



RESEARCH & EDUCATION

Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021



**BOOKNET
CANADA**

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Table of Contents

Data and methodology	3
Canadians and their free time	4
Readers and their leisure activities	6
Reading as a leisure activity	9
Reading activities	11
Book discovery	12
Acquisition by format	14
Print books	16
Ebooks	16
Audiobooks	17
Money spent on books and perceptions of value	17
Format preferences and frequency	19
Devices, apps, and accessibility features	25
Subjects and authors	29
Diversity and representation in books	32
About BookNet Canada	35
Appendix A: Demographics	37
Appendix B: Canadian Leisure & Reading Survey	

Data and methodology

The annual Canadian Leisure and Reading survey provides insight into the reading behaviours of Canadians in the previous year as well as over time when compared to previous surveys. This information can guide data-driven decisions in the Canadian book industry and beyond.

This survey was fielded in January 2022 to 1,282 Canadians over the age of 18. Where noted, we compare the 2021 results to the 2020 results which were gathered from the same survey fielded in January 2021 to 1,253 Canadian adults.

For both surveys, 1,000 respondents identified as 'readers': those who had read or listened to a book at least a few times a year in the past year.

- *Buying* refers to buying books from an online retailer (or retailing app for ebooks and audiobooks), a physical bookstore that primarily sells new books, a used bookstore or thrift store, a general retailer, or a subscription service.
- *Borrowing* refers to getting books for free from a public library, another person (gifting or lending), a free internet site, or an illegal file-sharing site.

Survey methodology:

- Respondents were English-speaking Canadians, 18 years of age or older, located throughout Canada, and representative of the Canadian population based on age, gender, and geographical region.
- There is a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, meaning that statistics for this group could fluctuate about 3% in either direction if the survey was fielded to the entire Canadian population.
- The online survey was limited to those with internet access who were able and wanted to participate in our panel in exchange for incentives.
- The data is unweighted to represent the behaviours and habits of individual Canadians.
- In 2022, 282 people were screened out for not having read or listened to a book in 2021.

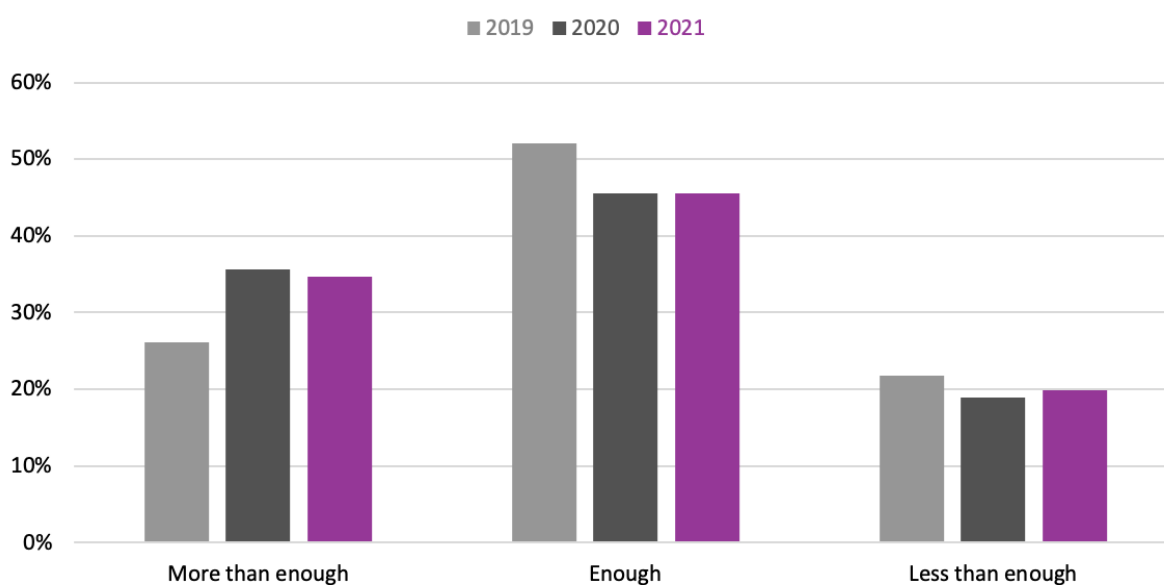
The study was prepared by BookNet Canada staff.

Canadians and their free time

Each year we ask Canadians whether they felt like they had enough leisure time over the last year. In 2021, the answers were similar to the previous years. Just under half of Canadians (45%) responded that they had enough leisure time, 35% said they had more than enough leisure time, and 20% said that they did not have enough leisure time. These breakdowns were almost identical for the readers subset of our survey as well.

The distribution of these percentages has not changed significantly since 2019, and even then the change was mostly a shift between “Enough” and “More than enough” with the percentage of Canadians who felt like they had less than enough time remaining fairly constant.

Perception of Canadians’ leisure time



As we see above, most Canadians either had enough or more than enough leisure time in 2021. So, what were they doing with it?

Almost all Canadians spent at least some time shopping (98%); watching TV, videos or movies (98%); cooking (97%); listening to music (95%); or spending time with family (94%) in 2021. Many of these activities were the ones they also did most frequently. Unsurprisingly, Canadians watched TV (78%) or cooked (72%) at least once a day. They did, however, also browse social media or the web (74%) at least once a day as well.

Half of adult Canadians read or listened to a book at least once a week in 2021, which was the same as in 2020. If we put that in context of all the other leisure activities Canadians choose from, it ranks in eighth place. Last year reading was in ninth place. The change in ranking mainly has to do with the decrease in the percentage of Canadians who reported listening to radio shows. It's down 10% from 58% in 2020 to 48% in 2021.

Leisure and recreational activities done by Canadians at least weekly in 2021:

1. Watching videos/TV/movies (91%)
2. Cooking (89%)
3. Listening to music (85%)
4. Browsing social media/web (84%)
5. Spending time with family (70%)
6. Shopping (67%)
7. Exercising/working out (62%)
- 8. Reading or listening to books (50%)**
9. Listening to radio shows (48%)
10. Playing video games (43%)

When we look at the activities that Canadians were doing at least once a day, we see that the ranked activities and the percentage of Canadians who did them were fairly similar in 2021 as they were in 2020, although listening to radio shows is again down 10%.

