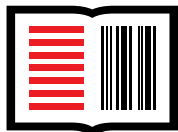




BNC RESEARCH

# The **Canadian** Book Buyer 2018



**BOOKNET  
CANADA**

# Table of Contents

<b>4</b>	Introduction
<b>4</b>	Methodology
<b>5</b>	The Average Buyer
<b>6</b>	Frequency of Reading
<b>7</b>	Social Media Use
<b>8</b>	Library Use
<b>9</b>	Discoverability
<b>12</b>	Subject Performance
<b>14</b>	Sales by Channel
<b>16</b>	Sales by Format
<b>16</b>	Intended Use for Purchase
<b>18</b>	Want More Information?
<b>18</b>	About BookNet Canada

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## Introduction

For many years, BookNet Canada has been asking book buyers about their buying habits and preferences — how they find out about books, where they shop, and what they read, along with a lot of other detailed questions about book-buying attitudes and preferences.

We often hear about the continuing shifts in the publishing industry, questions such as: How are people finding books? How much are people shopping online? Is book purchasing on the decline? The purpose of this study is to give a baseline report of some of the most basic questions that we are frequently asked — looking at how book-buying has been trending over the past three years.

## Methodology

BookNet Canada conducts quarterly online surveys of the Canadian public that ask about their book-buying habits. The questions contained in this ongoing survey are asked of adult respondents (aged 18+) who had purchased a book in any format in the prior month.

Data has been gathered from the following:  
2016 – 1,827 respondents representing 4,479 purchases  
2017 – 2,169 respondents representing 6,297 purchases  
2018 – 2,942 respondents representing 8,618 purchases

Rankings of sales categories have been obtained from BNC SalesData, the tracking service for print sales in the Canadian English-language trade book market.

## Sampling details

For the 2018 respondent panel, the margin of error is +/- 1.8% at a 95% confidence interval. Specific segments, or questions, may have a smaller sample size and a different margin of error.

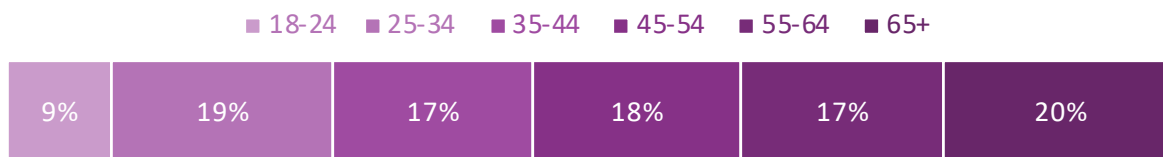
## The Average Buyer



Who is the average Canadian book buyer?  
She identifies as female; is 47 years old; is a graduate of a college or university; is married; and works full-time.

It is important to keep in mind that this survey was conducted online, which may slightly skew the results when considering the age of buyers. That being said, the majority of book buyers were over 65 years of age.

## Book buyers by age



We asked book buyers how often they undertake certain book-related activities, including how often they read print books or listen to audiobooks. While we often hear that reading is increasingly losing out to other forms of competing entertainment<sup>1</sup> — we're looking at you, Netflix — we found that 97% of book buyers said they read at least occasionally and 33% said they read daily.

Looking at specific book formats, we found the following:

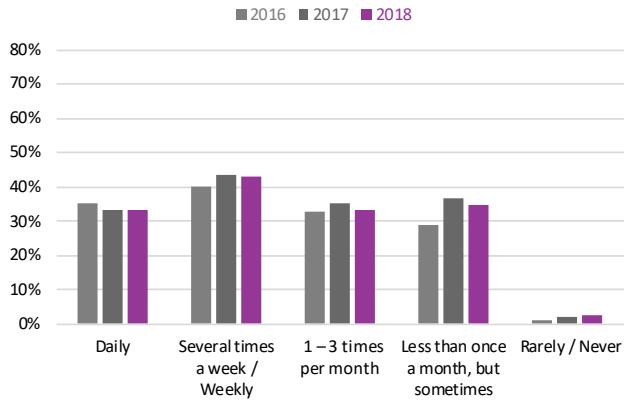
- Just over 93% of book buyers are reading print books, with a very slight year-over-year decline. There is also a slight decline in daily reading: 33% in 2018, down 2% from 2016.
- Digital reading has remained relatively flat over the past three years, with 57% of book buyers reading ebooks at least occasionally in 2018.
- Audiobook listening, while still small in comparison to print, is seeing notable gains. Those book buyers who listen to audiobooks daily has increased from 2.5% in 2016 to 3.2% in 2018. When we add up all those who listen to audiobooks, regardless of frequency, we find that use has increased from 11% in 2016 to 35% in 2018 — a whopping increase of 24%.

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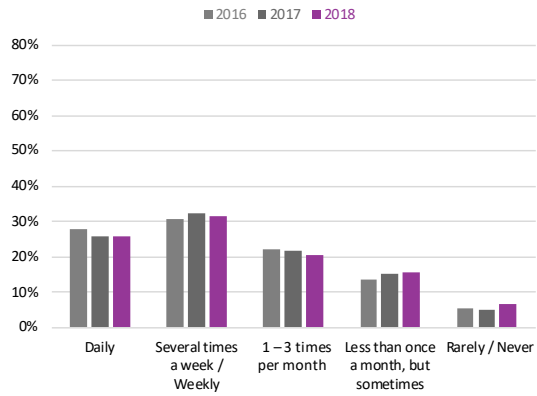
<sup>1</sup>BookNet Canada. 2019. "Canadians and their leisure time: Leisure study part 1". BookNet Canada <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2019/4/2/canadians-and-their-leisure-time-leisure-study-part-1>. May 24, 2019

