



RESEARCH REVIEW

Snapshot
August 2023



At Australia Reads, we're on a mission to build a reading nation.

Reading is vital to a healthier, happier, more connected nation. However, despite these benefits, 44% of Australians have low or very low literacy¹, approximately a quarter of Australians did not read a single book over the course of a year², and children's participation in reading for pleasure has been trending downwards, dropping from 79% in 2018 to 72% in 2022.³

In order to drive systemic change, we need to understand the underlying factors that influence the reading behaviours and habits of Australians – from early readers to adult readers, and in contexts as diverse as our schools, public spaces, libraries, bookshops, and homes.

To effectively advocate for reading at a national level, we also know it's important to be able to tell a strong, unified story about the benefits of reading – backed up by reliable research and data – and to share the latest industry learnings from across the world to ensure that our sector remains robust, informed, and forward-thinking.

That's why, in 2022, Australia Reads embarked on an ambitious research project.

The **Australia Reads Research Review** provides an audit of recent reading research undertaken in Australia and overseas. The project seeks to find, collate, synthesise, and make this information more accessible to the wider books and reading sector in Australia.

Our goals have been to understand:

1. What relevant research on reading is currently out there?
2. What is this research telling us about contemporary reading engagement?
3. What's missing from the reading research landscape in Australia – what might we need to research further?
4. How can we use this information to help the industry reach new and existing readers?

Over the past seven months, Australia Reads has audited over **2913 pages** from **134 research articles and reports**, conducted by **314 researchers** in **22 countries** across the world.



Australia Reads Research Review

Rationale & Overview



The Research Review will take the most relevant, useable, and timely findings and make them freely accessible to all those who advocate for books and reading in Australia. **This information will be released on the Australia Reads website over the coming months**, broken down under a range of different subject areas and age groups, to make information easy to use and find.

What follows here is an initial Snapshot of the information collated as part of the Research Review, to introduce the project and provide insights into some of the key information in each segment.

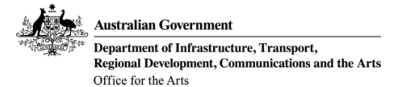
The breadth of research across many disciplines relating to reading – from early childhood education to health and wellbeing – reflects the considerable work and understanding of reading that is being formed around the world.

In sourcing these findings, Australia Reads acknowledges the ongoing work and findings of the Australia Council for the Arts and Scholastic, in particular. We also credit the Reading Agency and Demos' [A Society of Readers](#)⁴ report from the UK as a valuable resource on the benefits of reading.

This project forms part of Australia Reads' larger strategic focus on research, sitting alongside recent projects such as the [National Reading Survey](#) (2021), and the [Live Literature Research Project](#) (2023).

We look forward to sharing more findings of our Research Review over the coming months, and continuing to invest in quality research to give us the tools and insights to build a stronger national reading culture in Australia.

This project is made possible thanks to the support of the following funding bodies:





Young Readers

The research around early childhood reading shows the wide-reaching benefits across education, literacy, and health that reading from an early age can have on children.

It also demonstrates the considerable influence that parents and families play in establishing reading habits – both as facilitators and demonstrators of reading themselves.

There is a sizeable body of research on the impacts of public libraries and schools as places which nurture and facilitate reading engagement in children – as well as some findings on the potentially negative implications that assigned and curriculum reading can have on perceptions of reading throughout life.

Overwhelmingly, the research showed that **choice** and **autonomy** are critical factors for boosting reading motivation in children.

There is also a growing body of research that investigates – and challenges – the gender divide in reading for pleasure from an early age, and provides practical tips for educators and parents.

Key Stats

Three-year-olds who can name a favourite book are better readers at age seven.⁵

Children who were exposed to more storybooks showed a greater inclination to read for pleasure and in turn, had more advanced literacy skills as adolescents.⁶

Children who experience reading with a caregiver are more likely to read independently once their reading skills develop.⁷

89% of children (age 6–17) agree their favourite books are the ones that they have picked out themselves.⁸

86% of children (age 6–17) said they loved being read books aloud at home or liked it a lot – the main reason being because it is a special time with parents.⁹

One in five parents of children aged 6–17 (20%) stopped reading aloud to their child before age 9, most often citing reasons related to their child being able to read independently.¹⁰

Of those children aged 6–8 whose parents no longer read books aloud at home, half (51%) did not want their parents to stop.¹¹

Children who are given time for independent reading at school are more likely to enjoy reading books for fun.¹²



Teen Readers

There is a growing body of research on teen readers, and the changing ways in which they are choosing – or choosing not – to read in the digital era.

