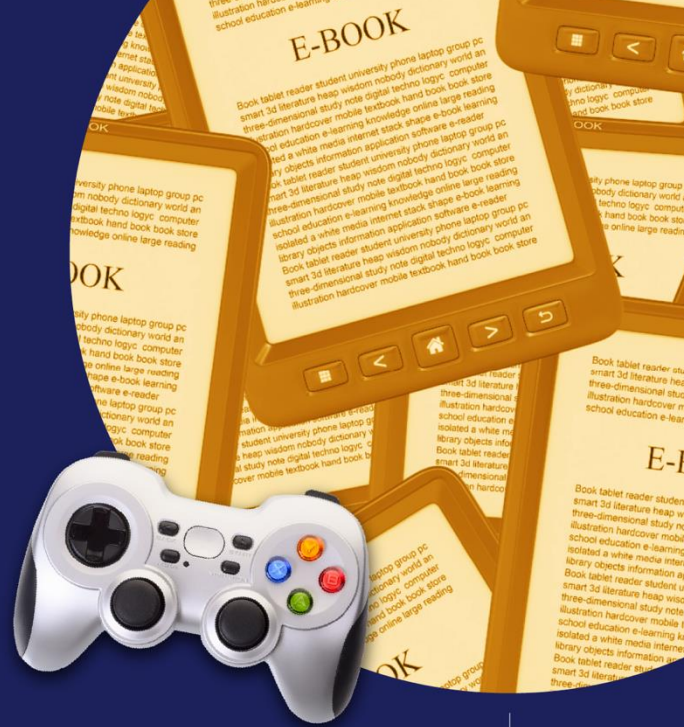


THE
READING
AGENCY



State of the Nation's

Adult Reading:

2025 Overview

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Introduction

New research from The Reading Agency reveals a gap between reader identity and reading engagement, with data showing that while millions of UK adults are reading every day, half still resist calling themselves ‘readers’.¹

Our annual State of the Nation’s Adult Reading study finds that 53% of UK adults now describe themselves as regular readers – up slightly from 50% last year.² Yet 47% of adults reject the label of ‘regular reader,’ even though most of them are reading at least once a week. Our research shows that even amongst those who say they don’t read regularly now and have never been a reader, 77% regularly consume text in other forms, including news and magazine articles, cookbooks, in-game narratives, or graphic novels.³

Younger adults are driving this growth in engagement, but the way they read looks very different from older generations, with digital reading formats coming top of the list for younger adults and print remaining the preferred reading format for older adults. This indicates that younger adults are also immersed in reading every day – just not always in the long-form, print-based formats most closely associated with being ‘a reader.’

When those who describe themselves as non-readers do pick up a book or listen to an audiobook, they often immerse themselves for longer than a self-identified regular reader, averaging over an hour per session. This suggests that barriers to reading are more about self-perception, time and focus than a lack of interest.

About the research

The Reading Agency’s work with adults aims to create a world of opportunity where everyone can access the benefits of reading. Reading makes us more aware and informed; it makes us more empathetic and understanding of other people and cultures; it supports our health and wellbeing; and it increases our ability to learn new skills and communicate our ideas more effectively.⁴

For 23 years, The Reading Agency has built a robust evidence base relating to the reading habits of people of all ages across the UK, supported by extensive research and evaluation. This report explores the state of adult reading habits in 2025, including the ways UK adults are engaging with a range of reading formats, the barriers they face in engaging with reading, and the positive wellbeing links of a regular reading habit.

¹ Reading engagement measures and survey developed by The Reading Agency. The research was conducted by Censuswide with 4,000 UK nationally representative consumers aged 16+, between 11.04.25 to 17.04.25. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council. More details can be found in the Methodology.

² ‘Regular reading’ defined in the question as ‘at least once a week’.

³ Proportion of self-identified ‘non-reader’ respondents who reported engaging with any of the following reading formats on a weekly basis: physical/print books, eBooks, audiobooks, printed newspapers and magazines, digital articles, graphic novels and comic books, webcomics and digital zines, cookbooks/recipes, fan fiction, video/computer game narrative, social media posts and subtitles.

⁴ The Reading Agency (2025) [Reading Facts](#)

Key findings

Just under half of UK adults say they aren't readers

- 53% of UK adults consider themselves regular readers, an improvement from 2024 (50%), but still an overall downward trend compared to 2015 (58%).
- Reading confidence is highly correlated with reader identity. Only 4% of adults with self-identified 'poor' or 'very poor' reading ability are regular readers, compared to 23% of 'average' readers, 48% of 'good' readers and 73% of 'excellent' readers.

A crisis not in reading, but in reader identity and time

- However, over three-quarters of those who define themselves as never having been a reader actually read some form of text weekly (77%), and nearly all self-identified lapsed readers read on at least a weekly basis (94%).
- Non-readers report lower levels of frequency in reading books, audiobooks and eBooks, but similar levels of reading to self-defined readers in other formats, such as online articles, print newspapers and magazine and graphic novels and comic books.
- When non-readers and lapsed readers do sit down to read, they engage with all formats except print books for a longer period than regular readers do.

Focus and distractions

- 55% of all UK adults say they read less than they plan to. Even amongst those who have never been readers, 42% say they read less than they intend.
- 36% of non-readers and lapsed readers struggle to focus for more than a few minutes when reading, compared to only 21% of regular readers.
- 61% of lapsed readers struggle to read because there are too many distractions, compared to only 40% of readers and 31% of non-readers.

Reading enjoyment varies by reading format

- 75% of UK adults say they enjoy reading – regardless of their current level of engagement.
- 'Traditional' reading formats – meaning long-form, usually print-based formats – elicit the highest levels of enjoyment. 75% of those who engage say they highly enjoy print books, 62% enjoy eBooks, 58% enjoy audiobooks, 58% enjoy print news or magazines, and 57% enjoy reading social media posts.

Reading and wellbeing

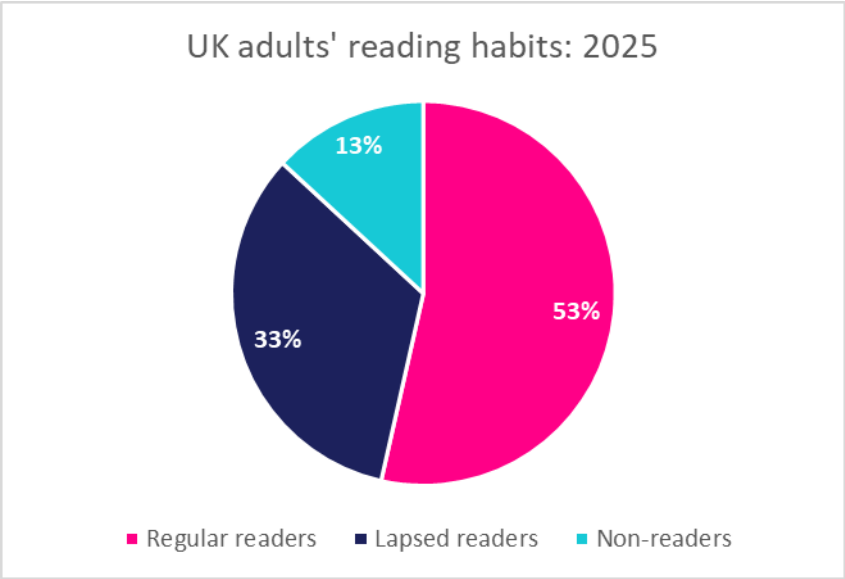
- Compared to non-readers, people who consider themselves regular readers are 86% more likely to report feeling a sense of belong to their community, 58% more likely to report feeling generally happy, 51% more likely to report finding it easy to relax, and 45% more likely to report sleeping well.
- Regular readers are also 35% more likely to say they don't feel lonely and 32% more likely say they don't feel anxious or depressed.

Who considers themselves a regular reader in 2025?

Reader identity

Just over half of UK adults (53%) now say they regularly read for pleasure, with 13% reporting that they don't read regularly now and have never been a regular reader.⁵ Around a third of UK adults (33%) identify as 'lapsed' readers, meaning that they used to read regularly but no longer do so. A breakdown of the nation's reading habits in 2025 is visualised in Figure 1.⁶

Figure 1. 'When thinking about reading regularly for pleasure (i.e., at least once a week), what statement is true for you, if any at all?'



The data shows both an age and gender gap in reader identity. Young adults aged 16-24 are the least likely to consider themselves a 'regular reader', with 61% identifying as either lapsed readers (44%) or non-readers (17%)⁷ – the highest of any age group. Men are more likely than women to identify as non-readers, with 15% of male respondents identifying as non-readers compared to 10% of women.⁸

However, the findings reveal a small but encouraging change in UK adults' reading habits in the last year: while the proportion of those who consider themselves regular readers is still relatively low, it has increased by 6% compared to 2024 (from 50% to 53%).⁹ Similarly, there has been a 13% decrease in the proportion of non-readers and a 6% decrease in the proportion of lapsed readers.

⁵ N=4,000 unless indicated otherwise.

