



Research update

What have we learnt about the reading habits of Australian teens?

What does our 2022 survey data tell us?

In 2022, more than 9500 Australian secondary school students responded to our survey asking them about what they read in their free time and how they find books and other reading material they enjoy reading. We heard from students attending 57 different government, independent and Catholic schools in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. We also interviewed 60 teen literacy and library experts from the school library and English teaching staff and conducted focus groups with 83 Australian teenagers.

Our research project uses a purposive quota sample designed to be representative of Australian secondary school students. Schools are selected to participate in the survey based on their:

- location (state, capital city/rest of state)
- gender (co-educational, single sex)
- school type (independent, Catholic and government)

We have not yet completed each of the quotas as we are still collecting data in Victoria and Western Australia. But we do have enough responses to share some preliminary answers to the questions:

- How often do Australian teens read for pleasure?
- What do Australian teens enjoy reading?

The following discussion identifies emerging trends in our data. It is indicative only, but we are reasonably confident that these findings will be confirmed by our full data set.

Are Australian teens reading?

One of the first questions we ask teenagers to tell us is how much time they spend on the following activities on a typical week during the school term:

- Social media
- Video games
- TV and movies
- Watching YouTube
- Reading a book (print, ebook, audiobook)

Almost two-thirds of the teenagers who responded report spending 'some' or a 'small amount of time reading. A quarter 'don't spend any time' reading and almost a fifth spend 'a lot' or 'as much time as I can' reading.

When we asked teens to tell us how often they read in a typical school week, just over a quarter read daily or 4-6 times per week, one third read once or 2-3 times per week, and more than 40% do not read or read less than once per week. These results are in line with our pilot study in 2016, which suggests that the amount teens are reading has not changed significantly in recent years.

When we asked teens how they feel about reading books in their own free time, more than half indicate that they have a positive attitude towards reading. But we are seeing signs that reading is an activity often side-lined during the school term, especially as students get older. Many teens report that they read less now than they did in grade 6 and that they read less during the school term than during the school holidays.

Summary

Reading is in the mix of leisure activities Australian teens enjoy, but many teens find it difficult to spend as much time reading as they (and many teachers, parents and guardians) would like

What does our 2022 survey data tell us?

What are Australian teens reading?

Teens who read for pleasure told us that they prefer to read printed books rather than ebooks or audiobooks. When it comes to genre, fiction is more popular than non-fiction, with fantasy, mystery and crime and dystopian the most popular fiction genres. Humour and graphic novels are more popular with younger teens aged 12-13, and romance and dystopian fiction are more popular with older teens aged 15+. The most popular non-fiction genres are history, biographies, autobiographies and memoirs, and technology and science.

When we asked teens what book they enjoyed reading most in the past year, the Harry Potter series by J.K Rowling tops the list of responses. The next two most popular books are #booktok favourites Karen McManus' *One of Us is Lying* and Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us*. Although we still have more work to do on this topic, we are seeing a few interesting trends emerge when we look at the gender and age breakdown of these responses. The Harry Potter series is most popular with teens aged 12-14, with similar numbers of male and female fans. *It Ends With Us* is most popular with teen girls aged 14+, as are a number of Colleen Hoover's other titles. *One of Us is Lying* appeals to teens aged 12-15, it is more popular with female readers but has a number of male fans as well.

The #booktok effect

The impact of BookTok on the reading choices of Australian teenagers is another significant trend. A quarter of teens report browsing book social media including BookTok, Bookstagram and BookTube for book recommendations and books popular on #booktok feature prominently in the answers to the question 'which book did you enjoy most in the past year?'. The impact of booktok is most pronounced in the responses from teens aged 14+ who identify either as female or with a non-binary gender identity.

Summary

Age and gender are important factors in shaping teen reading preferences, including the impact of #booktok on teen reading choices



Teen Reading in the Digital Era

CONTACT US

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