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Book Reading 2016

A growing share of Americans are reading e-books on tablets and smartphones rather than dedicated e-readers, but print books remain much more popular than books in digital formats

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Book Reading 2016

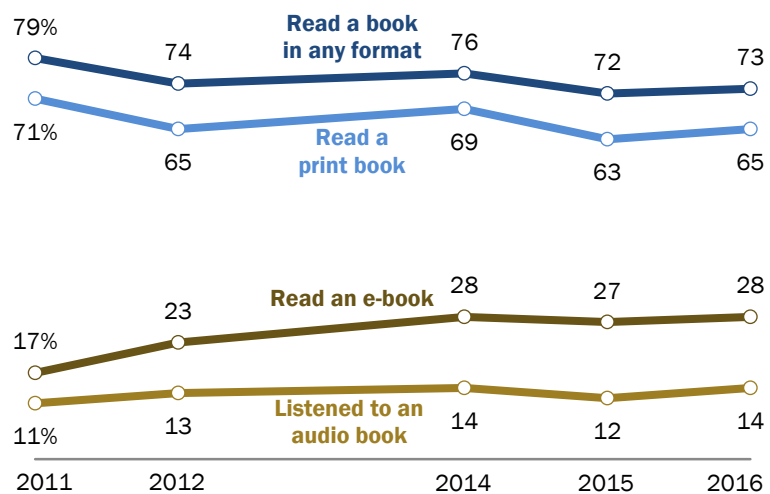
A growing share of Americans are reading e-books on tablets and smartphones rather than dedicated e-readers, but print books remain much more popular than books in digital formats

Americans today have an enormous variety of content available to them at any time of day, and this material is available in a number of formats and through a range of digitally connected devices. Yet even as the number of ways people spend their time has expanded, a Pew Research Center survey finds that the share of Americans who have read a book in the last 12 months (73%) has remained largely unchanged since 2012. And when people reach for a book, it is much more likely to be a traditional print book than a digital product. Fully 65% of Americans have read a print book in the last year, more than double the share that has read an e-book (28%) and more than four times the share that has consumed book content via audio book (14%).

But while print remains at the center of the book-reading landscape as a whole, there has been a distinct shift in the e-book landscape over the last five years. Americans increasingly turn to multipurpose devices such as smartphones and tablet computers – rather than dedicated e-readers – when they engage with e-book content. The share of e-book readers on tablets has more than tripled since 2011 and the number of readers on phones has more than doubled over that time, while the share reading on e-book reading devices has not changed. And smartphones are playing an especially prominent role in

Print books continue to be more popular than e-books or audio books

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ in the previous 12 months



Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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the e-reading habits of certain demographic groups, such as non-whites and those who have not attended college.

These are among the main findings of a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,520 American adults conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.

The share of Americans who have read a book in the last year is largely unchanged since 2012; more Americans read print books than either read e-books or listen to audio books

Following a slight overall decline in book readership between 2011 and 2012, the share of American adults who read books in any format has remained largely unchanged over the last four years. Some 73% of Americans report that they have read at least one book in the last year. That is nearly identical to the 74% who reported doing so in a survey conducted in 2012, although lower than the 79% who reported doing so in 2011.

Americans read an average (mean) of 12 books per year, while the typical (median) American has read 4 books in the last 12 months. Each of these figures is largely unchanged since 2011, when Pew Research Center first began conducting surveys of Americans' book reading habits (for additional details on the number of books read per year by different demographic groups, see [Appendix A](#)).

Readers today can access books in several common digital formats, but print books remain substantially more popular than either e-books or audio books. Roughly two-thirds of Americans (65%) have read a print book in the last year, which is identical to the share of Americans who reported doing so in 2012 (although down slightly from the 71% who reported reading a print book in 2011).

By contrast, 28% of Americans have read an e-book – and 14% have listened to an audio book – in the last year. In addition to being less popular than print books overall, the share of Americans who read e-books or listen to audio books has remained fairly stable in recent years.

E-book readership increased by 11-percentage points between 2011 and 2014 (from 17% to 28%) but has seen no change in the last two years. Similarly, the share of American adults who listen to audio books has changed only marginally since Pew Research Center first asked about this topic in 2011 – at that point, 11% of Americans had listened to an audio book in the last year, compared with 14% now.

