasy book.

But it is an illustration of the MOST common failure mode of keywords from what I've seen in my DMs, which is simply *not having enough characters in the dang boxes*. Look at all that wasted real estate!!

It is also an illustration of another failure mode, which is determining keywords by guesswork / ~vibes~ rather than data. I remain mad that "found family" isn't a good keyword, but it doesn't make money! It being perfect doesn't change that.

So take heart: If your keywords look anything like this, they can only improve! 😊

And don't be afraid to share what your keywords look like so we can help. Yours are probably already better than mine were. =)

Other common failure modes:

1. Not a wide enough range of type of keyword (setting, plot, character, and tone). You may not end up using all of them, but your chances of ranking are better the more you can. I see a lot of people who have just like, "dark romance," "epic romantasy," all kind of genre and vibe terms and nothing else. Diversify!
2. Too much repetition. If possible you want to avoid having "fantasy romance" in every single box, because, again, you don't rank extra for the repetition. It just means you could be ranking for more keywords. There is going to be *some* repetition, because,



for instance, adding "fantasy" or "romance" etc. will improve your targeting and thus your ability to rank. But avoid it when you can—or at least use different terms in different boxes lol.

3. Filling every box all the way. You can do this, but it means you're cutting your chance at ranking highly at any keyword from the beginning, which may affect how many iterations the algorithm will spin out for you.

TAKEAWAYS

I have once again written you a whole dang essay lmao. Let's review with some questions so I know what we need to talk about more:

1. Do you have questions about how keywords work, as in, how they can help your book?
2. Are there particular types (setting, plot, character, and tone) that you have trouble brainstorming? (It's plot for me, every time lol. I swear my books have plots!!)
3. Are you comfortable analyzing the comparative utility of a keyword?
4. Take a look at the keywords for one of your books. How do you think they could be improved?