⁶ 'Regular readers' defined as those who responded 'I regularly read for pleasure'; 'Lapsed readers' as 'I used to read regularly for pleasure, but I rarely or never read nowadays'; and 'Non-readers' as 'I don't read for pleasure now, and have never been a regular reader'.

⁷ N=521 throughout the report.

⁸ N=1,939; N=2,051, respectively, throughout the report.

⁹ Data comparison to 2024 drawn from an online survey by Censuswide, with 2,003 UK nationally representative consumers 16+, between 2-4 April 2024. For more, please see The Reading Agency (2024) [State of the Nations Adult Reading 2024 Overview-Report](#)

The relative increase in regular readers occurs across all age groups, but it is particularly pronounced amongst adults aged between 16 and 34. For instance, the proportion of regular readers aged 24-35 rose by 31%, while lapsed and non-readers fell by 19% and 15%, respectively.¹⁰ Similarly, the proportion of regular readers aged 16-24 rose by 22% while the proportion of non-readers dropped by 29%.

What and how are people reading?

Widened definitions of reading

In 2025 we asked about reading engagement in a new and explicitly wide way, asking directly about experiences of reading in a range of formats:

- physical/print books
- eBooks
- audiobooks
- printed newspapers and magazines
- digital articles
- graphic novels and comic books
- webcomics and digital zines
- cookbooks/recipes
- fan fiction
- video/computer game narrative
- social media posts and subtitles

By asking respondents to consider each individual formats in turn, we can see a very different picture of reading habits start to emerge. The data suggests that people are reading more frequently than expected, but this is not always in 'traditional' ways. While long-form content and print books remain one of the most frequently used formats for reading, people also often engage with screen-mediated reading in the form of social media posts, digital articles and subtitles/captions. This data problematises the tension between 'screens vs reading', instead highlighting the ways screens can be used to engage with and enable reading.

This section outlines how often UK adults choose to read in each of these different formats, how long they spend on an average reading session, and how much they enjoy their experience of reading each format.

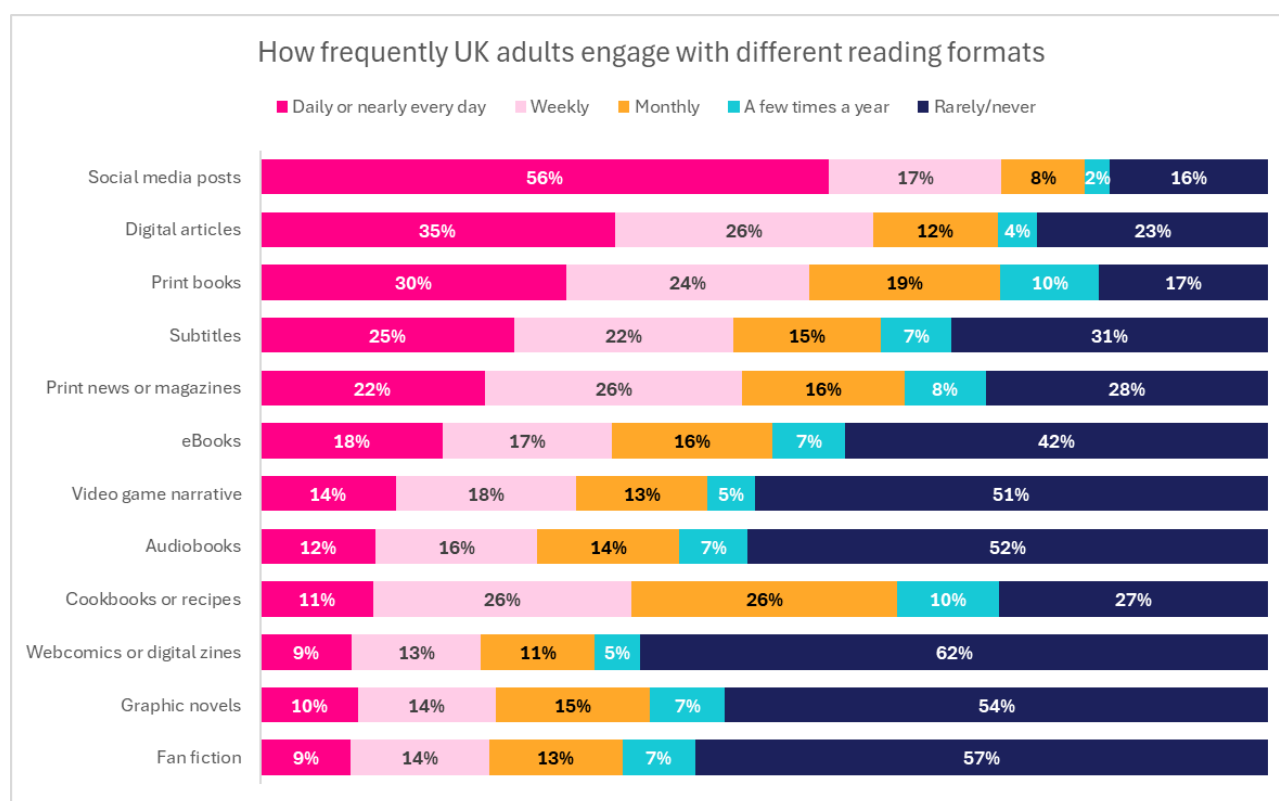
Frequency of reading in different formats

We asked our survey respondents to share how often, and for how long, they engaged with a range of different reading formats, including print-based and digital formats. Across all formats, social media posts are read by far the most frequently: 47% of UK adults read them at least once a day, and 74% at least once a week. Figure 2 below shows the proportion of

¹⁰ N=655 throughout the report.

respondents who engage with each format daily or nearly every day, weekly, monthly, a few times a year, and rarely/never.¹¹

Figure 2. Frequency of reading, broken down by format



The data also highlights a generational gap in engagement with different reading formats. Among 16–24-year-olds, the most frequently read formats are social media posts (75%), subtitles (71%), and digital articles (54%). For those aged 25–34, the pattern is similar, with digital formats at the top of the list: social media posts (82%), subtitles (70%), and digital articles (68%).

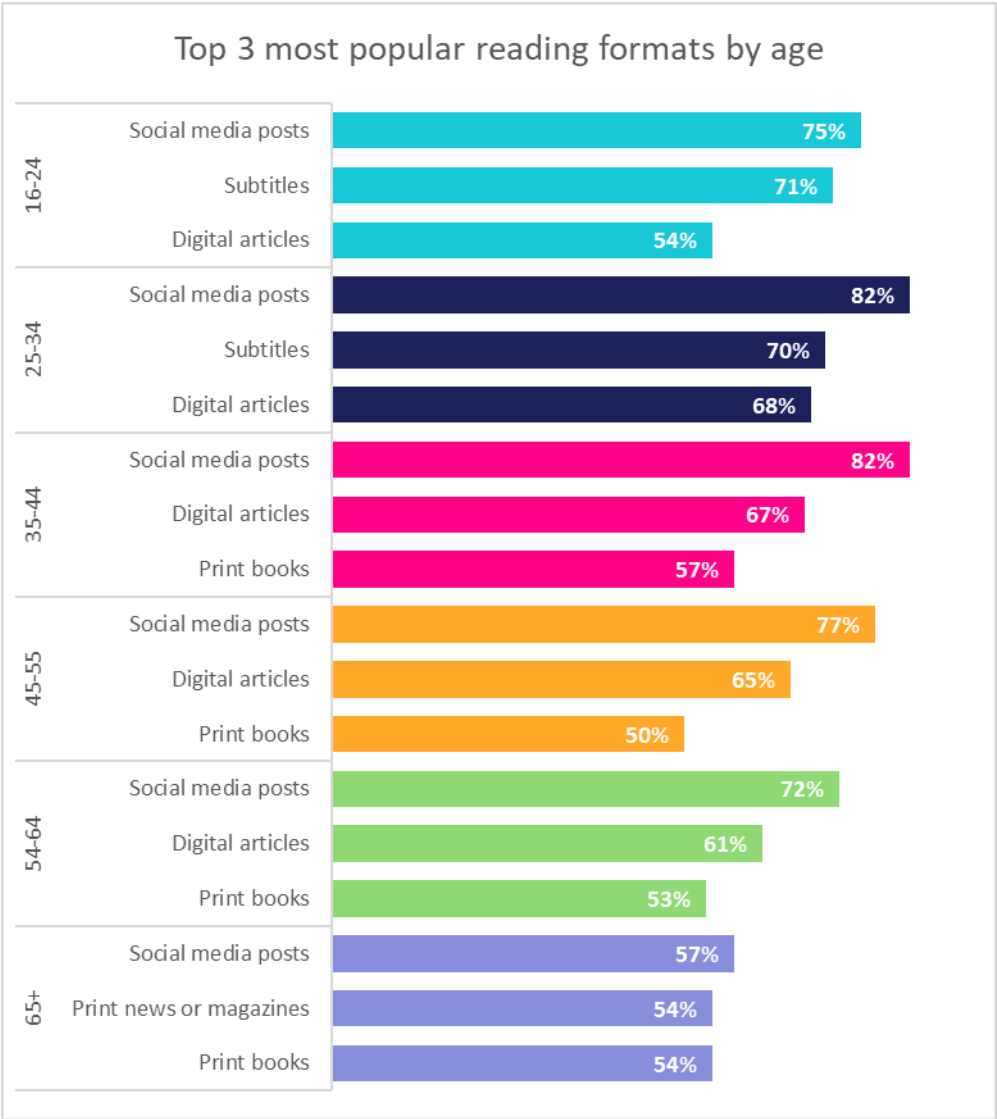
By contrast, for adults over 35 years old, print books enter the top three. Among those aged 65+, traditional formats dominate, with two of the three most frequently read formats being print-based and long-form: print books (54%) and print news or magazines (54%) rank alongside social media posts (57%).¹² Figure 3 on the next page highlights the percentage of respondents in each age category engaging with the format across a year.¹³

¹¹ 'Daily or nearly every day' = ≥4 times/week; 'Weekly' = 1-3 times/week; 'Monthly' = every 2-8 weeks; 'A few times a year' = every 3-12 months; 'Rarely/never' = less than once a year or never.

