Appeal Terms for Adult Fiction as Defined in EBSCO’s NoveList Database

**Storyline Terms for Adults**

The Storyline tag is a quick way to determine a book's focus -- is the plot what drives the story, or is character development where the real interest lies? Is the plot intricate and complex? This appeal factor will help readers find books with the overall structure they are looking for.

- **Action-packed**: Pulse-pounding, high-octane excitement is the rule in these books!
- **Character-driven**: The interior growth and development of the characters is an important element in these books.
- **Intricately plotted**: These books have intricate, complicated, or elaborate storylines, often involving multiple plots, large casts of characters, or numerous narrative twists and turns.
- **Issue-oriented**: Issue-oriented books explore controversial themes, which may cover a variety of emotional, ethical, or social problems.
- **Plot-driven**: In these books, a pivotal event or series of events move the story forward; characters often react to the events, rather than causing them.
- **World-building**: Almost exclusively found in works of fantasy and science fiction, these books immerse the reader in a vividly created imaginary world that possesses such intricacies as invented histories, languages, geography, or cultures.

**Pace Terms for Adults**

Pace is the rate at which a story unfolds for the reader. The vocabulary for this appeal factor is designed to identify books falling at either end of the pacing spectrum -- those titles that are clearly fast-paced, or those which are steady and measured. Books that fall in the middle will not receive a pace appeal tag.

- **Fast-paced**: Events in these exciting books unfold rapidly, moving the reader quickly through the story.
- **Relaxed pace**: Due to descriptive language, focus on detail, or careful development of character or setting, these books unfold slowly and gradually, allowing the reader to savor the narrative.

**Tone Terms for Adults**

Tone is the feeling that a book evokes in the reader. Is the mood of the story light and upbeat, or dark and menacing? Is it inspirational or bleak? Does the setting significantly add to the emotional content of the story? This is one of the most subtle and challenging of appeal factors, but may also be one of the most important to the reader.

- **Atmospheric**: These books immerse the reader in the story's setting, whether it's a gothic mansion or a small Midwestern town. Although noteworthy, these settings are more generic than those in which 'Strong sense of place' is used as an appeal term.
- **Bittersweet**: These books have a mixed emotional edge – both pleasant and painful – that is sustained through much of the story.
- **Bleak**: The general outlook of these books is dark, offering little room for hope or optimism. While there may be some brighter elements, the grim tone pervades the overall story.
- **Creepy**: Unsettling in a visceral, skin-crawling way, these books make the reader distinctly uneasy, and often feature supernatural elements and eerie settings.
- **Darkly humorous**: The humor found in these books is biting, and the tone and subject matter are often morbid.
- **Disturbing**: These books approach the darker side of human nature, and are unsettling in a sophisticated, psychological manner. They often feature socially marginal or dysfunctional individuals and families, and showcase the less pleasant sides of human interaction.
- **Dramatic**: Ranging from emotionally intense melodramas to exciting adventures, these books are larger-than-life and often have a cinematic quality.
- **Funny**: Laugh-out-loud humor and a light, playful tone characterize these books.
- **Gruesome**: Not for the squeamish, these books include a significant amount of explicit gore or other grisly elements.
• **Haunting**: Often because of hard-hitting storylines, these books have a memorable, unforgettable quality that stays with the reader.

• **Heartwarming**: These gentle, comfortable books are sometimes sentimental, always life-affirming, and don't usually have edgy or potentially objectionable content.

• **Homespun**: Simplicity is key in these books, which often have a rural or small-town setting and feature characters that are unpretentious and cherish old-fashioned values.

• **Inspirational**: These books have an inspiring, enlightening, or uplifting quality, which may or may not be religious in nature.

• **Melancholy**: While not grim or hopeless, these books have a sad, somber, or gloomy edge.

• **Menacing**: A sense of threat or menace pervades these stories, giving the reader a feeling of foreboding or dread.

• **Moody**: These intense books have a dark and brooding tone that in some cases borders on the melodramatic.