Nearly four-in-ten Americans read print books exclusively; just 6% are digital-only book readers

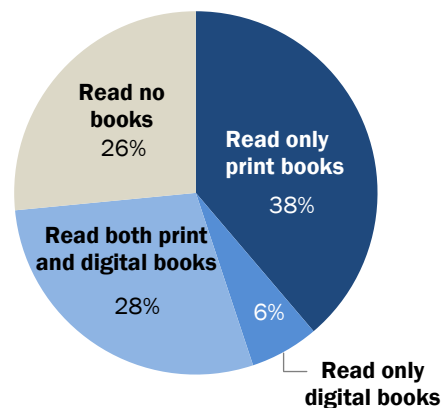
In total, 34% of Americans have either read an e-book or listened to an audio book in the last year, but relatively few Americans read books in these digital formats to the exclusion of print books.

More than one-quarter (28%) of Americans read books in both print and digital formats (which includes e-books and audio books). Some 38% read print books but did not read books in any digital formats, while just 6% read digital books but not print books.

Relatively few Americans are “digital-only” book readers regardless of their demographic characteristics. However, some demographic groups are slightly more likely than others to do all of their reading in digital format. For instance, 7% of college graduates are digital-only book readers (compared with just 3% of those who have not graduated from high school), as are 8% of those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more (compared with 3% of Americans with incomes of \$30,000 or less). Interestingly, young adults are no more likely than older adults to be “digital-only” book readers: 6% of 18- to 29-year-olds read books in digital formats only, compared with 7% of 30- to 49-year-olds and 5% of those 50 and older.

Just 6% of Americans are digital-only book consumers

% of U.S. adults who have ___ in the last 12 months



Note: “Digital books” includes e-books as well as audio books.
Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
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College graduates are roughly four times as likely to read e-books and about twice as likely to read print books and audio books – compared with those who have not graduated high school

As was the case in [previous Pew Research Center surveys](#) on book reading, certain groups of Americans read at relatively high rates and in a wide variety of formats. These include:

College graduates – Compared with those who have not attended college, college graduates are more likely to read books in general, more likely to read print books, and more likely to consume digital-book content. The typical (median) college graduate has read seven books in the last year.

Young adults – 80% of 18- to 29-year-olds have read a book in the last year, compared with 67% of those 65 and older. These young adults are more likely than their elders to read books in various digital formats, but are also more likely to read print books as well: 72% have read a print book in the last year, compared with 61% of seniors.¹

College graduates are especially likely to read books in both print and digital formats

% of U.S. adults who say they have ____ in the previous 12 months

	Read a book in any format	Read a print book	Read an e-book	Listened to an audio book
<i>Total</i>	73%	65%	28%	14%
Men	68	61	27	14
Women	77	70	29	14
White, non-Hispanic	76	70	31	15
Black, non-Hispanic	69	63	23	11
Hispanic	58	48	18	12
18-29	80	72	35	16
30-49	73	65	32	15
50-64	70	64	24	15
65+	67	61	19	9
Less than high school	45	38	11	12
High school grad	62	55	19	9
Some college	81	74	32	14
College+	86	79	41	20
Below \$30,000	65	59	19	9
\$30,000-\$49,999	74	68	26	16
\$50,000-\$74,999	75	69	33	19
\$75,000+	81	73	40	16
Urban	75	69	29	17
Suburban	73	64	30	14
Rural	66	61	22	10

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
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Women – Women are more likely than men to read books in general and also more likely to read print books. However, men and women are equally likely to read digital-format books such as e-books and audio books.

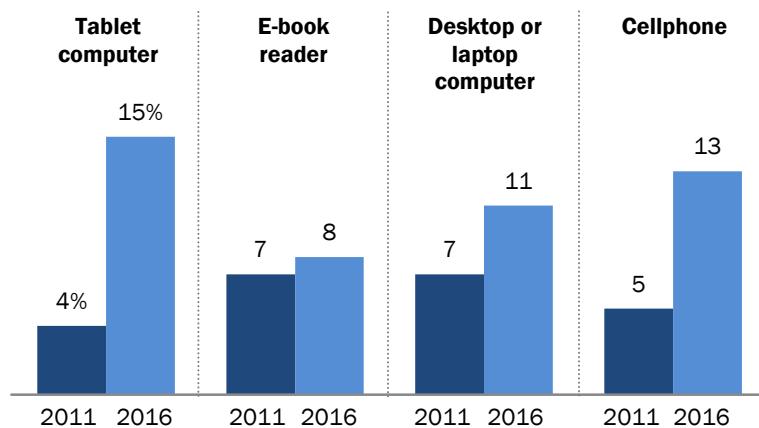
¹ As noted later in this report, young adults are especially likely to do any reading for work or school.