# Frequency of Reading

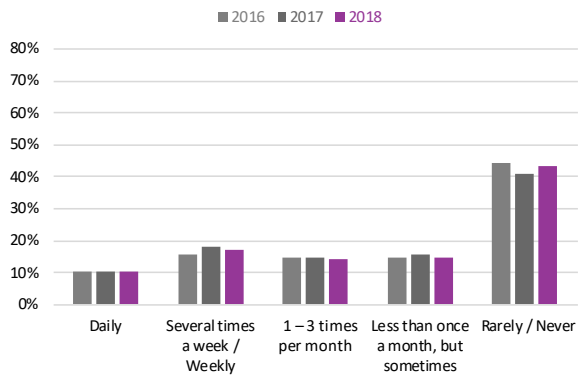
## Overall reading frequency



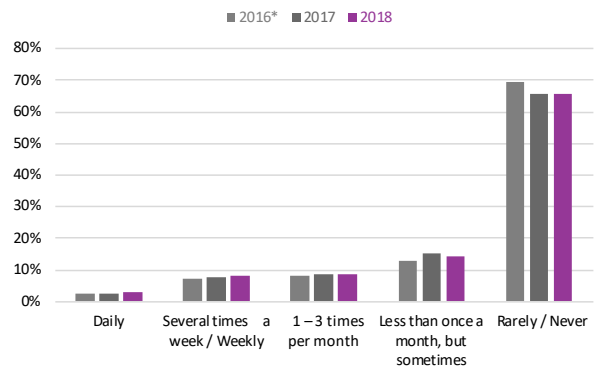
## Print books



## Ebooks

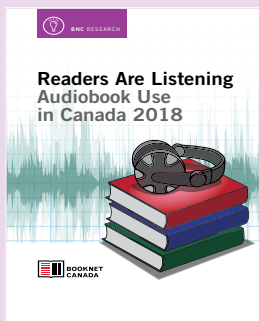


## Audiobooks



Question: How often do you engage in the following activities? Read print books, read ebooks, listen to audiobooks.

\*Audiobook use was surveyed for half of 2016

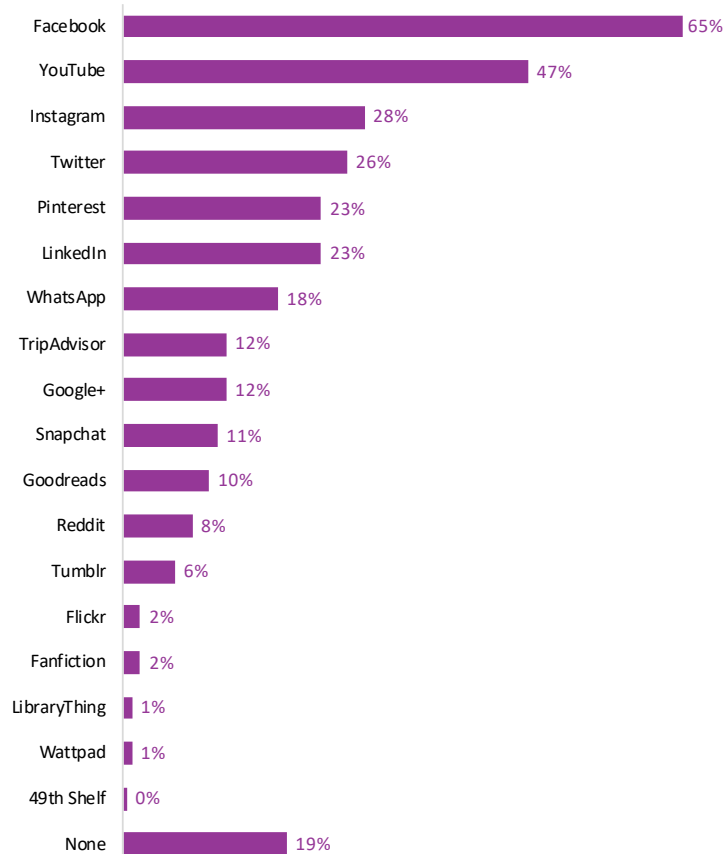


If you are interested in more research specifically related to audiobook use in Canada, check out our report: [Readers Are Listening: Audiobook Use in Canada 2018](#).

## Social Media Use

Canadian book buyers predominantly use the major social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Fewer book buyers are using book-related sites, such as Goodreads (10%) and LibraryThing (1%), though they do appear on the list.

### Social media use



*Question: In which, if any, of the following online social networks, communities or sharing sites do you currently participate? Please select all that apply.*

For more information on social media use, check out our [#AmReading series](#) that reports on social media use by book-buying Canadians for all the major platforms: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Twitter.



## Library Use

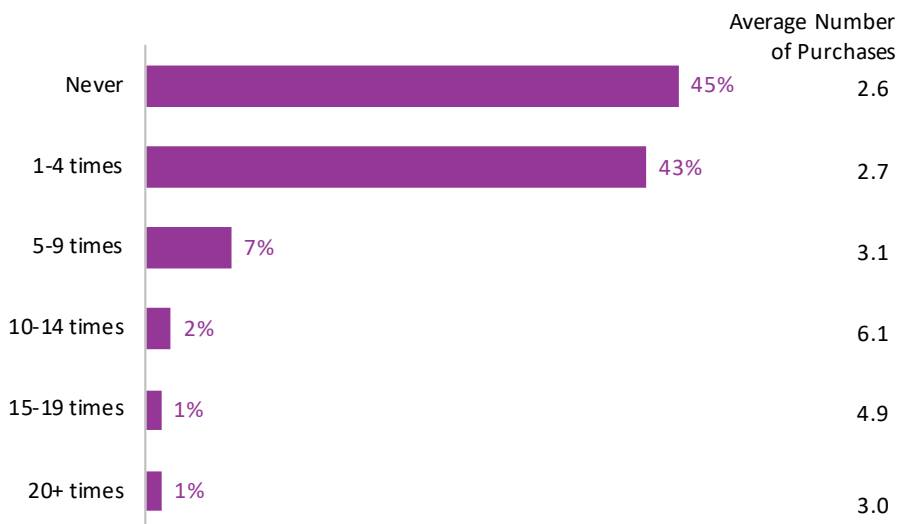
In 2018, 54% of Canadian book buyers reported using the library in the prior month.