• **Moving**: These books convey emotions that are profoundly touching, hitting a nerve with readers and deeply affecting them.

• **Nostalgic**: Great attention is paid to setting and period detail in these books, either because characters reminisce or recollect events in the past, or because the book as a whole looks back toward a particular place or time with longing and wistfulness.

• **Offbeat**: Frequently containing extreme plot twists, bizarre humor, and unique personalities, these quirky books recount unconventional, idiosyncratic, or unusual stories, often quite creatively.

• **Reflective**: These contemplative books feature characters who think seriously about their lives and their place in the world, which can inspire a similar mood in the reader.

• **Romantic**: These books are not genre romances, but do feature strong romantic elements – either between characters or in the nature of the story or setting itself. Happy endings are not guaranteed!

• **Sobering**: Addressing weighty social issues, these profoundly serious and hard-hitting books present a perspective that may be revelatory to the reader.

• **Steamy**: These sensual books contain lots of vividly described sex (not just innuendo!)

• **Strong sense of place**: The powerfully depicted locales – real or imaginary – in these books come alive for readers, giving them a good sense of the buildings, people, and ways of life that make a place unique. This appeal term is often linked to a subject heading for the setting or location being described.

• **Suspenseful**: Ranging in intensity from subtle psychological unease to nail-biting suspense, these books keep readers on edge.

• **Thought-provoking**: More than just telling a story, these books take on big ideas – anything from philosophical quandaries to time paradoxes – and in doing so stimulate continued interest or thought in the reader.

• **Upbeat**: These lighthearted and optimistic books offer a hopeful outlook even if serious events occur, and often just have an exuberant sense of play.

• **Violent**: Not for the faint of heart, these books contain explicit or graphic violence.

**Writing Style Terms for Adults**

Writing style as an appeal factor includes the language used in the book and the level of detail in the background. How is the book written? Are care and attention placed on the words or language used to convey the story, or is this secondary to the plot? Does the author excel at including "extras" that enrich the reader's experience?

• **Candid**: The narrative style of these books is frank and forthcoming, even when discussing potentially sensitive or discomfiting subjects.

• **Compelling**: Incorporating a variety of narrative techniques, from foreshadowing to frequent changes in perspective, these gripping books have a powerful effect on readers, drawing them irresistibly into the story.

• **Conversational**: Written in informal language, these books read as if a close friend were telling a story.

• **Descriptive**: Full of elaborate descriptions, these books use illustrative, expressive language.

• **Dialect-rich**: These books employ regional language, lingo, or slang, making the setting come alive.

• **Dialogue-rich**: These books contain well-crafted, notable, or remarkable dialogue.

• **Engaging**: These appealing books capture the attention and imagination of readers through narrative style, character, or use of detail.

• **Experimental**: These books employ language, narrative structure, or even setting in an unusual or unexpected manner.
Gritty: Characterized by a narrative style that includes dark and unsettling details, these books often depict violence.

Jargon-filled: These books use the specialized, technical language of a particular group, trade, or profession.

Lush: The descriptive language in these books is specifically geared toward evoking the senses. Touch, taste, smell, hearing or sight are strongly depicted, making readers feel as if they are actually experiencing what is being described.

Lyrical: The language in these titles is elegant and beautiful, often with a rhythmic or poetic quality.

Richly detailed: In these books, a strong level of detail informs the story's backdrop. Sometimes a special body of knowledge (e.g., of forensics, music, history, etc.) adds to the storyline, and sometimes there are so many "extras" included that the reader's experience is greatly enriched.

Spare: The writing in these books is minimal and elegant. Words are seldom wasted, and great attention is paid to the use of language.

Stylistically complex: The language in these books is constructed with care, and may skillfully combine several style elements. Due to sophisticated narrative structure, these stories can often be read on a number of levels.

Thoughtful: Despite covering a sensitive or controversial topic, these books are considerately written and handle the subject with respect.

Witty: Through clever use of language, these books express amusing insights or perceptions.