The share of Americans who read books on tablets or cellphones has increased substantially since 2011, while the share using dedicated e-readers has remained stable

Tablet computer and smartphone ownership have each **increased** dramatically in recent years, and a growing share of Americans are using these multipurpose mobile devices – rather than dedicated e-readers – to read books. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of Americans who read books on tablet computers has increased nearly fourfold (from 4% to 15%), while the share who read books on smartphones has more than doubled (from 5% to 13%). The share of Americans who read books on desktop or laptop computers has also increased, although by a more modest amount: 11% of Americans now do this, up from 7% in 2011.

More Americans are reading books on tablets and cellphones, even as dedicated e-reader use has remained stable

% of U.S. adults who have read an e-book in the last year using a/an ...



Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
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By contrast, 8% of Americans now report that they read books using dedicated e-reader devices – nearly identical to the 7% who reported doing so in 2011.

About one-in-five Americans under the age of 50 have used a cellphone to read e-books; blacks and Americans who have not attended college are especially likely to turn to cellphone – rather than other digital devices – when reading e-books

Previous Pew Research Center studies have documented how several groups – such as blacks and Latinos, and those who have not attended college – tend to [rely heavily on smartphones](#) for online access. And in the context of book reading, members of these groups are especially likely to turn to smartphones – rather than tablets or other types of digital devices – when they engage with e-book content.

For instance, 16% of blacks report that they use their cellphones to read books. That is nearly double the share of blacks who read books on traditional computers (9%) and four times the share who read books using dedicated e-readers (4%). Hispanics are less likely than blacks as a whole to read books on cellphones (11% do so), but Hispanics are also substantially more likely to read books on cellphones than on e-readers or traditional computers. By contrast, whites tend to turn to a range of digital devices when reading e-books: 13% read e-books on cellphones, but 18% read e-books on tablet computers, 10% use e-book readers and 11% engage with e-book content on desktop or laptop computers.

Cellphones play a relatively prominent role in the e-reading habits of non-whites, those who have not attended college

% of U.S. adults who read e-books on the following devices

	Tablet computer	E-book reader	Desktop or laptop computer	Cellphone
<i>Total</i>	15%	8%	11%	13%
Men	14	6	12	14
Women	16	10	10	13
White, non-Hispanic	18	10	11	13
Black, non-Hispanic	10	4	9	16
Hispanic	8	3	6	11
18-29	15	5	16	22
30-49	18	9	11	18
50-64	15	9	9	9
65+	10	7	5	4
Less than high school	3	1	1	8
High school grad	9	4	7	12
Some college	16	8	13	13
College+	25	15	15	17
Below \$30,000	9	2	7	10
\$30,000-\$49,999	11	11	7	13
\$50,000-\$74,999	19	12	13	18
\$75,000+	25	12	16	17
Urban	14	7	10	14
Suburban	17	8	11	15
Rural	12	9	9	9

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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Cellphones also play a relatively prominent role in the reading habits of Americans who have not attended college. College graduates are far more likely than those with high school diplomas or less to read books on tablets (25% vs. 7%), e-book readers (15% vs. 3%) or traditional computers (15% vs. 6%). But these differences are much less pronounced when it comes to reading books on cellphones. Some 17% of college graduates read books this way, compared with 11% of those with high school diplomas or less – just a 6-percentage point difference.

Along with these groups, Americans under the age of 50 are especially likely to consume e-book content on cell phones: one-in-five (19%) do so, compared with 9% of 50- to 64-year-olds and just 4% of those 65 and older.