¹² N=754 throughout the report.

¹³ N=521, N=655, N=642, N=627, N=801, N=754, respectively, throughout the report.

Figure 3. Top three most frequently read formats, by age group



Time spent reading in different formats

We also asked people to tell us how long they spent reading each of these formats in a typical reading session. We found that long-form formats, such as print books, eBooks and audiobooks, tended to involve longer individual reading sessions overall. However, people engaged with these formats less frequently. Short-form content, by contrast, was consumed in ‘short burst’ sessions of typically less than an hour, but people engaged with them more regularly. Figure 4 on the next page shows how reading time and frequency compare across different formats.

Figure 4. Each dot represents a reading format, showing people's average length of engagement in minutes (X-axis) along with average frequency of engagement in days per week (Y-axis).

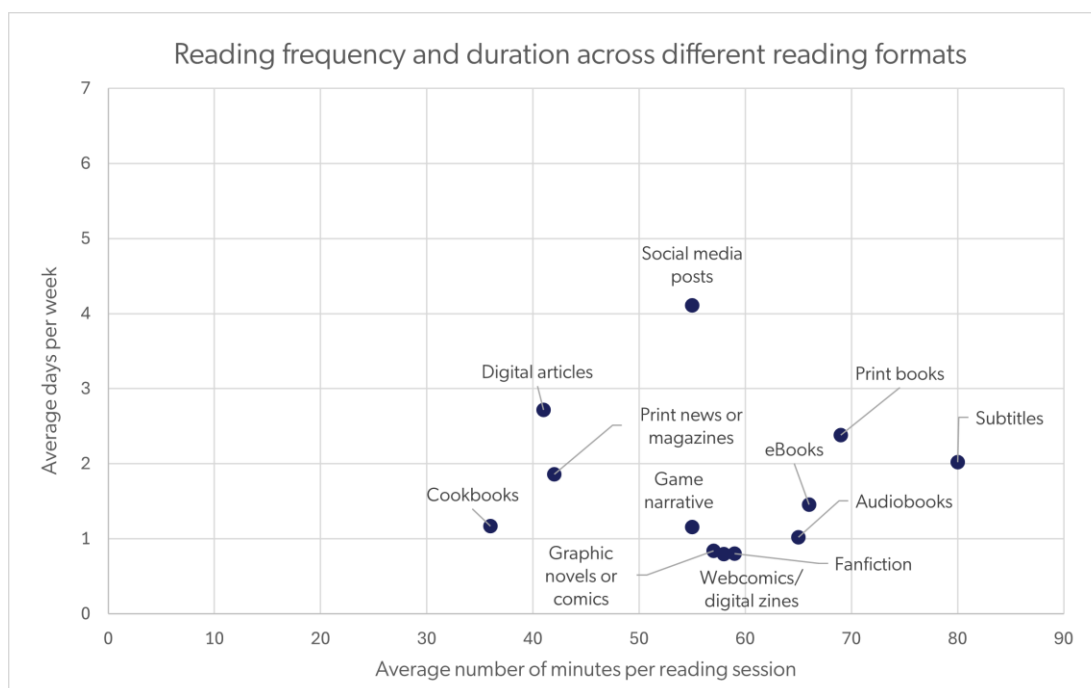


Figure 5 below provides the detailed average reading time and frequency figures, allowing for more precise comparisons alongside Figure 4.

Figure 5. Average reading time (minutes per session) and average reading frequency (times per week)

Reading format	Average reading	Average reading frequency
Subtitles	80	2.0
Print books	69	2.4
eBooks	66	1.5
Audiobooks	65	1.0
Fanfiction	59	0.8
Webcomics or digital zines	58	0.8
Graphic novels/comics	57	0.8
Video game narrative	55	1.2
Social media posts	55	4.1
Print news or magazines	42	1.9
Digital articles	41	2.7
Cookbooks or recipes	36	1.2

Over the course of a year, short but frequent reading sessions add up: the average UK adult spends 195 total hours – or over eight full days – per year reading social media posts, and 143 hours – almost 6 full days – reading print books.¹⁴

The average adult in the UK spends

195 hours	per year reading social media posts
143 hours	per year reading print books
140 hours	per year reading subtitles
97 hours	per year reading digital articles
88 hours	per year reading print news
83 hours	per year reading eBooks
54 hours	per year reading in-game narrative
52 hours	per year reading audiobooks
42 hours	per year reading graphic novels/comic books
41 hours	per year reading fan-fiction
40 hours	per year reading web comics/digital zines
37 hours	per year reading cookbooks/recipes

Breaking the data down by age and gender reveals further insights on what's engaging the nation in reading. In a single reading session, both women and men both spend the most time reading subtitles, print books, and eBooks, but overall women spend longer with each format:

- Women: 1 hr 27 mins on subtitles, 1 hr 14 mins on print books, and 1 hr 8 mins on eBooks
- Men: 1 hr 13 mins on subtitles, 1 hr 3 mins on print books, and 1 hr 3 mins on eBooks

While those aged 16-24 spent significantly more time reading subtitles and social media posts than any other age group (1 hr 43 mins and 1 hr 28 mins, respectively), this is also true of the length of time they spend reading print books (1 hr 25 mins).

¹⁴ Average length of time spent reading each format per year calculated by the average time spent per session in hours and minutes multiplied by average frequency of reading each format.

Are people reading less or reading differently?

Disconnect between reader identity and reading engagement

The findings outlined in the previous section raise the question then of where this adult reading crisis might be situated – are we recording a crisis in adults’ engagement with reading, or in their perception of what constitutes ‘a reader’? Our data shows that there is a disparity between how many people *identify* as readers, and how frequently they *actively engage* with different reading formats.

In 2024, just 27% of UK adults told us that they read for pleasure on a daily basis.¹⁵ Asking about reading frequency broken down by individual and specific format, we can see that 70% of UK adults are choosing to read in some way on a daily basis. Even when excluding social media posts and subtitles, 49% of UK adults are choosing to read on a daily basis.

When analysing these patterns in relation to reader identity, we start to see an even greater gap emerge between people’s perceptions of themselves as ‘a reader’ compared with the formats they engage with on a weekly basis.

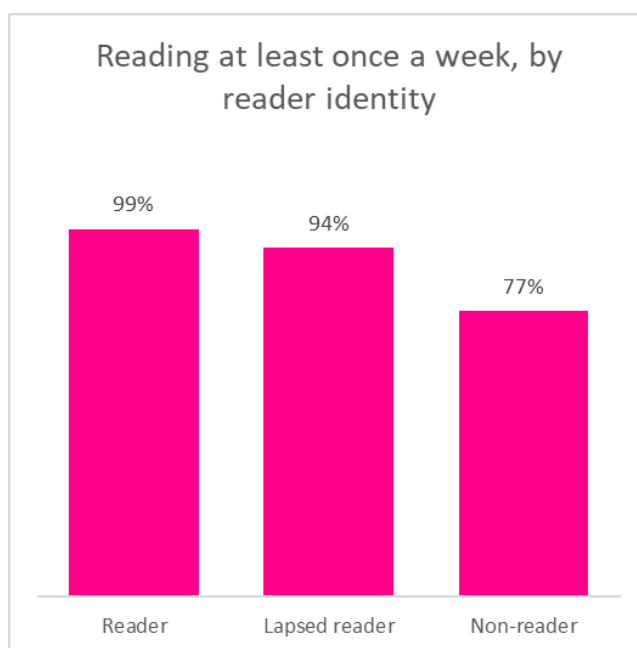
While only 53% of UK adults identify themselves as ‘reading regularly’ – meaning at least once a week – when analysing reading engagement in detail, the data shows that 82% of UK adults are choosing to read in some format at least once a week.

For the 33% who identify as ‘lapsed readers’, the data shows that 94% are reading in some format at least weekly. Even amongst the 13% self-identified ‘non-readers’, over three-quarters (77%) are also engaging with a reading format on at least a weekly basis.¹⁶

Furthermore, many lapsed readers actually read at similar levels of frequency to regular readers, in formats such as digital articles, fan fiction, cookbooks and recipes, subtitles, in-game narratives and social media posts, with significant proportions of non-readers doing the same.