Leisure and recreational activities done by Canadians at least daily in 2021:

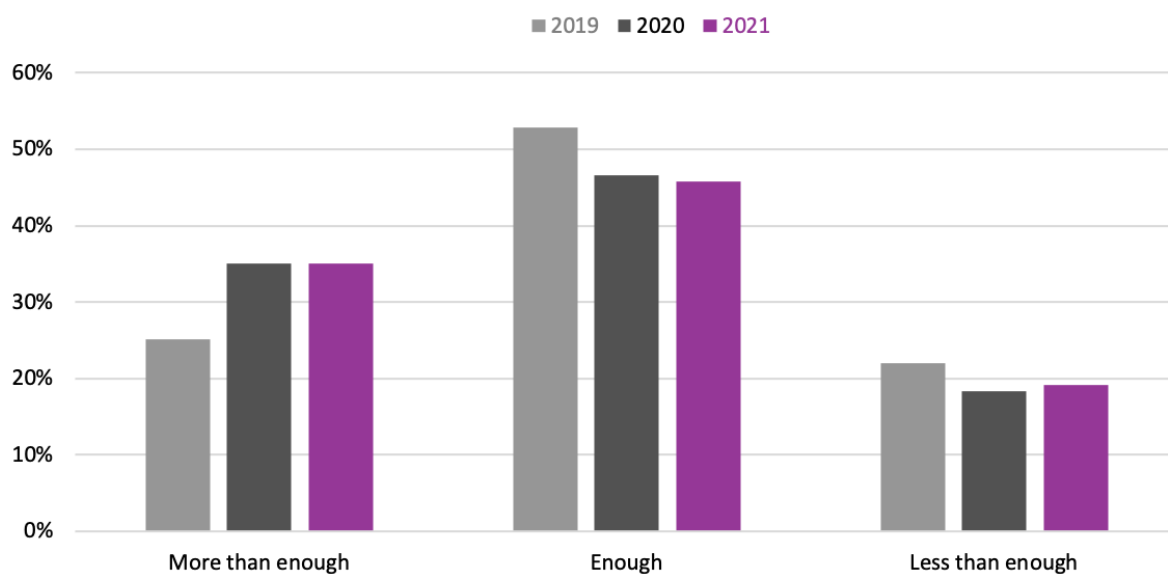
1. Watching videos/TV/movies (78%)
2. Browsing social media/web (74%)
3. Cooking (72%)
4. Listening to music (64%)
5. Spending time with family (50%)
6. Exercising/working out (35%)
- 7. Reading or listening to books (33%)**
8. Listening to radio shows (30%)
9. Playing video games (28%)
10. Listening to podcasts (14%)

Readers and their leisure activities

As we mentioned in our methodology section, we surveyed Canadians until we had responses from 1,000 people who had read at least one book in 2021. For the purposes of this study, we separated out all their answers so we could see the leisure activities and habits of readers as a group.

Readers felt like they had enough (46%) or more than enough (35%) leisure time in 2021. And, for the most part, they felt like their amount of leisure time stayed the same when compared with 2020 (57%), though 24% felt like their leisure time increased.

Perception of readers' leisure time



The leisure and recreational activities done by readers at least weekly in 2021 is identical in ranking to the activities done by all Canadians at least once a week, but (fairly obviously) readers are much more likely to read at least weekly than Canadians in general.

Leisure and recreational activities done by readers weekly in 2021:

1. Watching videos/TV/movies (92%)
2. Cooking (90%)
3. Listening to music (86%)
4. Browsing social media/web (85%)
5. Spending time with family (73%)
6. Shopping (69%)
7. Exercising/working out (66%)
- 8. Reading or listening to books (64%)**
9. Listening to radio shows (51%)
10. Playing video games (45%)

Leisure and recreational activities done by readers at least once a day in 2021:

1. Watching videos/TV/movies (77%)
2. Browsing social media/web (74%)
3. Cooking (73%)
4. Listening to music (65%)
5. Spending time with family (53%)
- 6. Reading or listening to books (42%)**
7. Exercising/working out (37%)
8. Listening to radio shows (33%)
9. Playing video games (29%)
10. Listening to podcasts (16%)

As in 2020, watching TV/videos/movies and browsing the web or social media were neck and neck for the top two spots in 2021.

It's quite possible that some of that social media or web-browsing was author or book-related content. While 83% of readers visited a general social network site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter) at least once in 2021, 39% said that they visited a book-specific social network (e.g., Shelfari, Goodreads, 49th Shelf, Wattpad, FanFiction, Archive of Our Own, etc.).

Almost half of readers said they don't mind reading or listening to books but would sometimes prefer doing other things instead (47%). Over a quarter did not agree with that statement (28%) but 20% did agree.

Reading as a leisure activity

Overall, almost all readers read at least one print book in 2021 (94%). Over half had read at least one ebook (64%), and just about half had listened to one audiobook (45%).

When we asked readers about their reading frequency, 42% said they read at least once a day, 22% once a week, 14% once a month, and 22% less than once a month.

Readers ages 65 and over were the most likely to read once a day or more. Though once a day or more was the most popular frequency for each age group.

Frequency of reading by age

	Once a day or more	Once a week	Once a month	Less than once a month
18-29	35%	22%	19%	23%
30-44	38%	24%	13%	25%
45-54	38%	26%	14%	22%
55-64	44%	18%	15%	23%
65+	58%	19%	7%	17%

We asked readers to tell us, in their own words, why they chose to spend their leisure time reading. The theme that came up more than any other was “relaxation” (35%). Readers also often chose to read to learn, for enjoyment, or as escapism, with 2% specifically referencing the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I have always loved reading. It increases my knowledge, perspective and broadens my life I enjoy solitude and I can totally 'escape' in a book."

"It is something I love to do. I read 3 or 4 books at the same time to help keep my brain sharp."

"It's relaxing, can be done indoors in the winter when it is cold, can transport a person to another place other than in a pandemic."

When we asked them directly whether they agreed with the statement "Books are for enjoyment, entertainment, or leisure," 62% chose "Yes" and 34% chose "Sometimes."

Those who agreed with the statement "Books are for learning or education" made up 41% of all readers, 50% sometimes agreed with that statement.

When reading, most readers are focused on just that activity. However, audiobook listeners like to listen to their books while doing other things (e.g., working, commuting, housework, etc.) — 36% agreed and 38% sometimes agreed with that statement.

Ebook readers were less likely to agree, but 54% of ebook readers still said they agreed or sometimes agreed that they read while doing something else (e.g., listening to music, watching TV, etc.). Print book readers were least likely to do other things while reading; 50% of print book readers disagreed with the statement.