The share of Americans who read in order to research a specific topic of interest has increased in recent years

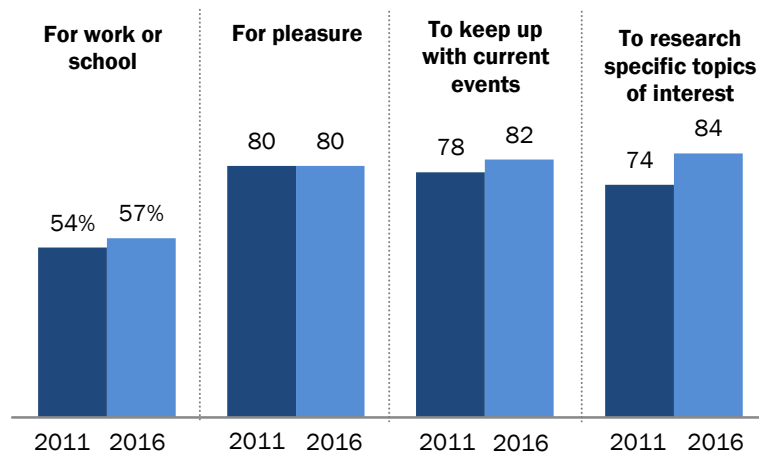
In addition to asking whether – and on what devices – Americans read books specifically, the survey also included a broader set of questions asking about reasons that people might read written content of any kind (including books, but also magazines, newspapers or online content).

Among all American adults:

- 84% ever read to research specific topics of interest (29% do so nearly every day).
- 82% read to keep up with current events (47% nearly every day).
- 80% read for pleasure (35% nearly every day).
- 57% read for work or school (31% do so nearly every day).

Americans are more likely to read for the purpose of researching a specific topic or interest than five years ago

% of U.S. adults who ever read ...



Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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A similar share of Americans report that they read for pleasure, for work or school, or to keep up with current events compared to the most recent time these questions were asked in 2011.

However, the share of Americans who read in order to research specific topics of interest has increased by 10-percentage points over that time frame, from 74% to 84%.

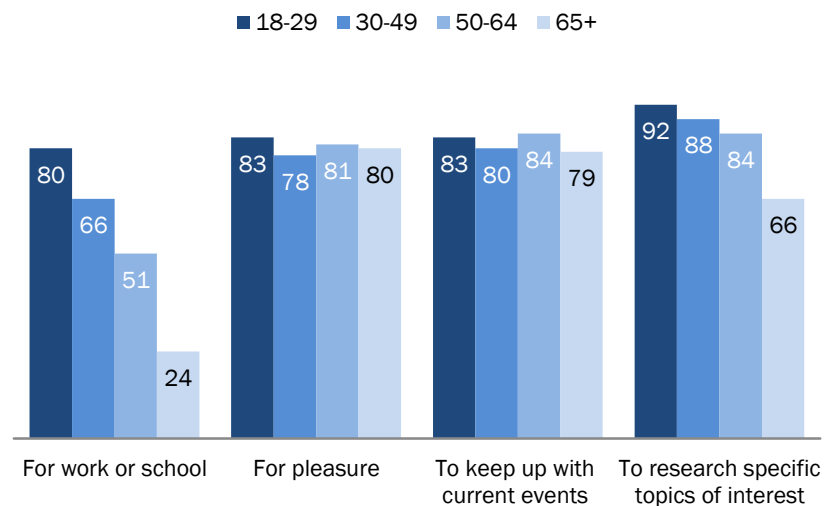
Older and younger adults are equally likely to read for pleasure or to keep up with current events; younger adults are more likely to read for work or school, or to research a topic of interest

In some cases, the factors associated with high rates of book readership are the same ones associated with reading for specific purposes. For instance, college graduates are more likely than those who have only attended high school to read books in general – and they are also more likely to read for all four of the specific motivations examined in this survey.

At the same time, there is not always such a direct relationship between book reading and overall reading for specific purposes. As noted earlier in this report, young adults are more likely to read books than older adults. And when asked about specific reasons why they might read a range of content, these young adults are much more likely than older adults to say that they read for work or school, or to research a specific topic of interest. However, Americans of all ages are equally likely to indicate that they read (whether in book form or otherwise) for pleasure or to keep up with current events.

Younger adults are more likely than older adults to read for work or school, or to research a topic of interest

% of U.S. adults in each group who ever read ...



Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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Appendix A: Additional demographic tables and charts

The median American reads four books per year

Among all U.S. adults ages 18+ (including non-readers), the mean and median number of books read in whole or in part by each group

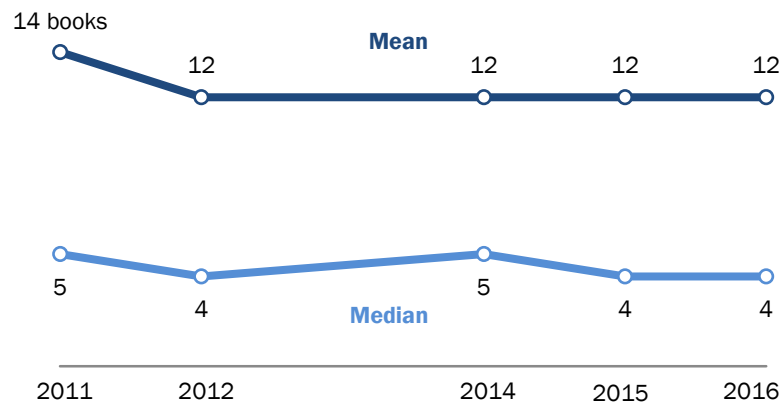
	Median	Mean
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>12</i>
Men	3	9
Women	5	15
White, non-Hispanic	5	14
Black, non-Hispanic	3	9
Hispanic	1	6
18-29	5	12
30-49	4	12
50-64	3	11
65+	3	13
Less than high school	0	3
High school grad	2	9
Some college	4	12
College+	7	17
Below \$30,000	2	10
\$30,000-\$49,999	4	12
\$50,000-\$74,999	5	13
\$75,000+	5	14
Urban	4	11
Suburban	3	12
Rural	4	12

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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Mean and median number of books read per year, 2011-2015

Among U.S. adults ages 18+ (including non-readers), the mean and median number of books read in whole or in part in the last year



Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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Younger adults more likely than older adults to read for work or school, or to research a topic of interest

% of U.S. adults who ever read ...

	For work or school	For pleasure	To keep up with current events	To research specific topics of interest
<i>Total</i>	57%	80%	82%	84%
Men	61	76	81	83
Women	54	84	83	84
White, non-Hispanic	56	83	84	84
Black, non-Hispanic	62	79	76	83
Hispanic	50	68	75	80
18-29	80	83	83	92
30-49	66	78	80	88
50-64	51	81	84	84
65+	24	80	79	66
Less than high school	33	56	65	63
High school grad	45	75	79	77
Some college	64	84	83	89
College+	72	92	90	94
Below \$30,000	44	76	77	78
\$30,000-\$49,999	55	80	83	83
\$50,000-\$74,999	64	82	85	86
\$75,000+	76	88	86	93
Urban	65	83	84	86
Suburban	56	79	81	83
Rural	44	79	80	81

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Book Reading 2016"

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on a Pew Research Center survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016, among a national sample of 1,520 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Fully 381 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,139 were interviewed on a cellphone, including 636 who had no landline telephone. The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cellphone random-digit-dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who was at home. Interviews in the cellphone sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, visit:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cellphone samples are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity, and region to parameters from the 2013 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cellphone only or both landline and cellphone), based on extrapolations from the 2014 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cellphones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
All adults 18+	1,520	2.9-percentage points
Men	785	4.0-percentage points
Women	735	4.1-percentage points
18-29	269	6.8-percentage points
30-49	401	5.6-percentage points
50-64	481	5.1-percentage points
65+	369	5.8-percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	1,053	3.4-percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	165	8.7-percentage points
Hispanic	179	8.3-percentage points
Less than high school	125	10.0-percentage points
High school graduate	371	5.8-percentage points
Some college	385	5.7-percentage points
College+	634	4.4-percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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Topline questionnaire

DEVICE1 Please tell me if you happen to have each of the following items, or not. Do you have ...
[INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]?

	YES	NO	(VOL.) DON'T KNOW	(VOL.) REFUSED
b. A handheld device made primarily for e-book reading, such as a Nook or Kindle e-reader but NOT a Kindle Fire				
Current	17	82	*	0
April 2015	19	80	1	*
September 2013	24	75	1	*
c. A tablet computer like an iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, Google Nexus, or Kindle Fire				
Current	48	52	*	*
April 2015	45	54	*	*
September 2013	35	65	*	*
d. A desktop or laptop computer				
Current	74	26	0	0
April 2015	73	27	0	*

BOOKS1 During the past 12 months, about how many BOOKS did you read either all or part of the way through? Please include any print, electronic, or audiobooks you may have read or listened to.