The data also reveals a clear set of patterns in the ways people of different reader identities engage with different reading formats. Looking at weekly reading habits, for example, almost 4 in 5 (79%) regular readers pick up a print book, with almost 3 in 5 (58%) reading print newspapers or magazines, and just under half (48%) choosing eBooks.

Figure 6. Weekly engagement with any reading format, by reader identity



¹⁵ The Reading Agency (2024) [State of the Nations Adult Reading 2024 Overview-Report](#)

¹⁶ Regular readers N= 2,136; Lapsed readers N= 1,344; Non-readers N=507; throughout the report.

By contrast, lapsed readers are more likely to engage with short-form content or digital formats on a weekly basis, with almost 3 in 5 (57%) reading digital articles, around 1 in 3 reading cookbooks or recipes (34%) and in-game narrative (32%), and 1 in 5 reading fan fiction (21%) or webcomics and digital zines (20%).

Non-readers reflect similar patterns, with an even greater likelihood of choosing to read digital formats: 56% read social media posts, around 1 in 3 read digital articles (35%) or subtitles (31%), and almost 1 in 5 (19%) read in-game narrative on computer and video games.

These patterns are further reflected in the average length of time these groups spend reading each of these formats in a single reading session:

- Regular readers spend the most time reading subtitles (1 hr 13 mins), print books (1 hr 11 mins), and eBooks (1 hr 2 mins).
- Lapsed readers spend the most time reading subtitles (1 hr 27 mins), audiobooks (1 hr 9 mins), and eBooks (1 hr 9 mins).
- Non-readers spend the most time reading webcomics or digital zines (1 hr 35 mins), subtitles (1 hr 34 mins), and eBooks (1 hr 28 mins).

Taking these two datasets into consideration together reveals new insights into our understanding of reader behaviour. While those who consider themselves regular readers do read more frequently on average and spend longer individual periods of time reading print books, the data shows that when lapsed and non-readers do take time to read, they immerse themselves for a longer period of time in every format except print books than regular readers do.

These findings point towards the potential value of meeting people where they are, shifting mindsets around what constitutes 'reading' to more effectively support those who are already reading by choice in a variety of formats to feel a connection to a reader identity.

The charts on the following pages offer a full picture of these varied reading engagement patterns. Figure 7 highlights engagement with each reading format on at least a weekly basis, broken down by reader identity type.

Figure 8 provides a breakdown of the average length of time UK adults reported spending during a single session of engaging with each reading format, as split by reader identity.

Figure 7. Levels of weekly engagement with individual reading formats, by reader identity

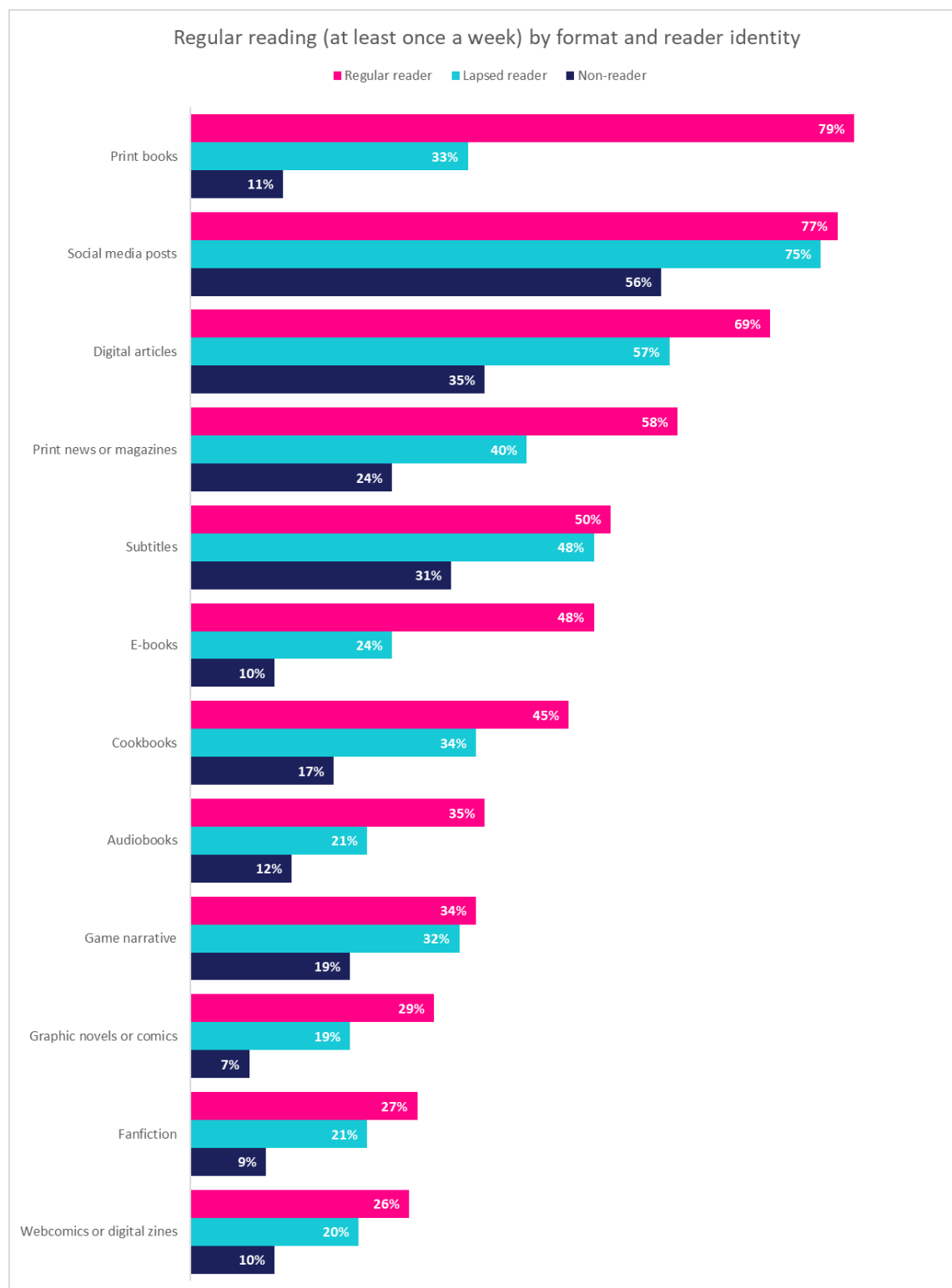
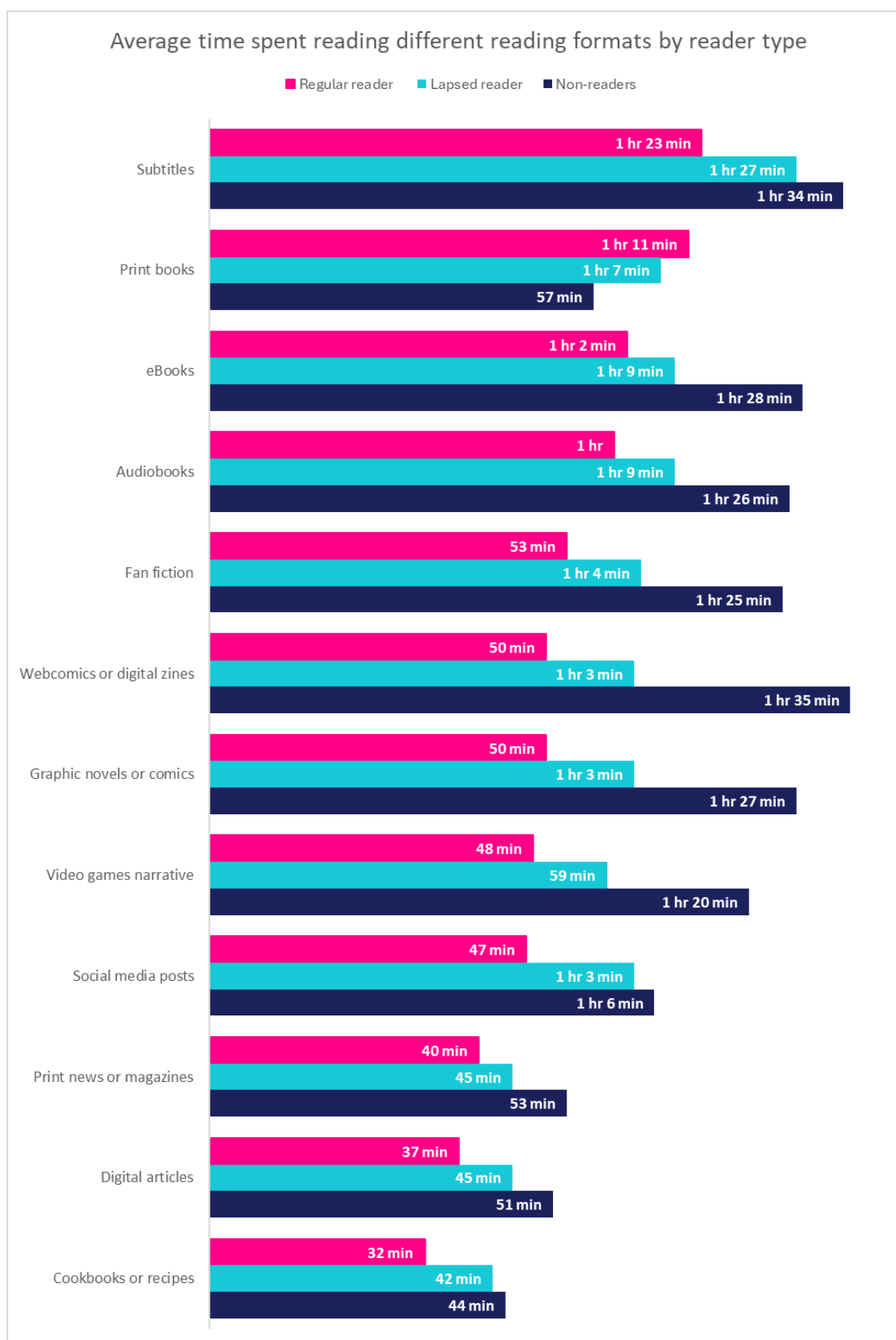