Reading activities

What kinds of things did readers do to engage with books other than just read them? We asked readers what actions they took while reading or shortly after:

- 38% searched for other books by that author;
- 22% shared the experience, book, or photo of the book with others;
- 17% went online to read about the author or follow them on social media;
- 16% added the book to a list of books they were currently reading or had finished reading;
- 11% made notes or highlighted text;
- 10% read parts of the book aloud;
- 10% took an action as a direct result of the book;
- 7% bought a copy of the book they had borrowed;
- 7% bought or borrowed the book in another format; and
- 7% considered the book part of a reading challenge.

Almost a third of readers said that they didn't do anything in that list (31%).

Some readers participated in book clubs or attended book-related events. Interestingly, the percentage of readers who participated in an online book club (22%) was very similar to the 20% of readers who did so in person in 2021. The same is true for the 21% who attended an online author or book-related event and the 20% of readers who attended an in-person author or book-related event in 2021.

Last year we found that about a quarter of Canadian readers attended an author or book-related event either online or in person (book launch or reading, award show, festival, presentation, etc.) at least a few times a year in 2020 (27%) and another 27% participated in a book club or reading group meeting either online or in person in 2020. When comparing this to the 2021 data, it seems like it might be safe to assume there is quite a bit of overlap between the in-person and online event goers.

Book discovery

There was a slight shift in 2021 in terms of how readers discovered the books they chose to read. While the top three means of discovery remained the same as in 2020 — word of mouth (36%), bookstore (27%), and public library (25%) — using online book retailers for discovery dropped from one in four readers in 2020 to one in five readers in 2021.

Podcasts have risen in terms of a discovery method and are up from 5% in both 2019 and 2020 to 8% in 2021. On the flipside, literary awards and “Best of” lists continue to trend downward in terms of awareness drivers for readers; from 14% in 2019, to 9% in 2020, and now coming in at 6% in 2021.

However, when we asked about reader awareness of a list of Canadian book awards, 57% were aware of at least one. Though again, this figure is down from 62% in 2020.

Awareness of Canadian literary awards:

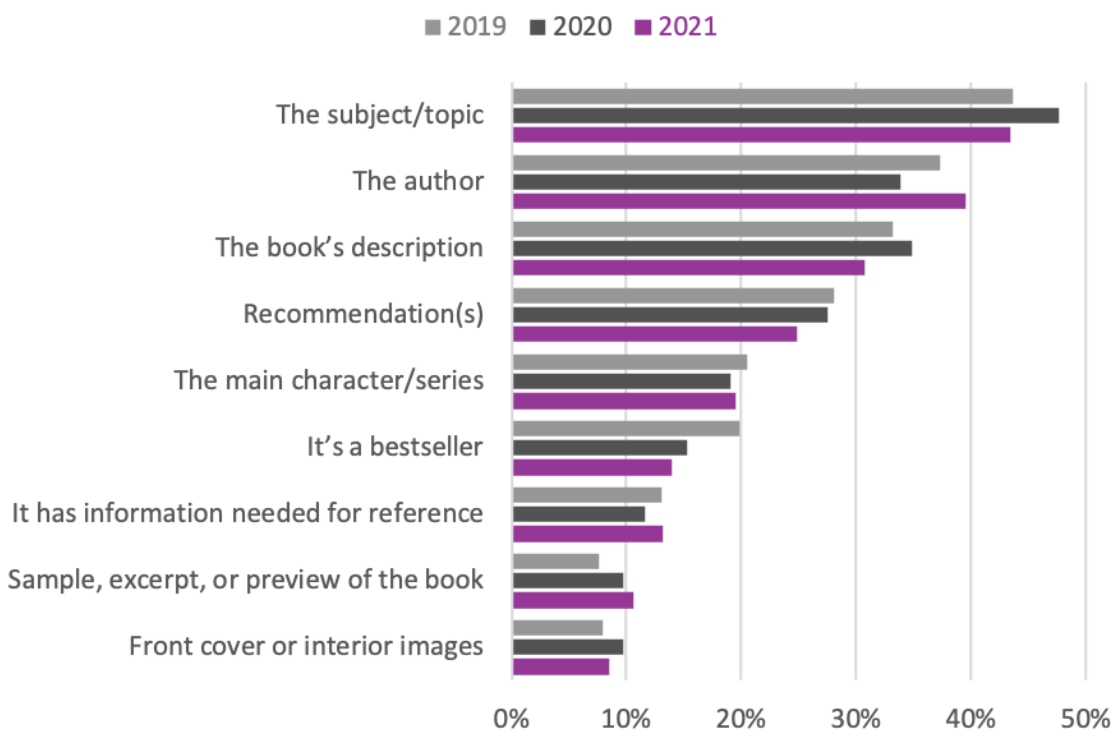
- Governor General's Literary Awards (33%)
- Scotiabank Giller Prize (32%)
- Canada Reads (25%)
- Canadian Children's Book Centre's CCBC Book Awards (9%)
- Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction (7%)
- Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize (7%)
- Forest of Reading (6%)

Book discovery isn't enough to drive a reader to read a specific book. Once a reader becomes aware of a book, something else drives them to choose to read it. For the readers we surveyed, the thing that most influences them to read a book is the subject or topic (43%). The other top reasons were:

- the author (40%);
- the book's description (31%);
- recommendation(s) (25%);
- the main character or the series (20%);
- it's a bestseller (14%);
- it has content/information needed for reference (13%);
- sample, excerpt, or preview of the book (11%); and
- front cover, interior images, or the inside of the book (9%).

Over time, some of these factors have shifted. Recommendations and the impact of bestseller lists have trended down from 2019 to 2021, while samples, excerpts, and previews of a book's content continue to be more important when readers are choosing their books.

Why readers chose to read a specific book, 2019–2021



Interestingly, in 2021 only 5% of readers chose “it was adapted for the screen” as a reason to read the book which is down from 11% of respondents who chose “it was made into a movie, film, or TV show” in 2020. Perhaps the new wording of the question was unclear and led to the lower number since we’re seeing sales and library borrowing impacts from movie and TV show adaptations elsewhere in [our research](#).