One question we are often asked is whether library use cannibalizes book sales — i.e., if library users purchase fewer books than those who don't use the library. To address this, we compared the average number of book purchases between library users and those who do not use the library.

We found the following:

- Those who used the library bought more books than non-library users.
- Those who used the library 1-4 times in the prior month bought an average of 2.7 books.
- Those who used the library 5-9 times bought an average of 3.0 books.
- Book buyers who do not use the library purchased an average of 2.6 books per month.

## Frequency of library use



*Question: How many times did you visit a public library (in person or online) in the prior month?*

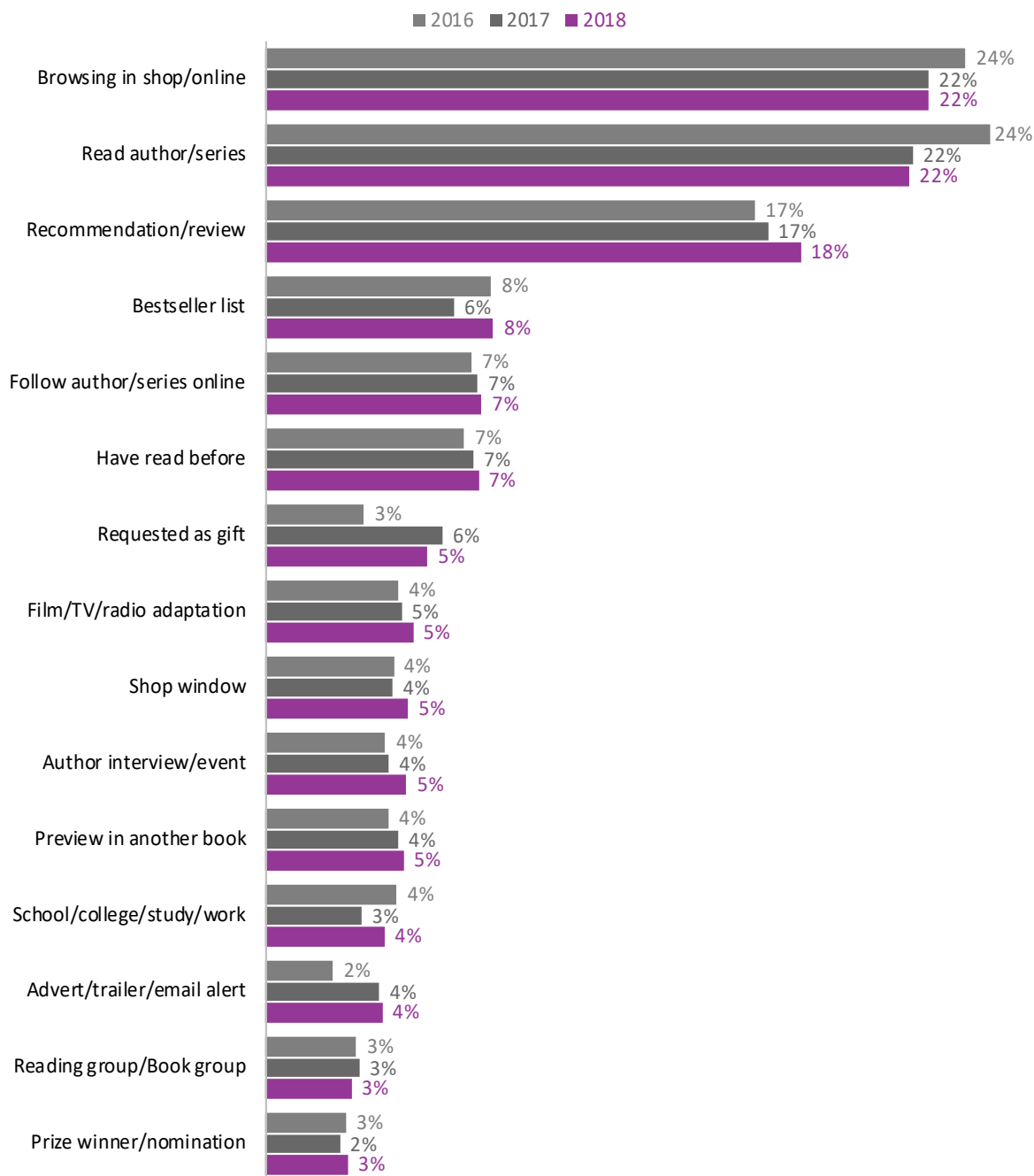


For a deeper dive into the relationship between book-buying and library use, check out our study [Borrow, Buy, Read: Library Use and Book Buying in Canada](#), which compiles research from our consumer survey, leisure studies, SalesData, and LibraryData.

## Discoverability

How do book buyers find their next reads? Methods of discovering books have remained relatively unchanged over the past three years with browsing (in person or online) and familiarity with a specific author or series topping the list.