Figure 8. Average length of time spent reading different formats in a single session of reading that format, by reader type



Discovering digitally: Choosing new reading material

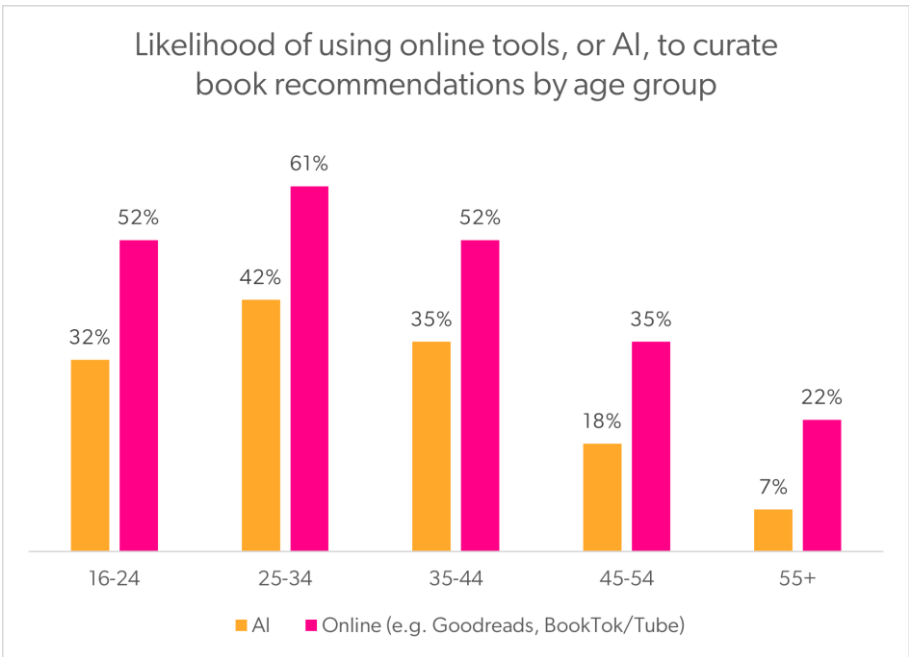
This year, we also asked people how they find inspiration around what to read next, with a focus on understanding digital entry points into reading. 39% of UK adults find reading recommendations online using tools such as Goodreads, BookTok or BookTube, rising to just under half (48%) of those who identify as regular readers.

More than half of UK adults aged 16-44 told us they find reading recommendations online, with 25-34-year-olds most likely to use online tools (61%). Men are also more likely to do so than women, with 41% of men using online tools to find reading recommendations, compared to 38% of women.

In addition, more than 1 in 5 UK adults (22%) now curate book recommendations using AI, rising to 42% of those aged 25-34. Once more, men are more likely to use AI to curate book recommendations than women, with 28% of men doing so vs 17% of women.

Figure 9 below provides a breakdown of generational engagement with online tools and AI to curate book recommendations, with use of both types of tools peaking amongst 25-34-year-olds.

Figure 9. Use of online tools or AI to curate book recommendations by age



Our 2024 State of the Nation data similarly showed the ways UK adults are pursuing reading material first encountered through a digital format. Watching films and TV shows and listening to podcasts/audiobooks was found to provide a route into reading for many people, especially lapsed readers. For example, 2 in 5 lapsed readers (41%) said films and TV shows had got them interested in reading books and 28% said the same about podcasts

or audiobooks.¹⁷ Even 1 in 5 non-readers (19%) agreed that films and TV shows had piqued their interest in reading.¹⁸

This highlights the potential pathways between engagement with digital content, and related short-form digital reading material such as subtitles, into reading books and other long-form content in digital or print formats.

Barriers to reading

Despite these fresh insights around the ways people are engaging with reading material in new ways – and using digital formats to do so – the data upholds the finding that UK adults are engaging less frequently with long-form content. They are also struggling to see themselves as readers or to fit reading into their lives for a variety of reasons.

Our data shows that, regardless of existing reading habits, there is a widespread desire to read more: 55% of all UK adults say they read less than they plan to. Even among those who say they have never been a regular reader, 42% told us they read less than they intend.

Building on findings that emerged from our 2024 survey around what’s stopping people from reading, we explored a number of key barriers in greater detail: the impacts of limited time, declining attention spans and focus, the cost-of-living crisis, low reading confidence, learning differences, and language barriers such as speaking English as a second or additional language.

Limited time

Only 46% of UK adults feel like they have a lot of free time, and 26% – or 14.5 million adults – disagree with feeling like they have a lot of free time.¹⁹ Lack of free time is cited as the top reason (24%) for those who report reading less compared to three years ago.²⁰

Our data shows a correlation between the two. Adults who feel like they have a lot of free time are 25% more likely to be regular readers.²¹ By contrast, adults who strongly disagree that they have a lot of free time are 50% more likely to be non-readers.²² Those who disagree that they feel like they have a lot of free time are 41% more likely to be lapsed readers.²³

Adults who feel they do not have a lot of free time are also more likely to have identified changes in their reading patterns over the past three years:

- They are 29% less likely to report reading more over the last three years and 94% more likely to report reading less.

¹⁷ N=699

¹⁸ N=291

¹⁹ Extrapolation calculated using the percentage of ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly agree’ answers combined multiplied the ONS 2024 mid-year UK population figures (aged 16+): $0.2558 \times 56,685,313 = 14,500,103.1$

²⁰ ‘A little less’ and ‘A lot less’ answers combined. N=854.

²¹ N=1854

²² N=259

²³ N=1023

- They are 30% less likely to report being able to focus more on reading than they could three years ago, and 93% more likely to report being able to focus less.

Attention and focus

Nearly half (46%) of UK adults say they struggle to focus on reading due to distractions around them – a figure that rises to 55% among 16-24s and 35-44s, and 52% of 25-34s.

Even when people do pick up some form of reading material, finishing it is another challenge. Almost a third (31%) of adults say they struggle to finish what they start reading, with younger readers again hit hardest: 43% of 16-34s report this issue.²⁴

Just under 1 in 5 UK adults (19%) say their ability to focus has worsened over the last three years, rising to almost 1 in 4 amongst 16-24-year-olds (24%). When asked what's behind this drop in reading focus, the top causes included:²⁵

- Lack of free time (24%)
- Changes in mental or physical health (11%)
- Major life events (10%)
- Changes in screen time or digital habits (10%)

Ability to focus on reading also appears has a positive association with a regular reading habit. People who consider themselves regular readers are 262% more likely to report an increase in ability to focus on reading over the last three years, compared to non-readers. By contrast, lapsed readers are 190% more likely and non-readers 210% more likely to report a decrease in ability to focus on reading than regular readers.

The data also revealed that a significant minority of UK adults are typically reading while engaging in other activities. 1 in 3 adults (33%) shared that they're usually multitasking while reading – whether commuting, exercising, or doing household chores. For younger adults, this figure spikes: 48% of 25-34s and 43% of 16-24s and 35-44s read on the go.

For some, multitasking can act as a distraction; for others, it can become an opportunity, finding small moments of time to fit reading into their lives. For example, alternative reading formats to print books are popular amongst those who struggle to focus. Almost 2 in 5 adults (38%) who struggle to focus listen to an audiobook at least once a week.²⁶

Cost of living

In addition to barriers around time and concentration, 1 in 5 adults (20%) say that cost is one of the most important factors when considering buying reading material.

Just under 3 in 5 adults (58%) – nearly 33 million – told us that they're feeling the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis.²⁷ Adults feeling the cost-of-living crisis are 9% less likely to be regular

²⁴ N=1,176

²⁵ N=768

²⁶ N=1,125

²⁷ Extrapolation calculated using the percentage of 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' answers combined multiplied the ONS 2024 mid-year UK population figures (aged 16+): $0.58 \times 56,685,313 = 32,877,481.5$

readers, and they are twice as likely to report that finding and affording reading material is less easy than three years ago.²⁸

One potential method of overcoming this cost barrier to accessing reading can be found through use of the public library service, which offers access to print and digital reading materials for free with library membership. However, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Participation survey data indicates that only 31% of adults have engaged with libraries at least once in the last 12 months, indicating further barriers to access.²⁹

Recent research conducted by Ipsos UK for DCMS found that one of the factors driving library non-use was a lack of awareness around the range of library services available, particularly those offering digital access to reading material.³⁰ Ipsos UK's research, and their recommendations around amplifying the sustainability and money-saving opportunities of library use, highlight the potential of libraries as a key access point for reading amongst people feeling the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, many of whom are also digital readers.