Interest, time, and competing technologies and leisure activities are all identified as contributing factors to teen’s disengagement with reading.

Research in this area investigates the impacts of early schooling and upbringing on forming reading habits in adolescence, as well as investigating the barriers and opportunities for teens to engage with reading.

Key Stats

Reading is four times more influential on intellectual progress in teens than having a parent with a degree.¹³

The top barriers to teens reading were the difficulty of choosing a good book (61%), followed by lack of free time (56%).¹⁴

More than 2 in 5 (44.1%) girls who don’t enjoy reading said they cannot find things to read that interest them.¹⁵

Exposure to larger home libraries in adolescence has a positive direct effect on adult literacy, numeracy, and information and communications technology skills.¹⁶

68% of young people said that BookTok had inspired them to read a book that they would have never considered otherwise.¹⁷



Adult Readers

In contrast to the research around the reading behaviours of children and teens, there appears to be a striking Australian, and global, scarcity of research around adults' ongoing engagement with reading.

In terms of reading motivation, **'finding the time'** was identified as a recurring barrier to reading across a broad spectrum of ages.

As an industry, it would be valuable to gain further insights into what these underlying blockers are to allocating time to reading, so as to be able to devise effective counter-strategies and campaigns.

Adults' income, class, employment status, gender, and self-identification as 'readers' has also been shown to affect reading for pleasure in adults – though there is still more to be learned about the intersectional factors that affect adult reading engagement.

Key Stats

72% of Australians read at least one book in 2019.¹⁸

Around 44% of Australians have low or very low literacy.¹⁹

37% of Australians said they do not read because it is difficult to find the time.²⁰

Retirees are the most active participants in 'reading' (80%), followed by those who are in paid work (75%).²¹

Women are more likely to read for pleasure than men (75% compared to 68%).²²

Respondents with no post-school qualifications had lower levels of reading participation than those with a university degree.²³



Reading and Health

The relationship between reading and health has been a source of the majority of the research identified through this audit.

While the proven impacts of reading on longevity have been frequently cited to promote reading, book sales, and borrowing – many of the other positive health impacts haven't been as widely touted.

From **depression** and **dementia**, to **empathy** and **self-esteem**, reading is shown to have far-reaching health and wellbeing benefits for young and old readers alike.

Key Stats

48% of Australians say they are motivated to read because it makes them happy and/or healthy.²⁴

A 20% reduction in mortality was observed for those who read books (30 mins a day), compared to those who did not read books.²⁵

Adults who read books, magazines, and newspapers almost every day had a substantially lower risk of being diagnosed with depression. They also scored lower on the loneliness scale.²⁶

43% of readers said reading helps them get a better night's sleep.²⁷

95% of people who are blind or partially sighted read at least once a week to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation.²⁸

Reading for just 30 minutes a week means you're 57% more likely to have a greater awareness of other cultures.²⁹



Reading Behaviour and Formats

There is a growing wealth of information on the ways that people are choosing to read.

While **print books** remained the most popular format, research revealed the growing markets for **ebook** and **audio** formats.

Our audit also identified research about the ways in which readers are finding new books – whether through word-of-mouth recommendations from family or friends, or via social media.

In particular, there was growing interest in the impact of TikTok on book sales and reading habits.

Local research also highlights the ways that readers value and engage with books by Australian creators, and the importance of fostering a robust and inclusive local books market.

Key Stats

More than half the library books borrowed in 2022 were penned by Australian authors (trend of past three years).³⁰

Library loans increased 37% for book-to-screen adaptations.³¹

Almost one in three Australians listen to audio books (31%).³²

37% of audiobook consumers started listening in the last 12 months.³³

More than half of Australians aged 15–34 years read e-books (55%).³⁴

The Australian graphic novel sector grew by 61% in 2020.³⁵

43% of Australian readers agree that family and friends are the most trusted source of reading recommendations.³⁶

77% of Australian readers largely agree 'it's important to support Australian writers by buying their books'.³⁷

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- ²¹ Australia Council for the Arts 2023, [Widening the Lens: Social inequality and arts participation](#)
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- ²³ Australia Council for the Arts 2023, [Widening the Lens: Social inequality and arts participation](#)
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