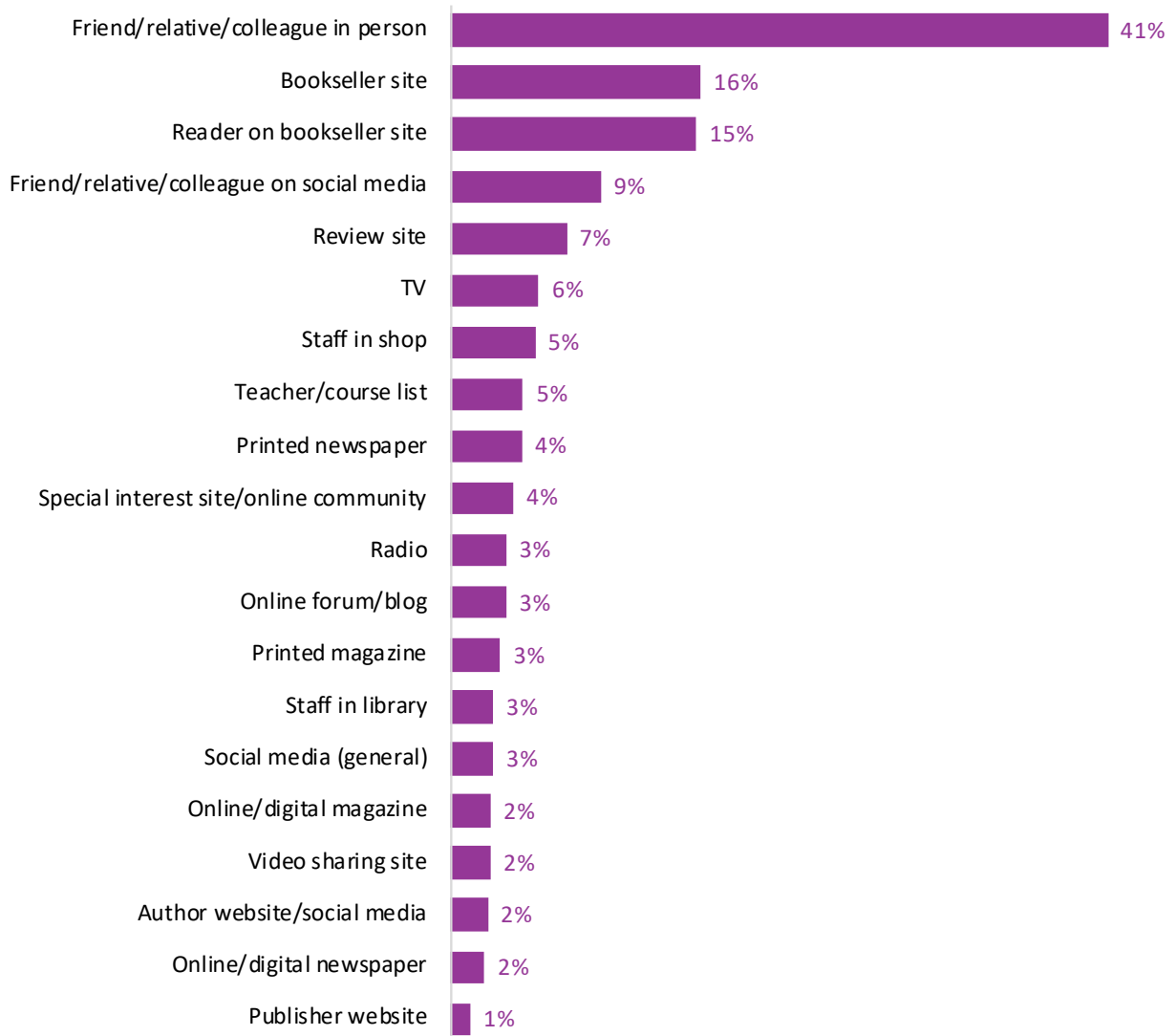
### Where buyers discover books



Question: How did you become aware of this book? Please select all that apply.

We asked those who discovered their book purchase through a recommendation or review where that recommendation or review came from. By far, the most common source was an in-person recommendation from a friend or relative, followed by a bookseller website.

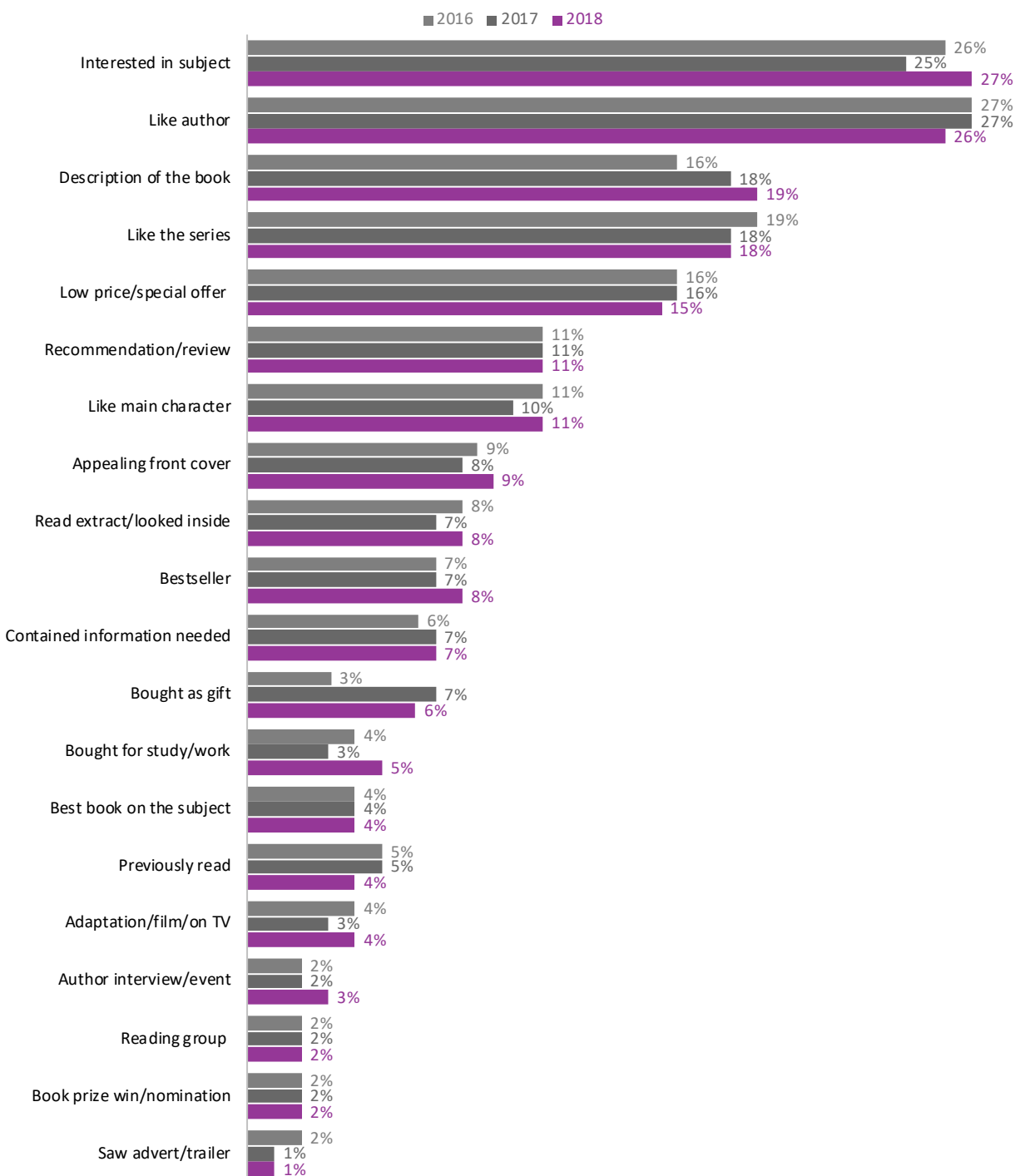
## Sources of recommendations and reviews