Reading confidence

Recent data from the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills showed that 18% of adults in England struggle to read at a functional level, meaning they have difficulty understanding unfamiliar text.³¹ This impacts not just their ability to navigate life, but also their likelihood of taking the time to choose to read.

We asked respondents to rate their reading skill levels to better understand the nation's relative levels of reading confidence. Our survey showed that 82% of adults in the UK consider themselves to be a 'good' or 'excellent' reader. A further 1 in 6 (16%) feel they are an 'average' reader, with 3% – or almost 1.7 million – rating their reading ability as 'poor' or 'very poor'.³²

These perceived reading confidence levels appear to have a correlation with reader identity. People with higher reading confidence are more likely to consider themselves a regular reader than those with average or low reading confidence. Almost three-quarters (73%) of those who consider themselves an 'excellent' reader also identify as a regular reader, followed by almost half (48%) of self-identified 'good' readers.³³ Just under one-quarter of 'average' readers (23%) consider themselves regular readers, with only a small proportion (4%) of those who consider themselves a 'poor' or 'very poor' reader saying they choose to read regularly.³⁴

²⁸ N=2,320

²⁹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2025) [Official Statistics: Main report for the Participation Survey \(April 2024 to March 2025\)](#)

³⁰ Ipsos UK (2025) [What works to engage library non-users](#), Department for Culture, Media and Sport

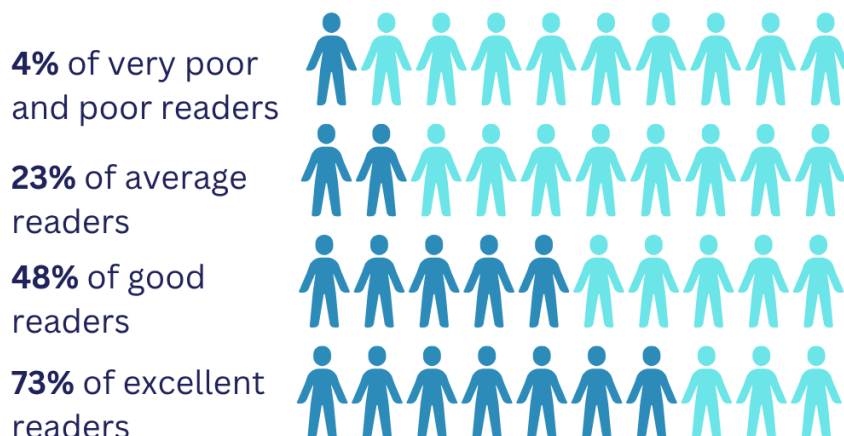
³¹ Wheater, et al. (2024) [OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2023 \(PIAAC\): National Report for England](#), Department for Education / Government Social Research

³² Extrapolation calculated using the percentage of 'Poor' and 'Very poor' answers combined multiplied the ONS 2024 mid-year UK population figures (aged 16+): $0.58 \times 56,685,313 = 1,672,216.73$

³³ N=1,718; N=1,543; respectively.

³⁴ N=621 and N=118, respectively.

Levels of regular readers by reading confidence



Additionally, the way that reading makes people feel changes significantly with self-rating of reading ability. Those who rated themselves as 'excellent' or 'good' readers found reading to be a comforting, inspiring or enlightening activity.³⁵ In contrast, those who rated themselves as 'poor' or 'very poor' readers said they didn't associate reading with any particular feeling at all, and if they did, they most often felt bored or overwhelmed when reading.

Learning differences

14% of respondents – around 8 million adults – said they consider themselves to have a learning difference, such as dyslexia.³⁶ While reader identity levels were comparable between those who do and do not identify as having a learning difference, it appears that, as with reading confidence, their qualitative experience of reading also varies.

Those with a learning difference were 28% less likely to report finding reading comforting, and over 200% more likely to say reading made them feel overwhelmed, and 83% more likely to say it made them feel bored.³⁷ This suggests that more could be done to support people with learning differences to get the most out of reading.

Figures 10 and 11 overleaf highlight the feelings evoked by reading experienced by UK adults, broken down by self-perceived reading ability (10) and by learning difference (11).

³⁵ Fifteen response options provided, including 'other'. Respondents were asked to select their top three; therefore, percentages may exceed 100%.

³⁶ Extrapolation calculated using the percentage of 'Yes' answers combined multiplied the ONS 2024 mid-year UK population figures (aged 16+): $0.1445 \times 56,685,313 = 8,191,027.73$

³⁷ N=579. Fifteen response options provided, including 'other'. Respondents were asked to select their top three; therefore, percentages may exceed 100%.

Figure 10. ‘How, if any way, does reading most often make you feel?’, by reading confidence level

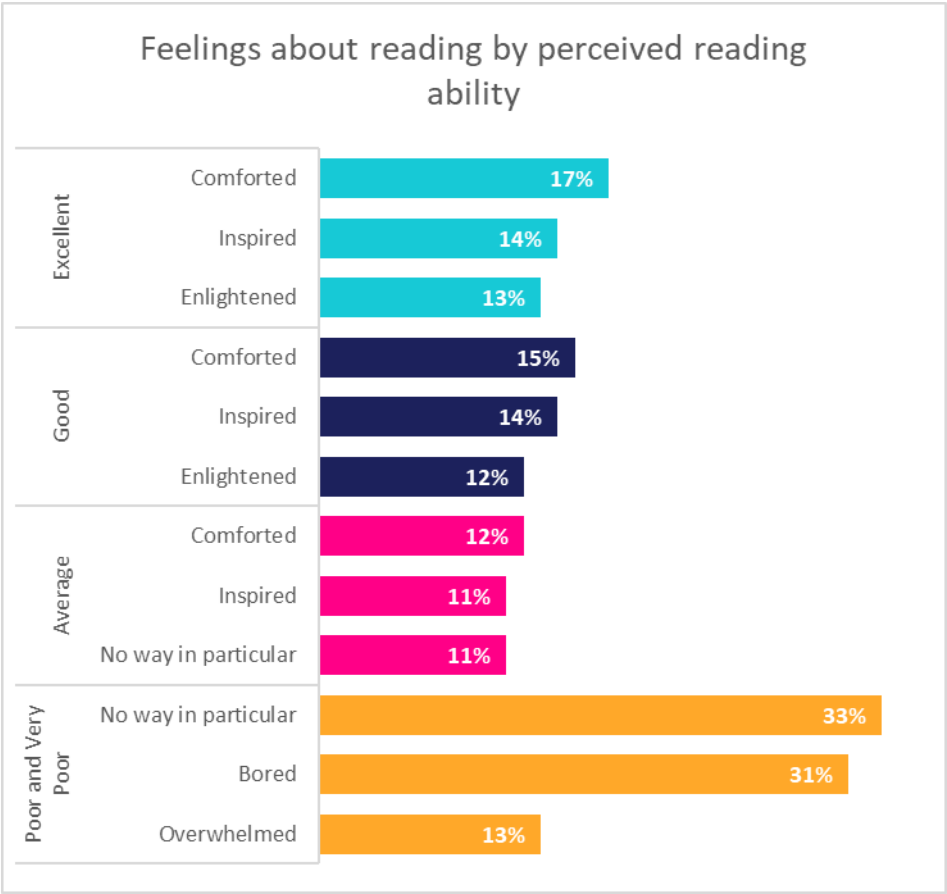
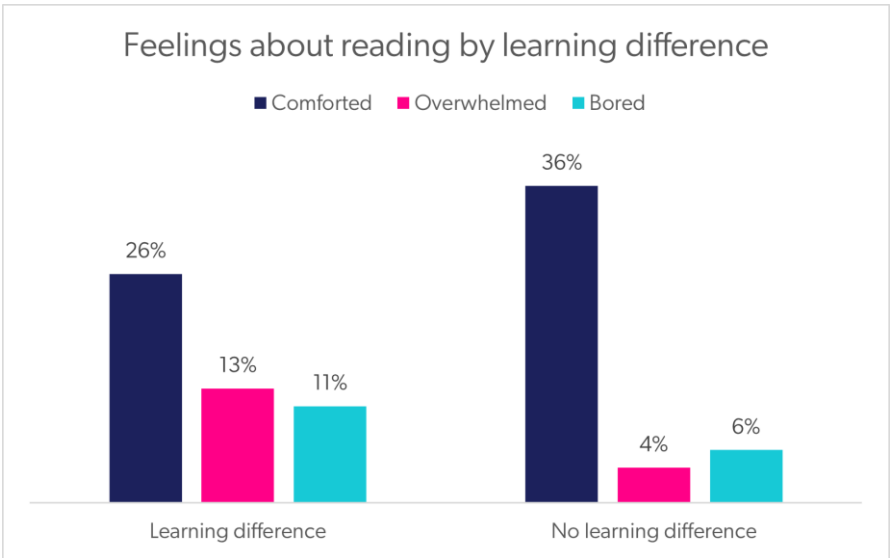