Acquisition by format

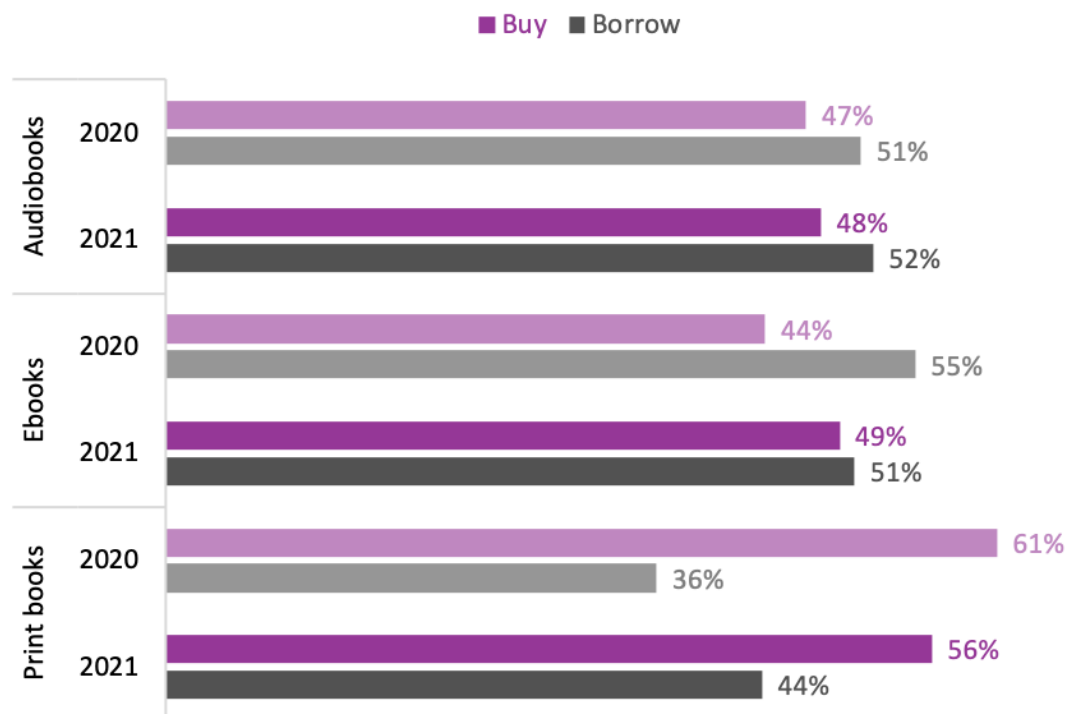
So, once a reader decides to read a book, where are they getting it from? Well, often it depends on the format they want to acquire, but essentially, either readers are buying their books or they are getting them for free. For print book readers, 56% are mainly buying books and 44% are mostly borrowing them. The split

between buying and borrowing or getting books for free is more equally weighted for ebook readers (51% borrow or get for free most often and 49% mainly buy) as well as for audiobook listeners (52% mainly borrow or get for free and 48% buy).

The borrowing/buying breakdown has remained the same for audiobook listeners since 2020, but there has been a shift for ebook and print book readers. Ebook readers' buying has increased 5% year over year, up from 44% in 2020 to 49% in 2021.

Print book readers on the other hand, have increased their borrowing in 2021— to 44% from 36% in 2020. It's likely these borrowing numbers increased because libraries were open for more of 2021 than in 2020. This hypothesis is borne out by comparing the 2021 numbers to the pre-pandemic, 2019 numbers where borrowing was also at 44%.

Borrowing and buying by format in 2020 and 2021



It still remains true in 2021 as in 2020, that borrowing, or getting for free, is the most popular method to obtain digital books and buying is more popular for print books, but the gap has narrowed slightly.

Print books

There was a real shakeup in the rankings of acquisition sources for print book readers in 2021 as compared with 2020. Public libraries were the most popular choice, though it remained at 22% same as in 2020. “People gave or lent them to me” moved up to second place in 2021 at 20%, up from just 14% in 2020. While 24% of print readers acquired their books from online retailers in 2020, this dropped down to third place in 2021 to 19%.

Other places print readers purchased books were:

- from a physical bookstore (14%)
- from a used bookstore or thrift store (12%)
- from a general retailer (11%)

Ebooks

Things were much the same for ebook acquirers year over year, except that public library as a method to acquire books dropped. Online retailers were still the most popular way to acquire ebooks — 27% of ebook readers chose this option in 2021 and in 2020. Public libraries and free internet sites were tied for second place at 18% apiece. Though in 2020, a quarter of ebook readers got their books from a public library. Subscription services remained around the same percentage as in 2020, 11%.

We asked ebook readers whether they shared their subscription log in with others and 28% said they either did (12%) or sometimes did (16%). This subscription sharing is up from 25% in 2020.

Audiobooks

Audiobook listeners, like ebook readers, mainly obtained their books from online retailers (24%), at the same rate as in 2020. Overall, the percentages for acquisition methods remained similar year over year. Free internet sites came in second, at 22%, followed by public libraries (18%) and subscription services (13%).

Audiobook listeners were more likely than ebook readers to share subscription log ins with others: 35% either said “Yes” (14%) or “Sometimes” (28%). This remains the same as in 2020.

Money spent on books and perceptions of value

We asked readers how much they spent on all their leisure activities in a normal month. The largest segment, 29%, typically spent between \$1 and \$49. This was followed by 25% who spent between \$50 and \$99, and 21% usually spent \$150 or more.

When asked what they would like the book industry to know, 8% of Canadian readers talked about book prices:

“Books are becoming too expensive and limit my ability to buy and read more.”

“Books could be way more affordable in Canada, considering they have no intrinsic value (they're tough to sell or even give away). Our prices are ludicrous compared to the US or UK.”

“Books are great, but too costly.”

When it comes to books in particular, 37% of readers said they chose books within their budget and 34% only borrowed or got their books for free. Only 29% had no limitations or restrictions on what or how many books they bought.

We also asked readers how much they spent on books over the entirety of 2021. If we break out that spending by format, we find that print book buyers are most likely to pay the highest amounts for their books — 8% estimated their spending at \$300 or more in 2021. Audiobook buyers were least likely to spend large amounts. Though both digital formats, ebooks and audiobooks, had a higher percentage of readers who got all their books for free in 2021.