*Question: Where did the recommendation/review come from? Please select all that apply.*

In most cases, Canadians buy books because they either like the author (26%) or they are interested in the subject (27%). One decision-making method that has been steadily increasing over the past three years is the description of the book, which has grown from 16% to 19%.

## Decision to buy



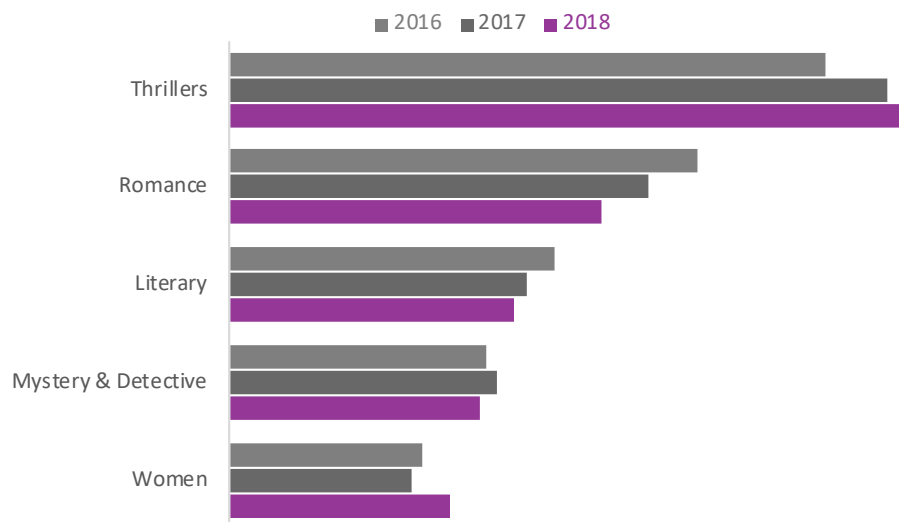
Question: What made you decide to buy this book? Please select all that apply.

## Subject Performance

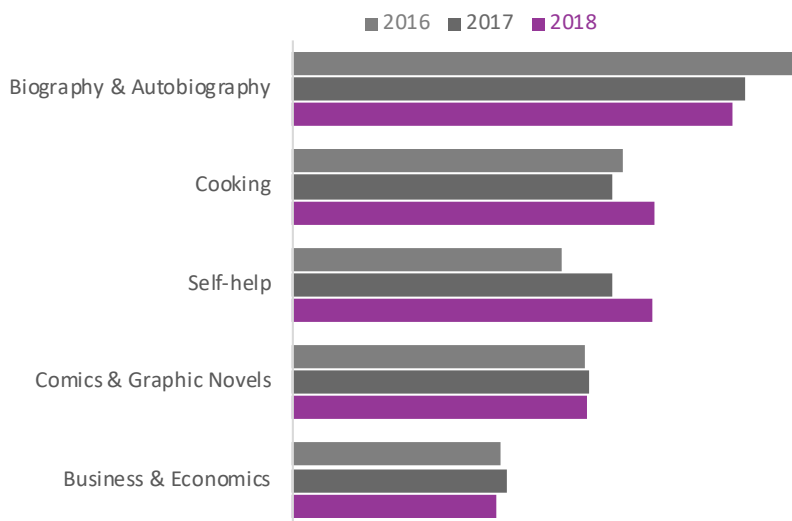
Below, we have included the five top-selling subjects in Fiction, Non-Fiction, Juvenile, and Young Adult (YA) according to print unit sales tracked by BNC SalesData over the past three years. It is important to note that significant sales for one or two big books can drastically impact sales in the relevant category for a given year.

Note that unit sales have been compiled from a representative subset of consistent retailers used for year-over-year comparison. For this reason, exact sales number have been redacted.

