



# NATIONAL READING SURVEY 2021

## KEY FINDINGS



## Who are the readers?

### Most Australians read a book a year

According to the inaugural National Reading Survey by Australia Reads, 75% of the general Australian population indicate they read or listen to at least one book (in any format) once a year. These are referred to here as 'general readers'.

### General Readers vs Engaged Readers

The National Reading Survey by Australia Reads collected data from more than 3,000 Australians across two groups of respondents;

1. general readers from multiple panel sources, collectively representative of Australian state and gender populations over 16 years of age;
2. engaged readers sourced from e-newsletter subscribers of Australian publishing houses and social media followers of Australia Reads – meaning they engage with book related news.

### More Australians not reading books at all

Conversely the results show 25% of the general Australian adult population have NOT read or listened to a single book (in any format) in a year. This is a marked increase on the findings of the Australia Council x Macquarie University Reading the Reader survey, which showed 8% of the population had not read a book in a year.

## Why do we read?

### Reading for enjoyment and wellbeing

The top reasons we read books in Australia:

1. for 'pleasure and enjoyment' (satisfaction)
2. to 'relax and unwind' (wellbeing)
3. to keep 'mentally stimulated' (cognition)



## How often do we read?

### **Most Australians are occasional readers**

Taking general readers to be reflective of the Australian adult population, the National Reading Survey shows 42% of us are occasional readers; reading 1 book every 15 weeks at most.

### **A third of Australians read frequently**

The survey also shows almost a third of the general Australian adult population (28% general readers) are frequent or passionate readers; reading on average one to two books a month.

### **Engaged readers are obsessed readers**

Most (37%) engaged readers (those respondents who subscribe to book news) are obsessed book readers – heading towards at least one book every fortnight. Typically, these readers have a big ‘To be read’ pile and read 2-3 books at once.

## What are we reading?

### **Paperback fiction most popular choice**

In Australia, paperback books are by far the most frequently read format, followed by hardback, then e-books and lastly audio books. Whereas only 3% of survey respondents claim to have never read a paperback, about a third (34%) claim never to read e-books, and more than half (52%) have never listened to an audio books. Australians are reading far more adult fiction than any other category, followed by adult non-fiction, children’s books, then young adult books.

### **New releases are not a priority**

A huge majority (89%) of Australian readers don’t really mind if the book they are reading is a newly released title or has been out for a while.

### **Reading Australian books is important**

While 77% of Australian readers largely agree ‘it’s important to support Australian writers by buying their books’, 68% actually like to read books by Australian writers and illustrators.

### **Still reading the classics**

Over a third (35%) of Australian readers make a conscious effort to read more of the ‘classics’.

## When are we reading?

### **Bedtime, Weekends, Holidays – Anytime!**

Just over half of Australian readers (52%) usually find time to read books right before bed. Weekends are also prime reading time, with 41% of respondents nominating this as when they usually find time to read or listen to books.

Slightly more Australian readers (43%) also nominated finding time to read books ‘anytime’, indicating they fit reading into their schedules around whatever else they have on. And 29% find time to read on holiday when they have less demands on their time from daily life.

### **Reading is primarily part of our leisure time**

A third (33%) of Australian readers dedicate less than 20% of their leisure time to reading books. Almost another third (31%) dedicate between 21-40% of their leisure time to reading books. Only a small proportion (14%) spend more than 61% of their leisure time reading books.

### **Almost never too much reading time!**

Only 3% of Australian readers feel they spend too much time reading! About half of us (51%) wish for more reading time, and the other half (46%) are satisfied with their reading time.

## Secrets to reading more

### **Turn off the TV and put down the phone...**

The majority (64%) of Australian readers cited ‘watching TV and movies at home’ and another big proportion (46%) cited ‘social media/internet browsing’ as the other leisure activities most likely to compete for their reading time.

### **Don’t finish a book you don’t like!**

More than half (54%) of Australians who read more books more often typically don’t finish a book if they really can’t get into it – meaning they move on more quickly to the next book for greater enjoyment and pleasure; and have fewer and shorter gaps between books.