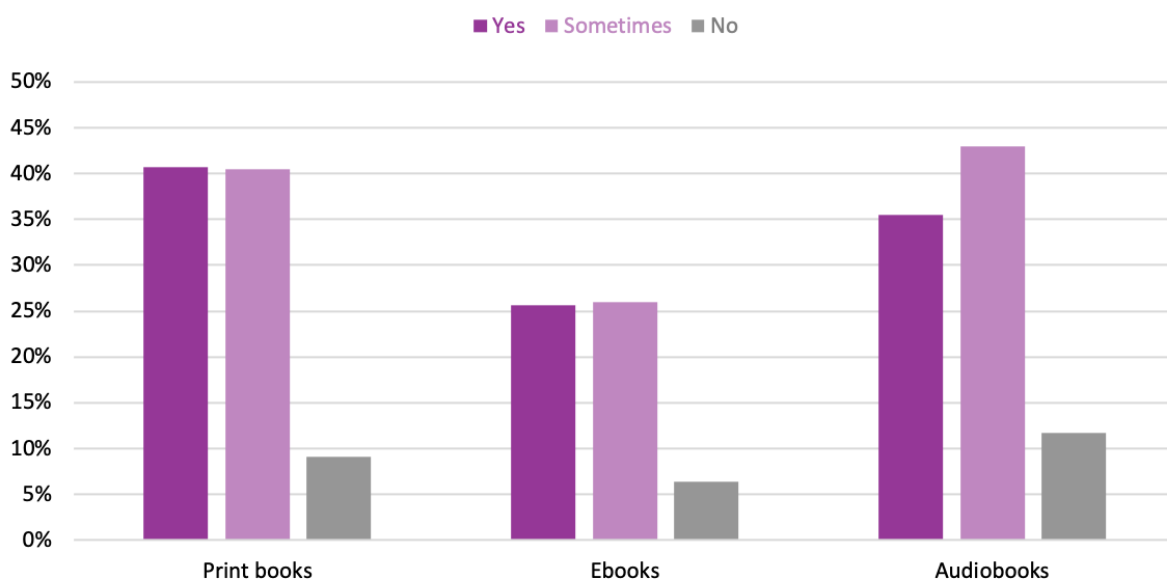
Amount spent on books by format

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
\$0	5%	20%	16%
\$1-49	27%	36%	43%
\$50-99	25%	19%	19%
\$100-149	16%	12%	11%
\$150-199	7%	4%	4%
\$200-249	8%	3%	4%
\$250-299	4%	3%	1%
\$300+	8%	3%	0%

In terms of perception of value, print book readers were most likely to say that they got good value for their books at the price they paid — 81% either said “Yes” or “Sometimes.” Audiobook listeners and ebooks readers weren’t far behind when

agreeing either they did or sometimes did get good value for their money at 78% and 76% respectively.

Perceptions of value by format



Ebook readers who got their books from an online retailer or via a retailing app (i.e., Kobo, Amazon, etc.) felt like they got the most value for their money — 24% answered “Yes” or “Sometimes.” Only 10% felt they did or sometimes did get good value for their money from an ebook subscription service (i.e., Kobo, Scribd, Kindle Unlimited, etc.).

Format preferences and frequency

When we asked readers whether the format they read or listen to depended on what was available and stocked they were divided. Only 28% said “Yes,” 36% said “Sometimes,” and 28% said “No.” It seems format preferences are driven by more than just what is available at a given time, though that definitely plays a part.

Preference for print books went up slightly in 2021 as compared with 2020. Print or physical books were the most preferred format for 68% of readers, up from 65% in 2020. Digging in even deeper, 66% preferred paperback books, 54% hardcovers, 19% pocketbook-sized paperbacks, 18% large print, and 14% comics or graphic novels.

Ebooks were the preferred format for 16% of all readers and audiobooks were preferred by just 10% of readers.

When asked what they would like the book industry to know, 4% of Canadian readers mentioned the importance of having print books:

"I know the world of digital is in the here and now, but I would like to have the options to have a physical object that I can go through and feel more connected to writings, that digital formats are not yet able to mimic, like the texture of cover or pages and the general feel of a book."

"I like to read a physical book. While it is nice to have the availability of ebooks, I find sitting in front of a screen to read not as pleasant as having a book."

Another 2% of readers wanted more ebooks and audiobooks, while others felt that having books in all formats was a priority:

"Publishing all formats is important."

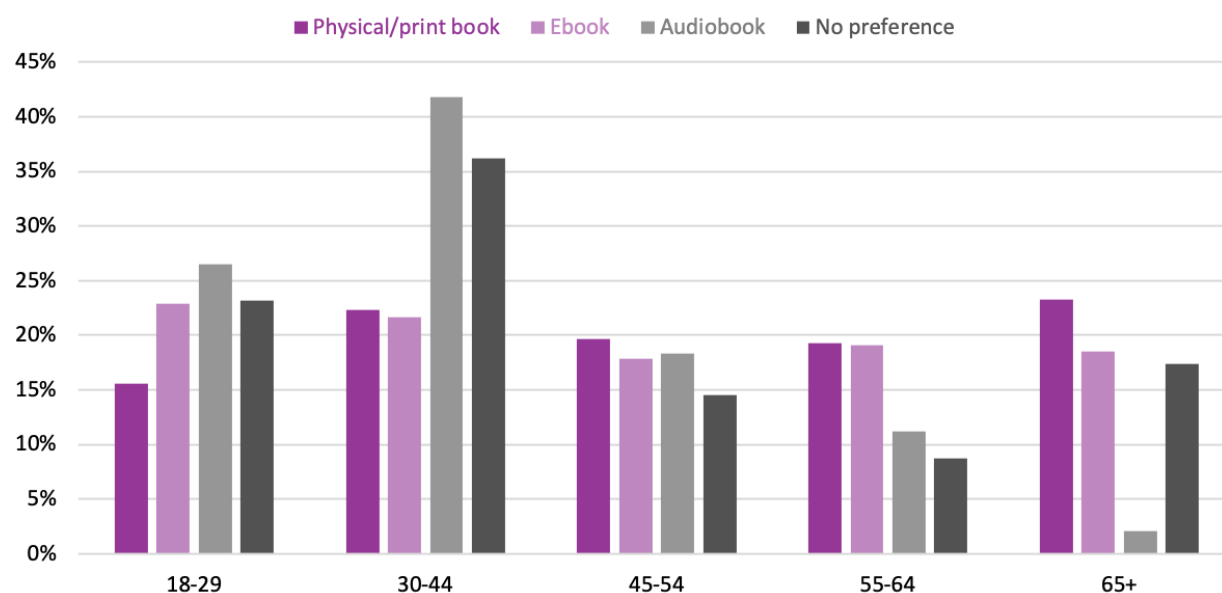
"Make all the books available in all platforms."

"They should offer wide varieties of book in different formats."