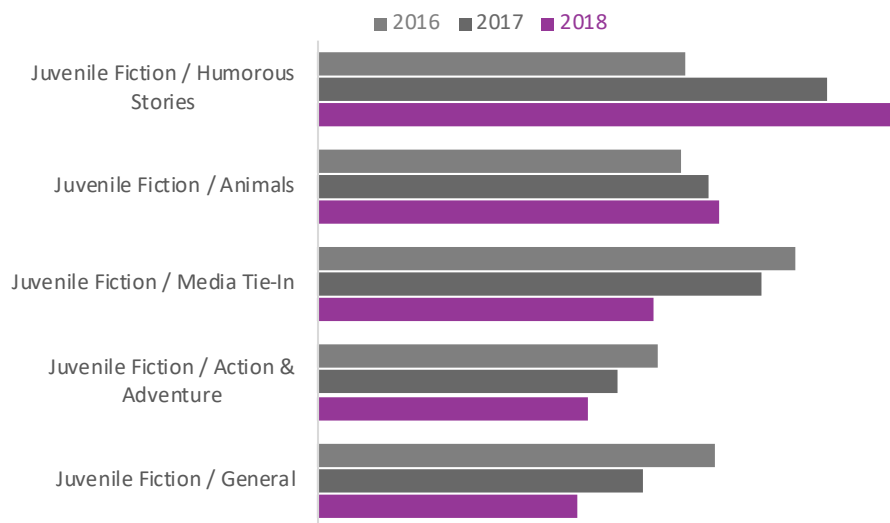
### Fiction



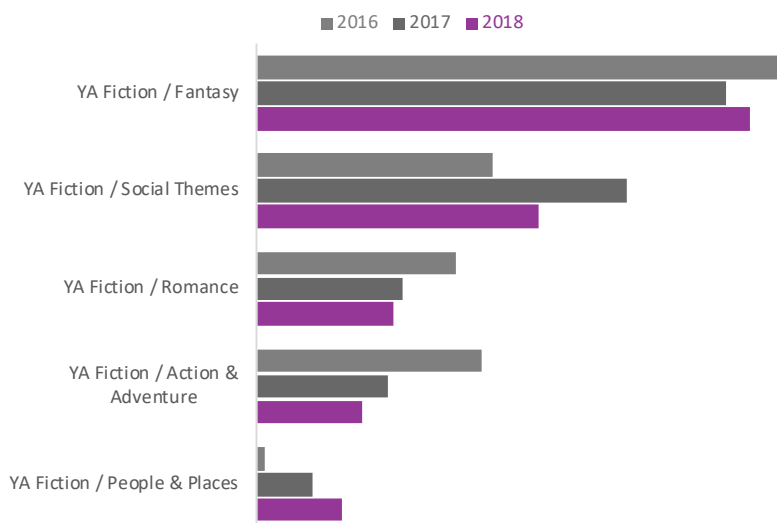
### Non-Fiction



## Juvenile



## Young Adult

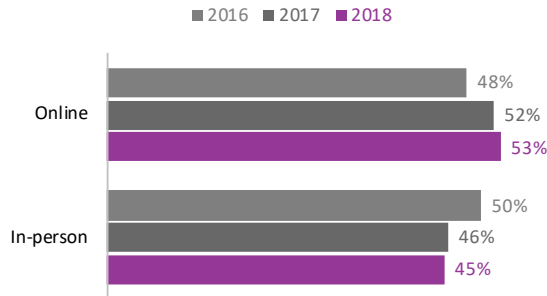


For more information on category performance of print sales in the Canadian English-language trade book market, check out our annual publication [The Canadian Book Market 2018](#). It looks at the sales performance of more than 60 genres, including top-selling titles and average list prices, in addition to providing information on consumer buying behaviour and an overview of the French-language market.

## Sales by Channel

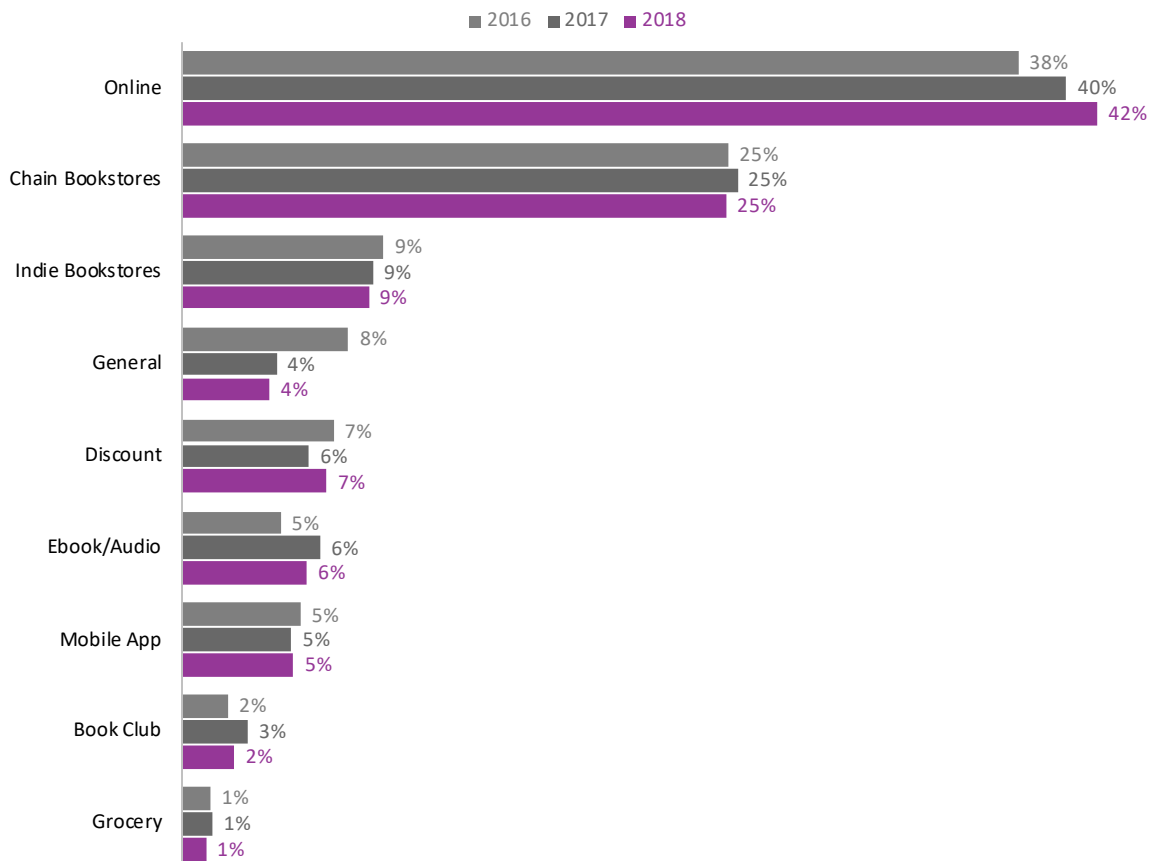
Perhaps unsurprisingly, online sales are the most popular retail channel. When we combine all online and in-person channels and compare them, we find that online book-buying has grown from 48% in 2016 to 53% in 2018. Conversely, in-person purchasing has declined from 50% in 2016 to 45% in 2018.