Figure 11. ‘How, if any way, does reading most often make you feel?’, for people with and without a learning difference



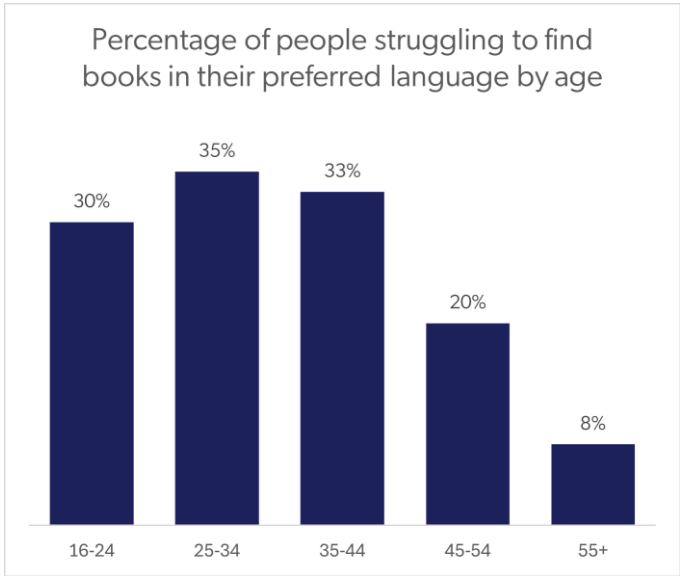
Preferred reading languages

Over 1 in 5 (21%) UK adults say books are not available in their preferred language. This equates to around 12 million adults. Men appear to experience greater challenges accessing books in their preferred language than women do, with over 1 in 4 men (26%) agreeing these texts are not available, compared to 1 in 6 women (16%).

Struggling to find books in their preferred language appears to be a much more prevalent issue amongst younger generations, with around 1 in 3 of those aged 16-44 agreeing with this statement.

A breakdown of barriers accessing books in a preferred reading language are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Those who agree ‘books in my preferred language are not readily available’, by age



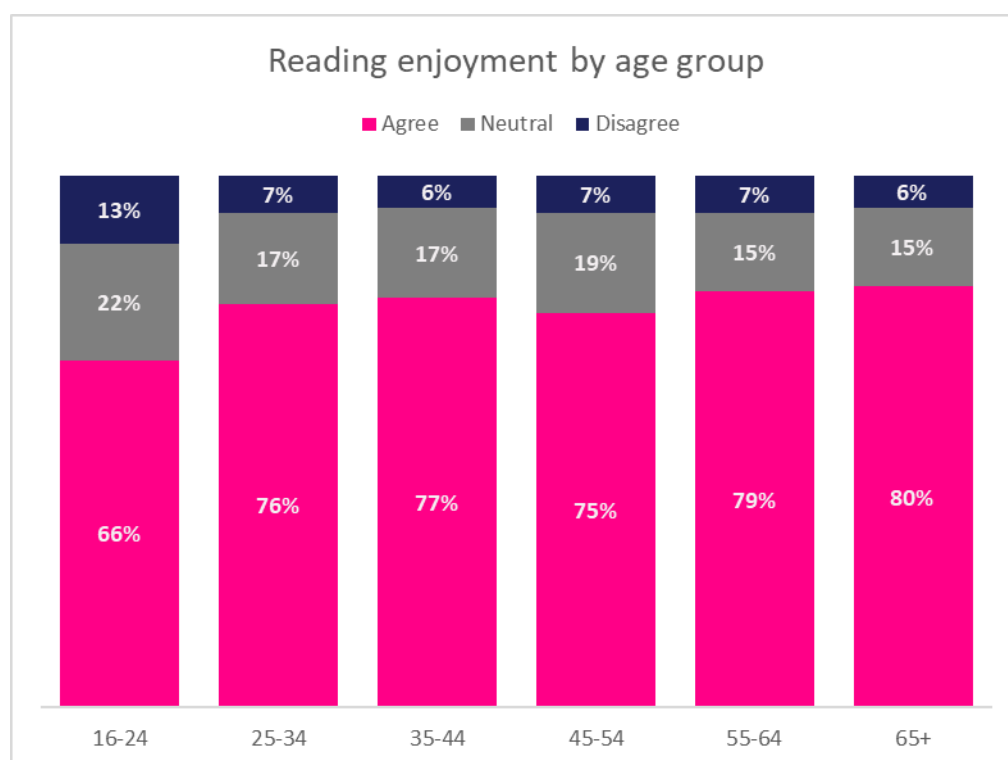
Reading enjoyment

Regardless of their current level of engagement with reading, three-quarters of UK adults (75%) say they enjoy reading and almost two-thirds (65%) say that reading is an important part of their life.³⁸ While these overall levels of reading enjoyment among UK adults present a broadly positive picture, a closer look at the data reveals some notable differences across gender and age groups.

Overall, women are 11% more likely than men to report that they enjoy reading (79% versus 71%). Reading enjoyment also rises steadily with age, with 66% of 16-24-year-olds agreeing that they enjoy reading compared to 80% of those over the age of 65. Figure 13 shows how self-reported reading enjoyment varies by age group.

³⁸ ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly agree’ answers combined.

Figure 13. Proportion of respondents who agreed that they enjoy reading by age group



Looking at these age and gender trends in relation to one and another reveals an even stronger pattern around enjoyment levels. Women over the age of 65 are the most likely group to say that they enjoy reading (88%), followed by women aged 45-54 and 35-44 (81%).³⁹ The least likely groups to agree that they enjoy reading are men aged 16-24 (53%), women aged 16-24 (70%), and men aged 45-54 (71%).⁴⁰

Enjoyment levels by format

In addition to asking survey respondents about their frequency and length of time spent reading in a defined set of reading formats, we also asked them to rate their enjoyment of reading those formats. The data indicated that reading enjoyment varies by format – and that higher levels of enjoyment don’t always align with the formats that are most frequently engaged in (social media posts and subtitles).

For example, although print books are read less often than shorter digital formats, 75% rated them as enjoyable or very enjoyable, compared to just 57% for social media posts.

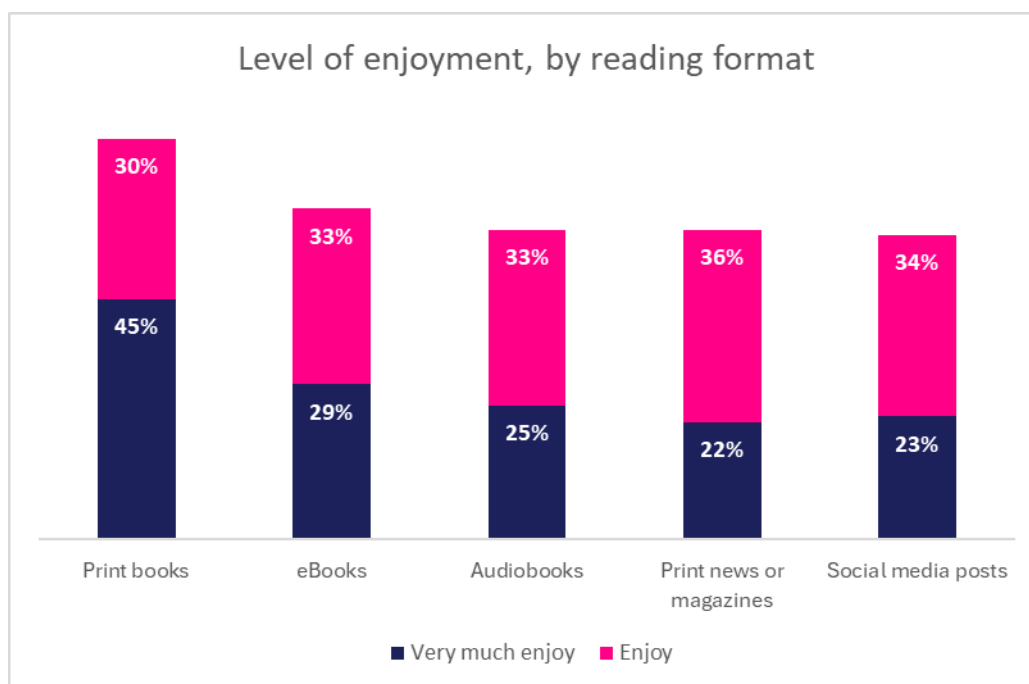
Across the range of reading formats we listed as options, the more ‘traditional’ reading formats – or those with long-form content – are reported as the most enjoyable, with 75% of people highly enjoying print books, 62% highly enjoying eBooks and 58% highly enjoying audiobooks.

³⁹ Women aged 65+ N=389; women aged 45-54 N=333; women aged 35-44 N=297

⁴⁰ Men aged 16-24 N=172; women aged 16-24 N=344; men aged 45-54 N=293. Note: Men aged 16-24 represents the smallest sample across these subgroups. Findings should be interpreted with caution due to increased margin of error.