Readers ages 30 to 44 were most likely to prefer audiobooks. Readers 65 and over were most likely to prefer print, and by far the least likely to prefer audiobooks.

Ebooks were favoured by 18- to 29-year-olds more than any other age group, though they also had a high “No preference” percentage.

Format preference by age group



More readers read all three formats (39%) than exclusively read another format. This is down from the 42% of readers in 2020 who said they read all three formats. Those who only read print books make up 30% of all readers in 2021. Very few readers said that they only read audiobooks (0.3%).

Other exclusive ways readers read:

- only print and ebooks (21%)
- only print and audiobooks (4%)
- only ebooks (2%)
- only ebooks and audiobooks (1%)

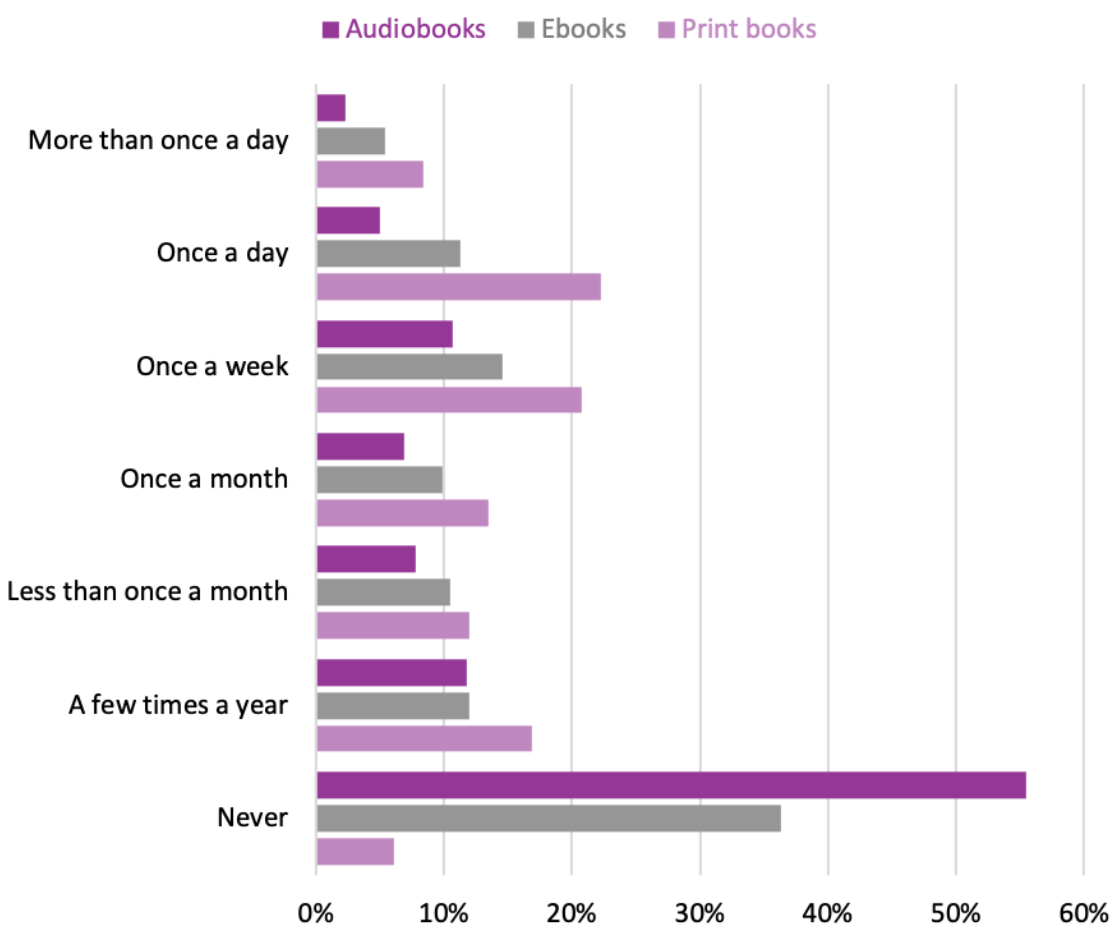
Print book readers are the ones most tied to their format. Half of print book readers said if they can't find the print version of a book, they won't read it in another format — 27% agreed with that statement and 23% agreed sometimes. For audiobook listeners, 13% agreed with that statement and 27% agreed sometimes.

Ebook readers were the most flexible, only 12% agreed with that statement and 25% agreed sometimes.

We also asked readers about how frequently they read print books, ebooks, or audiobooks, specifically.

Just over half of readers read print books at least weekly (52%), while 31% read ebooks and 18% listened to audiobooks at least weekly.

Frequency of reading, by format



Looking at reader demographics, readers ages 65 and over were the most likely to read a print book once a day or more, at 44%. For ebooks, 22% of readers ages 18

to 29 years old make up the most likely group to read this format once a day or more. The group of readers most likely to listen to audiobooks once a day or more are 30- to 44-year-olds, at 12%.

We wanted to know if readers felt that the amount of time they spent reading changed from 2020 to 2021. The majority of readers said their time spent reading stayed the same — 63% of readers said there was no change in their print book reading time, 57% said no change for time spent reading ebooks, and 58% for time spent reading audiobooks.

Perception of time spent reading books from 2020 to 2021, by format

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Unsure
Print books	22%	63%	13%	3%
Ebooks	17%	57%	16%	10%
Audiobooks	13%	58%	14%	15%

Almost half of all readers read between 1 and 5 books in 2021 (49%). Audiobook listeners were more likely than readers of all other formats to read between 6 and 11 books (30%), but they were less likely than all other readers to read 50 or more books (6%).

Number of books read in 2021, by all readers and by format



Devices, apps, and accessibility features

Tablets and smartphones are the two main ways most readers read their ebooks or listened to audiobooks in 2021.

Devices used to read ebooks and listen to audiobooks

	Ebook	Audiobook
Tablet	29%	21%
Dedicated e-reader	18%	6%
Smartphone	29%	42%
Computer	19%	16%
Smart speaker	-	3%
Car stereo	-	7%
CD/tape player	-	3%
Braille display/terminal	1%	-
Other	3%	1%

For ebook readers, smartphone use is catching up to tablets. In 2020, 37% of ebook readers used their tablet, which is down to 29% in 2021. Smartphone use has risen on the other hand, from 25% in 2020 to 29% in 2021. Computer and e-reader use have remained steady.

Smartphone use for audiobooks has also skyrocketed from 28% in 2020 to 42% in 2021.