### Online vs in-person purchases



The following graph breaks out general website purchasing from ebook/audio sites and mobile apps.

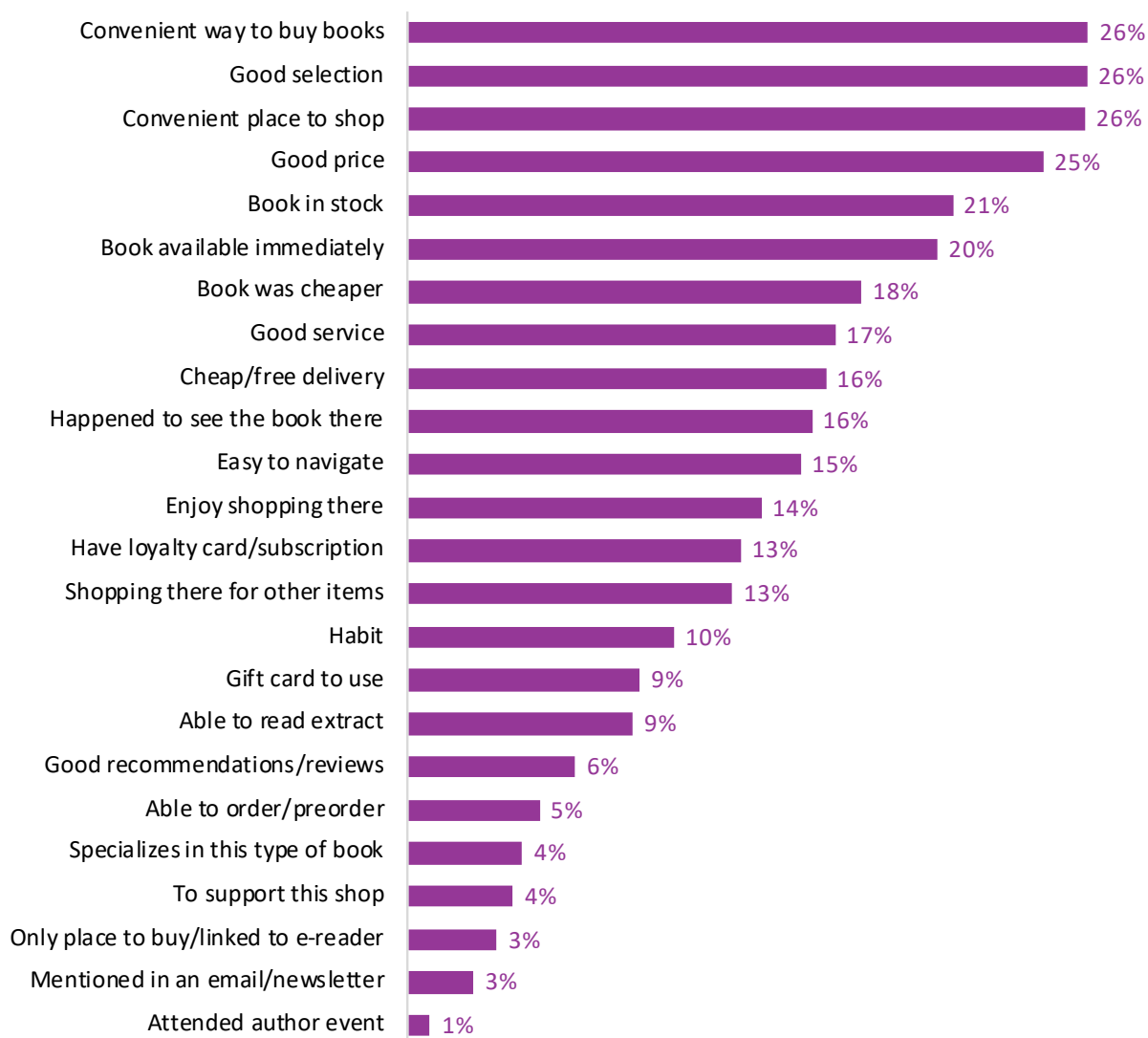
### Retail channels



*Question: Where did you buy this book?*

There are many reasons why a buyer chooses to make their purchase at a particular store or website, so we asked buyers to tell us all of them. We found that convenience tops the list with “convenient or easy way to buy books” and “convenience of the retail outlet,” both at 26%. Books being in stock (21%) and available immediately (20%) are also high on the list.