	NONE	1 BOOK	2-3 BOOKS	4-5 BOOKS	6-10 BOOKS	11-20 BOOKS	MORE THAN 20 BOOKS	(VOL.) DON'T KNOW	(VOL.) REFUSED
Current	26	7	16	12	13	10	15	1	1
April 2015	27	6	16	11	14	12	14	1	*
January 2-5, 2014	23	5	14	12	17	13	15	2	*
November 2012	24	7	15	11	15	13	14	1	1
February 2012	23	6	17	13	14	11	13	2	1
December 2011	19	6	13	12	15	14	17	2	1

BOOKS2 Thinking about all of the books you have read in the past 12 months, were any of those...
[INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]? Were any of those... [INSERT NEXT ITEM]?

Based on those who read any books in the past 12 months

	YES	NO	(VOL.) DON'T KNOW	(VOL.) REFUSED
a. Printed books				
Current [N=1,142]	90	9	*	*
April 2015 [N=1,403]	87	13	1	*
January 2014 [N=780]	91	8	*	*
November 2012 [N=1,663]	89	10	1	*
February 2012 [N=1,377]	90	10	*	*
December 2011 [N=2,345]	93	7	*	*
b. Audiobooks				
Current [N=1,142]	20	80	*	*
April 2015 [N=1,403]	17	83	*	0
January 2014 [N=780]	19	81	*	0
November 2012 [N=1,663]	17	83	*	0
February 2012 [N=1,377]	15	85	*	*
December 2011 [N=2,345]	14	86	*	0
c. Electronic books, also called e-books				
Current [N=1,142]	39	61	*	*
April 2015 [N=1,403]	38	62	*	0
January 2014 [N=780]	37	63	*	0
November 2012 [N=1,663]	31	69	*	*
February 2012 [N=1,377]	29	71	*	*
December 2011 [N=2,345]	22	78	*	*

Q7 When you read electronic books or e-books, do you ever read them on... [INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]? [IF YES: How often do you read e-books on... (ITEM)? Would you say every day or almost every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, or less often?]

	YES, DAILY OR ALMOST DAILY	YES, A FEW TIMES A WEEK	YES, A FEW TIMES A MONTH	YES, LESS OFTEN	NO, DON'T READ E- BOOKS ON THIS DEVICE	(VOL.) DEVICE NOT EQUIPPED FOR E- BOOKS	(VOL.) DON'T KNOW	(VOL.) REFUSED
<i>Item A: Based on tablet owners who read e-books in the past 12 months</i>								
a. A tablet computer								
Current [N=331]	15	22	23	19	19	0	1	0
December 2011 [N=288]	25	19	21	17	19	0	0	0
<i>Item B: Based on e-Reader owners who read e-books in the past 12 months</i>								
b. An e-book reader								
Current [N=209]	18	16	16	20	28	*	1	*
December 2011 [N=482]	33	28	19	13	6	*	1	0
<i>Item C: Based on desktop/laptop owners who read e-books in the past 12 months</i>								
c. A desktop or laptop computer								
Current [N=436]	5	11	13	11	59	0	0	*
December 2011 [N=741]	7	11	12	14	55	0	*	0
<i>Item D: Based on cell phone owners who read e-books in the past 12 months</i>								
d. A cell phone								
Current [N=460]	10	11	10	17	51	0	0	*
December 2011 [N=758]	5	8	9	7	70	1	*	*

- Q8** Overall, thinking about the different kinds of reading you might do, including books, magazines, journals, newspapers and other online content, do you ever read... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]? [IF YES: How often do you do this – every day or almost every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, or less often?] Next, do you ever read [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [IF YES: How often do you do this – every day or almost every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, or less often?]

	YES, DAILY OR ALMOST DAILY	YES, A FEW TIMES A WEEK	YES, A FEW TIMES A MONTH	YES, LESS OFTEN	NO, NEVER DO THIS	(VOL.) NO JOB/NOT IN SCHOOL	(VOL.) DON'T KNOW	(VOL.) REFUSED
a. For work or school								
Current	31	15	8	4	39	3	0	0
December 2011	34	12	5	3	43	3	*	*
b. For pleasure								
Current	35	19	15	10	19	n/a	*	*
December 2011	37	23	14	6	19	n/a	*	*
c. To keep up with current events								
Current	47	21	9	4	18	n/a	*	*
December 2011	51	20	5	1	22	n/a	*	*
d. To research specific topics you're interested in								
Current	29	28	18	9	16	n/a	0	*
December 2011	24	25	18	8	25	n/a	*	*

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