As outlined in Figure 14, these differences were even more stark for the highest level of reading enjoyment: 45% said they ‘very much enjoy’ print books compared with only 23% who ‘very much enjoy’ social media posts and 22% for print news or magazines.

Figure 14. Enjoyment levels of selected reading formats



The data also reveals a gender split in enjoyment of reading these different formats. While print books, eBooks, and audiobooks emerge as the top three most enjoyable formats for both men and women, the depth of enjoyment varies.

High levels of enjoyment are consistent across genders for both eBooks and audiobooks, but over half of women (52%) report high enjoyment of reading print books compared to only 37% of men. By contrast, men show a distinct preference for alternative formats; they are more likely than women to rate the following formats as highly enjoyable:

- Video game narrative (23% of men vs. 16% of women)
- Digital articles (21% men vs. 14% women)
- Graphic novels or comics (22% men vs. 16% women)
- Webcomics (20% men vs. 15% women)

Examining enjoyment data by format across different age group also reveals some interesting trends. Among those aged 16-44, high levels of enjoyment are distributed relatively evenly across reading formats: the proportion selecting ‘very much enjoy’ ranges from 15-44%.

By contrast, those aged 45+ show a more concentrated profile of high enjoyment: the proportion selecting ‘very much enjoy’ varies widely from 5% to 57%. High levels of enjoyment cluster around a small number of long-form, single-media formats: print books, eBooks, audiobooks, and print news.

This suggests that older readers find greater enjoyment in immersive, long-form reading experiences that resemble or extend traditional print books, while younger readers enjoy engaging with reading across a wide variety of single- and multi-media formats.

These findings offer some indication of potential methods for increasing certain groups' engagement with reading by choice. However, it also pinpoints a need for more research into what may be driving these affective experiences, such as the reader's intended purpose of engaging with that particular format, the depth of immersion in a text, or even the nature of the content itself.

Reading, wellbeing and sense of community

The benefits of reading on wellbeing are already well established, both within the wider literature highlighting its links with empathy, creativity, connections with others and positive mental health,⁴¹ and by our 2024 report, *State of the Nation's Adult Reading: Focus on Health and Wellbeing*.⁴² This year, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between a regular reading habit and our sense of individual and collective wellbeing.

Our 2025 data revealed that identifying as a regular reader is not just associated with significant wellbeing benefits, such as the ability to sleep well or relax easily, but also with significant benefits for community cohesion, such as increased sense of belonging to community. The data also indicated a correlation between reader identity and negative impacts on mental health, with non-readers more likely than regular readers to feel lonely, anxious, or depressed.

Compared to non-readers, regular readers are...

86% more likely to report feeling
a sense of belonging to
their community

45% more likely to report
sleeping well

58% more likely to report
feeling generally happy

35% more likely to say they
don't feel lonely

51% more likely to report
finding it easy to relax

32% more likely to say they
don't feel anxious or
depressed

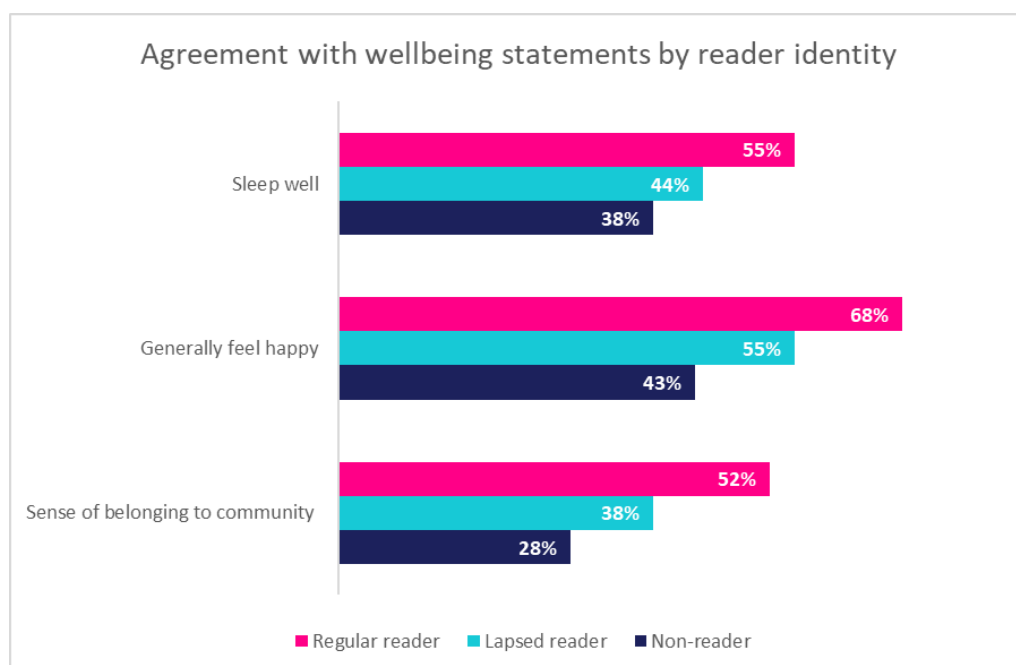
⁴¹ The Reading Agency (2025) [Reading Facts](#); Billington (2015) [Reading between the Lines: the Benefits of Reading for Pleasure for The Reading Agency Quick Reads](#), University of Liverpool

⁴² The Reading Agency (2024) [State of the Nation's Adult Reading: Focus on Health and Wellbeing](#)

Looking at the data in greater detail, and breaking it down by reader identity as in Figure 15 below, these disparities in subjective wellbeing indicators become even clearer. Of those who consider themselves regular readers, 55% say that they sleep well, as compared with 44% of lapsed readers and 38% of non-readers.⁴³ Similarly, 68% of regular readers report that they generally feel happy, compared to 55% of lapsed readers and 43% of non-readers.⁴⁴

In terms of community connections, 52% of regular readers say they feel a sense of belonging to their community compared to 38% of lapsed readers and just 28% of non-readers. These associations may link to the established power of reading to open doors into a wide range of different life experiences and perspectives, thereby increasing empathy and understanding.⁴⁵

Figure 15. Agreement with selected wellbeing statements by reader identity



⁴³ 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' answers combined.

⁴⁴ 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' answers combined.

⁴⁵ Woodley and Mantell (2020) [Reading for Pleasure: An evidence review](#), Arts Council England; Bishop (1990) 'Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors', *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).; Billington (2015) [Reading between the Lines: the Benefits of Reading for Pleasure for The Reading Agency Quick Reads](#), University of Liverpool

Conclusions

The findings highlighted throughout this report reveal new insights into our understanding of the current state of adult reading engagement in the UK. The data highlights a disconnect between reader identity – whether or not one considers themselves to be ‘a reader’ – and time spent reading a range of texts and formats in practice. By asking about reading engagement in a different way, the data reveals how so-called lapsed and non-readers are building reading into their lives, but potentially doing so in a way they don’t immediately recognise as reading.

While, on average, the data does reinforce that lapsed and non-readers are reading less frequently than self-identified regular readers, when these lapsed and non-readers do take time to read, they spend a greater amount of time engaging with their chosen reading formats than regular readers do. Along with lapsed and non-readers’ propensity to engage with short-form or digital reading formats over print books – less ‘traditional’ reading formats – these trends provide a more nuanced picture of the adult reading crisis.

However, it also highlights the many barriers people continue to face in choosing to read as frequently as they’d like, for as long as they’d like, or in a way they most enjoy. For example, the greater enjoyment older adults appear to derive from immersing themselves in long-form and book-based reading content, or the need to value and support the ways younger adults engage with reading across a wide variety of digital and multi-media formats, such as digital articles, subtitles and in-game narrative.

Namely, what we appear to be seeing in the data is a shift in the way that people engage with reading – one which does not necessarily align with societal perceptions of what ‘reading’ looks like. Increasing the visibility of these many ways of choosing to read in daily life may have a positive impact on widening reader identities, and on the potential associations for higher levels of wellbeing and belonging.

Methodology

This survey and the reading engagement measures used to understand adult reading habits in the UK were designed by The Reading Agency in part by using our Peter Sowerby Foundation-funded Reading Outcomes Framework. This Framework identifies the outcomes of reading for pleasure and provides a set of tools to help us measure these.⁴⁶ For the purposes of this survey, ‘reading’ was defined as reading that takes place by choice rather than for work or education.

The research was conducted by Censuswide with (4,000 UK general consumers aged 16+) between 11.04.25 to 17.04.25. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market

⁴⁶ The Reading Outcomes Framework was developed in collaboration with stakeholder organisations including Arts Council England, Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians (ASCEL), BookTrust, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), National Literacy Trust, Publishers Association, Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL).

Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

Data related to change against 2024 is drawn from an online survey by Censuswide, with 2,003 UK nationally representative consumers 16+, between 2-4 April 2024.⁴⁷

The results have been statistically weighted according to current data on age, gender, region and socioeconomic status from the most recent Census data to ensure the sample is representative of the entire adult population of the UK.

Population calculations use the [Office of National Statistics'](#) mid-2024 estimate of the UK population of adults aged 16 and over: 56,685,313.

⁴⁷ The Reading Agency (2024) [State of the Nations Adult Reading 2024 Overview-Report](#)