### Why buyers chose a particular store or website

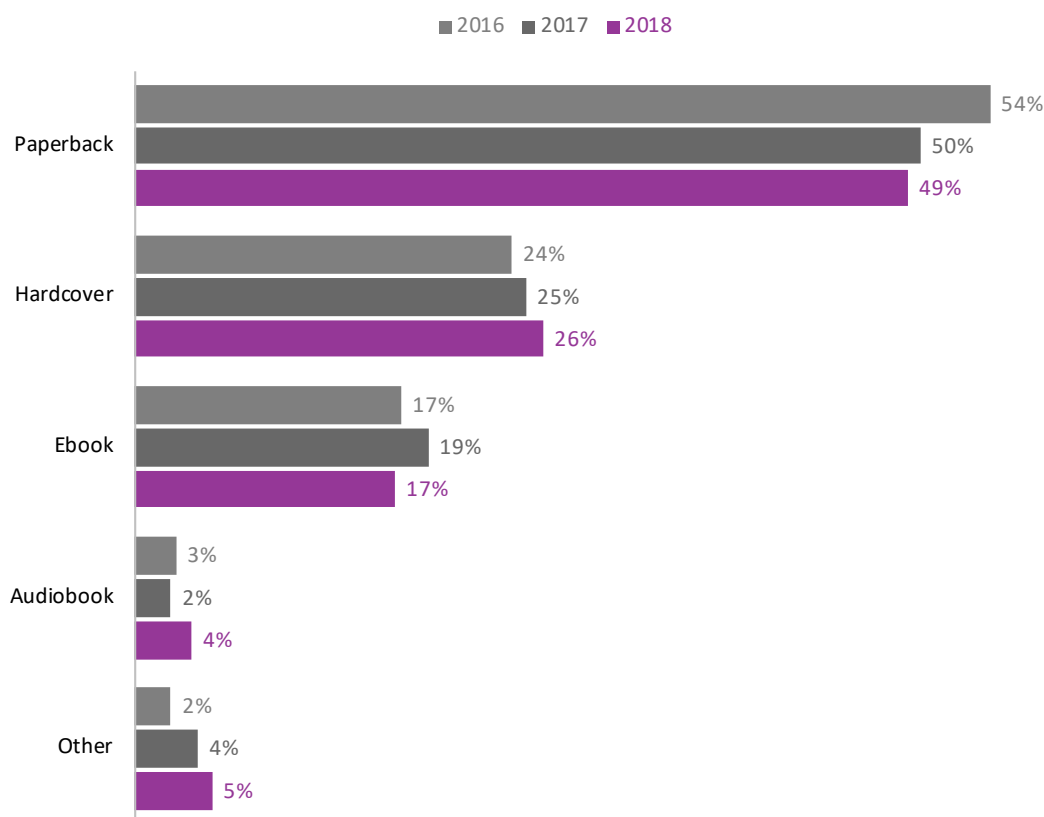


*Question: Why did you use this particular shop/website/organization to buy this book, rather than buying it somewhere else? Please select all that apply.*

## Sales by Format

Over the past three years, we have found a slight increase in the purchase of hardcover books (up 3%) and a decline in paperback (down 5%). Ebooks have remained relatively flat and, while we have seen some increase to audiobook purchases, this can be hard to measure because of the popularity of audiobook subscription services, which buyers often don't report as "purchases." The "other" category has seen a 3% increase and contains a fairly broad scope of formats that includes spiral bound books, maps, DVDs, game cartridges, calendars, cards, blank books, posters, and sheet music (to name a few).

### Format

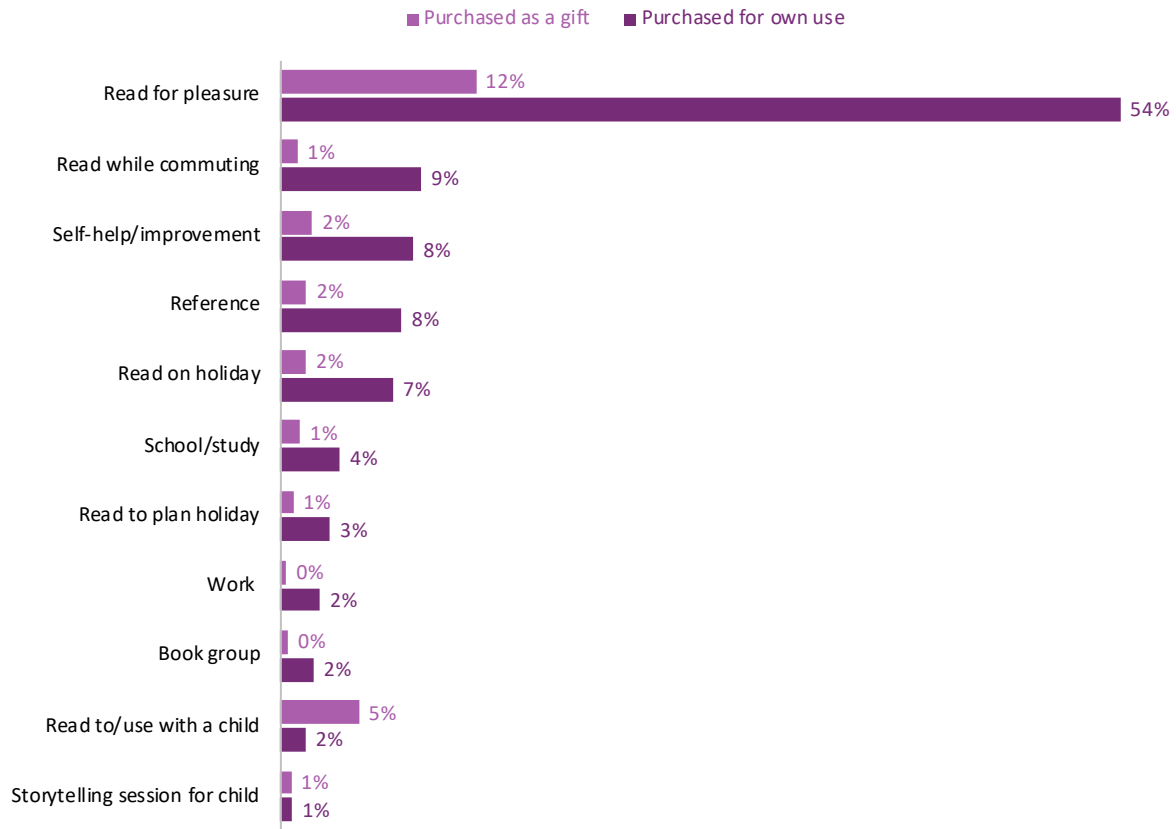


## Intended Use for Purchase

Readers were asked why they made their most recent purchase and they were allowed to select multiple reasons. By far, the most popular reason people buy books is to read for pleasure. This is followed by reading while commuting and for self-help or self-improvement.

Below, we have shown these reasons broken out by books purchased for buyers' own use compared to books that were purchased as a gift. While trends are fairly similar between the two, we find a few obvious exceptions: books bought for commuting are predominantly a personal purchase and books bought to read with a child tend to be gifts.

## Intended use for book purchases



*Question: What do you plan to use this book for?*

## Want More Information?

Has this report piqued your interest in finding out lots more about books in Canada? BookNet Canada has extensive research [available on our website](#), both free and for purchase. Multi-user editions are available to be purchased for library use as well.

## About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2012 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market. BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print trade book sales through BNC SalesData.

Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as *The Globe and Mail* puts it, "the book industry's supply-chain nerve centre."