### **Start a TBR pile**

More than half (54%) of Australians who read more books more often have stacks of books ‘to be read’ waiting on hand, so they always have books available to choose from when ready.

### **Read 10 minutes before bed every night**

Occasional readers can become frequent readers by reading 10 minutes before bed every night. At the average rate of 300 words/minute, they will read 90,000 words (average length of a novel) a month, and so at least 12 books a year.

## What to read next?

### Personal recommendations most trusted

The majority of Australian readers (43%) agree that family and friends are their number one trusted source for reading recommendations. As many as 80% agree they are happy to read books recommended by family and friends.

### Book professionals next most trusted

Tied in almost equal place as the second most trusted source of book recommendations are bookshops (34%) and professional book reviews (31%), followed by libraries (27%). As many as 76% readers will happily read books recommended by a bookseller or librarian.

### Social media least trusted source

Less than 12% of Australians trust book recommendations via social media platforms.

### Libraries & Indies make books easy to find

According to Australian readers, the top three easiest places to find a specific title and/browse for a new book to read are:

- 1) An Australian online bookseller (60%)
- 2) In a library (56%)
- 3) In-store at a local indie bookshop (54%)

## Buying books

### We mostly buy books for ourselves

The number one reason Australian readers buy books is for ourselves – either as a planned purchase (51%), or an impulse buy (50%). Readers are less likely to buy books as gifts – either planned (18%) or on impulse (13%).

### Browsing in a bookshop leads to sales

More Australian readers (54%) indicate they've bought books while browsing in-person in a bookshop than while browsing online (38%).

### Word-of-mouth is the magic influencer

When it comes to promotional campaigns for specific titles it is word-of-mouth that mostly influences book buying decisions, followed by publicity, then advertising, and then catalogues.

### Previous enjoyment of an author #1 factor

The top three factors that positively influence Australian readers when buying books are:

1. Previous enjoyment of book by same author
2. Recommendations of family & friends
3. Descriptive blurb on inside flap/back cover (not including cover review quotes or endorsements which had lowest influence.)

## Borrowing books

### **Libraries save the day for readers**

Some Australian readers find it tricky getting to a bookshop in-store (12%) and online (4%). Others simply no longer have a local bookshop (11%).

### **Limited space for books in our homes**

A significant proportion (39%) of Australian readers haven't got enough room to keep books.

### **Libraries help sustain strong reading habits**

Almost all Australian readers (89%) have used a library. Engaged readers (54%) are more likely than general readers (34%) to borrow books instead of buying them, because they spend more time reading more books more often.

### **Borrowing often only affordable option**

A third (32%) of Australian readers deem books too expensive to buy because:

1. price of new book too much to afford (41%)
2. no money after living costs for books (21%)
3. spend on other leisure activities first (14%)

### **Some like to try first, then buy later**

Some (12%) Australian readers love a book they've borrowed from the library so much they buy their very own copy.

## Pandemic changes?

### **Mostly reading the same amount of books**

The majority (53%) of Australian book readers believe they read the same amount of books during the pandemic as previously. Some think they read more (38%) and some less (9%).

### **Mostly buying the same amount of books**

The majority (55%) of Australian book readers think they bought the same amount of books during the pandemic as previously. Some think they bought more (29%), and some less (15%).

### **Rise in purchasing books online**

For the most part Australian readers continued buying books from their usual sources – some bought less, and some bought more, with 6% buying more from a local online bookseller.

### **Pandemic budget constraints**

The reasons Australian readers didn't buy books (even if they thought about it) during the pandemic period of 2020-21 was because;

1. it was out of their budget (26%)
2. uncertainty about liking the book (17%)
3. prohibitive postage costs (16%)
4. not looking to buy a book at that time (13%)

Only 8% thought a book poor value for money.

# Thanking our partners

The National Reading Survey is made possible thanks to our generous partners.



# Want to learn more?

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