In terms of apps, Amazon Kindle is the most popular for reading ebooks (35%) and YouTube is most popular for listening to audiobooks (29%).

Most popular apps used to read ebooks and listen to audiobooks

	Ebook	Audiobook
Amazon Kindle	35%	18%
Kobo	18%	9%
OverDrive/Libby	9%	8%
Google Books	16%	-
Apple Books	13%	12%
Adobe Reader or Digital Editions	12%	-
Internet browser	21%	16%
None of the above	15%	11%
Audible	-	21%
Audiobooks.com	-	9%
Google Play	-	15%
YouTube	-	29%

Part of the appeal of ebooks and audiobooks are their features that let readers and listeners customize their reading experience for comfort or to accommodate accessibility needs. We asked which of these features readers used.

The most used feature was night display for reading in dim or low lighting closely followed by using the table of contents and adjusting the font size of the book.

Ebook features used by readers

	Used	Sometimes	Not used
I adjust the screen magnification/zoom to be larger.	23%	40%	33%
I adjust font size or spacing to increase the text size or space out letters/lines.	25%	42%	29%
I turn on the night display when reading in dim/low lighting.	34%	33%	26%
I use the reading mode on a tablet or smartphone.	27%	31%	33%
I change the text orientation from portrait to landscape.	14%	33%	46%
I turn on the screen reader to use the text-to-speech feature or a Braille device.	10%	19%	64%
I change text or background colour(s) for a brighter contrast.	19%	38%	37%
I use the search function.	24%	41%	29%
I use the table of contents.	26%	40%	29%
I use the Bookmark button.	28%	34%	32%
I use reference page numbers or the percentage metric.	21%	27%	41%
I don't know how to use most or all of these features.	18%	31%	40%

Readers ages 18 to 44 were much more likely than older readers to use the ebook features in the list above. Which may be due to their ease of use of technology — they know how to find and access these features.

In terms of audiobook features, listeners used speakers or hands-free mode to listen to their books most often. Replaying parts of the audiobook to re-listen to them and listening to a sample of the audiobook before listening to the whole thing were a close second and third.

Audiobook features used by readers

	Used	Sometimes	Not used
I set a timer to stop listening after a certain amount of time.	16%	28%	50%
I listen at an increased/faster or decreased/slower speed.	19%	35%	42%
I listen to a sample of the audiobook before I listen to the full audio.	29%	39%	28%
I replay parts of the audiobook to re-listen to.	27%	45%	23%
I use the table of contents or chapter list to read ahead.	24%	36%	37%
I reference the chapter or “minutes left”.	26%	35%	32%
I use the Bookmark feature.	27%	37%	31%
I use the speaker, Bluetooth, or hands-free feature.	39%	36%	21%
I don’t know how to use most or all of these features.	17%	31%	44%

When asked what they would like the book industry to know, 1% of Canadian readers talked about the value of having books available in a larger font size:

“My friend struggles with her vision due to diabetes and having e-readers, which offer larger font or audiobooks, helps her greatly.”

“Large print should always be an option for consumers.”

“Larger font is easier reading.”

Subjects and authors

Print book readers are choosing to read more adult Non-Fiction in 2021 than they did in 2020 — 69% in 2021 up from 61% in 2020. Young Adult books continue to rise across all formats as well when compared with 2020 numbers. Adult Fiction remained fairly flat, but lost some of its audiobook share to adult Non-Fiction.

Subject breakdown by format, 2020-2021

	Print books		Ebooks		Audiobooks	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
Adult fiction	74%	75%	68%	69%	63%	61%
Adult non-fiction	61%	69%	60%	63%	64%	65%
Young adult books	14%	19%	12%	15%	11%	15%
Children’s books	9%	12%	8%	8%	10%	9%

To get even more granular, we asked readers to choose up to three Fiction genres or Non-Fiction subjects that they read in each particular format.

For Fiction readers, the most popular genre across all formats was Mysteries or Thrillers. Science Fiction was second for both ebook and audiobook readers, but print readers slightly preferred Historical Fiction.

Even though Mysteries or Thrillers were the top pick for audiobook readers, this genre was down a significant amount from 2020 when 57% of ebook readers chose it as one of their top three compared to 48% in 2021.

Fiction genres read by format

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
Mysteries or Thrillers	57%	48%	25%
Science Fiction	30%	32%	16%
Historical Fiction	32%	27%	10%
Romance	28%	28%	13%
Fantasy	29%	28%	10%
Literary Fiction	23%	20%	10%
Short Stories	17%	21%	9%
Chick Lit	6%	8%	3%
Comics or graphic novels	3%	2%	N/A
Other fiction subjects	1%	5%	0%
None	13%	13%	3%

For Non-Fiction readers, History books were the top choice for ebook and audiobook readers, however, they were in second place after Biographies or Memoirs for print readers. Ebook and audiobook readers were also bigger Business subject readers than their print book counterparts.

True Crime readership was up among print book readers in 2021, at 29% in 2021 compared with 24% in 2020. Biography or Memoir reading was down among ebook readers year over year from 35% in 2020 to 30% in 2021. Business books were up for audiobook listeners to 18% in 2021 from 14% in 2020. But Health and Fitness books were down from 22% in 2020 to 17% in 2021.

Non-Fiction subjects read by format

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
History	41%	33%	31%
Biographies or Memoirs	42%	30%	25%
True Crime	29%	28%	28%
Self-Help	23%	25%	27%
Cookbooks	26%	22%	11%
Health or Fitness	20%	22%	17%
Business	15%	21%	18%
Personal Finance	13%	16%	17%
Comics or graphic novels	7%	6%	N/A
Other non-fiction subjects	3%	4%	3%
None	10%	10%	3%

If you want to know more about how specific subjects are performing, read the [subject spotlight series](#) on the BookNet Canada blog.

Moving away from genres and subjects, we asked readers if they had read any of the following types of books regardless of genre or subject:

- books that have been made into movies or TV shows (42%);
- books with a sequel (duology, trilogy, series, etc.) (39%);
- comics, manga, or graphic novels (18%);
- books written in a language other than English (15%); or
- poetry, books in verse, or plays (13%).

A quarter of respondents (25%) had not read any of the above types of books.

Circling back to the 15% of readers who had read a book in a language other than English, the top three languages were: French (36%), Spanish (11%), and Mandarin (10%).

Diversity and representation in books

We asked a series of questions about readers' opinions on topics of diversity and representation in books. Nearly all readers, 90%, agreed (58%) or sometimes agreed (32%) that it is important that books should be representative of a variety of experiences. Many also agreed (32%) or sometimes agreed (39%) that it is important that books about a group or culture be written by people from that group or culture.

What's more, readers again overwhelmingly agreed (52%) or sometimes agreed (34%) that it is important that authors accurately represent their material through research, fact-checking, and/or hiring reviewers and sensitivity or beta readers.

Most readers agreed (42%) or sometimes agreed (30%) that a greater variety of authors should be published and stocked in stores.

We wanted to know what kinds of books readers had read in the previous year.

Readers read books by or about:

- Canadians/locals (28%);
- Black, Indigenous, or person/people of colour (19%);
- people who belong to religious minorities (14%);
- people with immigrant status (13%);
- disabled people (10%); and
- LGBTQIA+ (8)%.

A small group of readers were unsure if they had read any of the books above (13%) and just under half said they had not read any of the books listed above (45%).

Apart from the percentage of readers who had read books by or about Canadians/locals and LGBTQIA+ people, which stayed similar to the percentages in 2020, most other categories increased year over year.

Representation in books by year

	2020	2021
Books by or about Canadians/locals	27%	28%
Books by or about Black, Indigenous, or people of colour	10%	19%
Books by or about LGBTQIA+	8%	8%
Books by or about people with immigrant status	10%	13%
Books by or about disabled people	6%	10%
Books by or about people who belong to religious minorities	8%	14%

When asked what they would like the book industry to know, 4% of Canadian readers wanted more diversity in books:

“They need to put BIPOC at the forefront of their publishing. It is hard to search for authors and topics that are relatable to BIPOC.”

“More diverse subjects.”

“More stories about marginalized communities written BY marginalized people.”

“More children’s stories related to Canadian First Nations.”

“I would like to get books printed in my language.”

About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada acknowledges that its staff, board, and partners work upon the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat Indigenous Peoples, the original nations of this land. We endorse the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and support an ongoing shift from gatekeeping to spacemaking in the book industry.

The book industry has long been an industry of gatekeeping. Anyone who works at any stage of the book supply chain carries a responsibility to serve readers by publishing, promoting, and supplying works that represent the wide extent of human experiences and identities, in all its complicated intersectionality. We, at BookNet Canada, are committed to working with our partners in the industry as we move towards a framework that supports “spacemaking,” which ensures that marginalized creators and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute, work, and lead.

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.

BookNet Canada has extensive research available on our [website](#), both free and for purchase.

- [Canadian Book Consumer 2021](#): results from our quarterly surveying of Canadians about their book buying and borrowing habits in 2021.

- [Canadian Book Market 2021](#): a comprehensive guide to the Canadian market with in-depth category data. It's an indispensable tool for publishers, booksellers, librarians, authors, and anyone interested or involved in the Canadian book industry.
- [The State of Independent Bookselling in Canada 2020](#): new insight into independent bookstores in Canada, with information on operating expenses and processes, revenue and profit margins, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on bookselling, and more.

We also feature our research on the [BookNet Canada Podcast](#). To stay updated on current and future research, subscribe to our monthly [BNC Research newsletter](#). To stay up-to-date on all BookNet Canada news and information, [subscribe to our weekly eNews](#).

If you have any questions or comments about this or other studies, please contact the research team at research@booknetcanada.ca.

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.”

Learn more at booknetcanada.ca.

Appendix A: Demographics

Who are the Canadians we surveyed? A total of 1,282 Canadians participated in our survey, of whom 1,000 were readers.

The majority of our survey respondents, for both Canadians and readers, lived in a city or urban area (47% for both groups) in central Canada (59% of Canadians and 58% of readers).

Survey respondents by Canadian region

	Canadians	Readers
Atlantic	7%	7%
Central	59%	58%
Prairies	20%	20%
West Coast and Northern Territories	14%	14%

Survey respondents by population density

	Canadians	Readers
City or urban area	47%	47%
Suburban area	30%	31%
Small town or rural area	23%	22%

For both groups, a slight majority were ages 30 to 44, accounting for 23% of all Canadian respondents and 25% of readers.

Age distribution of respondents

	Canadians	Readers
18-29	17%	18%
30-44	23%	25%
45-54	19%	19%
55-64	21%	18%
65+	20%	20%

Of all the Canadians we surveyed, 52% identified as a woman and 48% as a man. For the group of readers, 54% identified as a woman, 45% as a man, and 1% as non-binary or gender non-conforming.

Gender distribution of respondents

	Canadians	Readers
Woman	52%	54%
Man	48%	45%
Non-binary or gender non-conforming	0%	1%

More than half of our survey respondents (56% of both Canadians and readers) identified themselves as belonging to a non-dominant identity. Another 44% of Canadians and readers did not identify with any of the identities listed below.

Respondent identities

	Canadians	Readers
BIPOC	6%	6%
Disabled	11%	11%
LGBTQIA+	6%	6%
Working class / low income earner	23%	23%
Immigrant	13%	14%
Religious minority	6%	7%
Prefer not to say	4%	4%

Most Canadians and readers lived in a household with an annual income between \$50,000 and \$74,999 a year, at 19% for both groups.

Distribution of respondent household income

	Canadians	Readers
Under \$15,000	7%	6%
\$15,000-\$24,999	10%	10%
\$25,000-\$34,999	9%	9%
\$35,000-\$49,999	14%	14%
\$50,000-\$74,999	19%	19%
\$75,000-\$99,999	14%	13%
\$100,000-\$149,999	15%	16%
\$150,000 and over	6%	6%
Prefer not to say	7%	7%

More than half of respondents, for both Canadians and readers, have earned either a college or university degree (53% of Canadians and 54% of readers).

Highest level of education received by respondents

	Canadians	Readers
College or university	53%	54%
Graduate or professional	14%	16%
High school or GED	32%	31%
Apprenticeship	4%	3%
Trade school	7%	7%
Prefer not to say / Other	2%	2%

At home, the majority of our respondents were responsible for providing care for someone, at 54% of Canadians and 57% of readers. Almost one third of both groups care for a pet or animal (31% of Canadians and 32% of readers). Another 46% of Canadians and 43% of readers are not care providers.

Care responsibilities of respondents

	Canadians	Readers
Yes, a parent/elder	8%	9%
Yes, a child/young adult	22%	24%
Yes, someone / a relationship not listed	6%	6%
Yes, a pet/animal	31%	32%