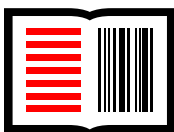RESEARCH & EDUCATION

Canadian Leisure & Reading Study
2023

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Now in its eleventh edition, 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.

Methodology

This survey was fielded in January 2024 to 1,247 Canadians over the age of 18 (demographics linked in Appendix B). We surveyed Canadians until we had responses from 1,000 people who had read at least one book in 2023.

- Readers refers to the 1,000 respondents who had read or listened to a book or part of 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:

- The survey was fielded online through an external provider, to their consumer panel of nearly two million Canadians. The survey was limited to those with internet access who were able and wanted to participate in our panel in exchange for non-monetary incentives as offered by our survey partner (e.g., loyalty reward "point" programs).
- 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. Selective sampling was based on demographic results from Statistics Canada.
- 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 data is unweighted.
- In 2024, 247 people were screened out for not having read or listened to a book in 2023.

The study was prepared by BookNet Canada staff.

Highlights

- 49% of Canadians read or listened to books weekly in 2023, with 31% of Canadians reading or listening to books once a day.
- Half of all Canadian readers (52%) read between one and five books in 2023.
- Canadian readers attended more book clubs and book-related events in 2023, both online and in-person.
- Spending on books in 2023 is similar to 2022, however less Canadian readers in 2023 did not have limitations on the number of books they could buy (23%) and more bought books within their budget (44%).
- Older demographic groups (ages 45-54, 55-64, 65+) are more likely to acquire free books of all formats than younger demographics (ages 18-29, 30-44).
- Canadian readers in 2023 continued to prefer print books the most (59%).
- Canadian readers' interest in abridged audiobooks, audiobooks with sound effects and/or music, and environmentally friendly print books is on the rise.
- Adult Fiction books remain the most popular book subject for Canadian readers across all formats, but Children's books and Young Adult books are continuing to see increases in readership across all formats in 2023.
- Diversity and representation in books continues to be a priority for Canadian readers in 2023.

Canadians and their free time

The number of Canadians who said they had more than enough leisure time has dropped slightly since 2020 and 2021. So after moving out of the restrictions (both self-imposed and societal) placed on socialization and events during the pandemic, Canadians were more likely to feel as though they had just enough leisure time for the second year running. The percentage of those who felt like they had less than enough leisure time has remained pretty consistent year over year since 2019 hovering within a percent or two of the 20% mark.

In 2023, 50% of Canadians reported having enough leisure time, 29% had more than enough, and 21% had less than enough.

When we asked them how they thought their leisure time was compared to the previous year, the bulk of Canadians said it had stayed the same (61%). Only 19% said their leisure time had decreased and 17% said it had increased.

Canadians' perception of leisure time, 2020–2023
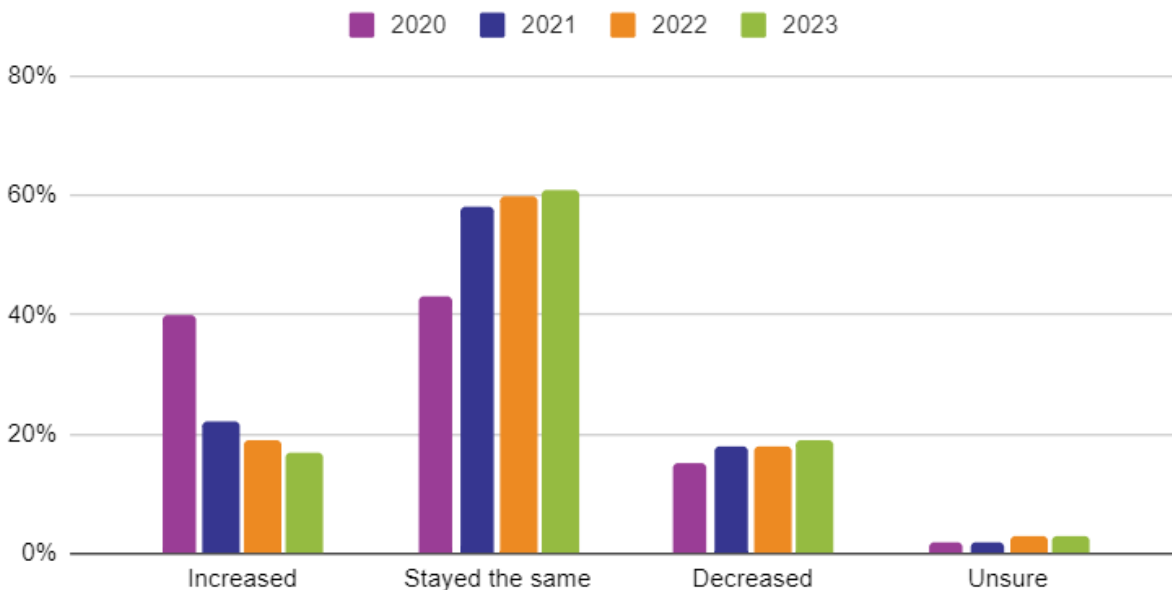
Source: BookNet Canada

Canadians are using their leisure time in 2023 much the same as they did in 2022 The top 10 leisure and recreational activities done by Canadians at least weekly in 2023 were:
1. Watching videos/TV/movies (89%)
2. Cooking (88%)
3. Browsing social media/web (86%)

4. Listening to music (84%)
5. Spending time with family (69%)
6. Shopping (64%)
7. Exercising/working out (64%)
8. Listening to radio shows (51%)
9. **Reading or listening to books (49%)**
10. Playing video games (40%)

Most of these answers were within one or two percentage points of the answers in 2022. Though shopping and playing video games have both dropped by 4% compared with last year.

In terms of the activities Canadians do most frequently, here are the top 10 activities Canadians participated in at least once a day in 2023:
1. Browsing social media/web (75%)
2. Watching videos/TV/movies (73%)
3. Cooking (69%)
4. Listening to music (64%)
5. Spending time with family (48%)
6. Exercising/working out (37%)
7. Listening to radio shows (34%)
8. **Reading or listening to books (31%)**
9. Playing video games (25%)
10. Listening to podcasts (18%)

Browsing social media ousted watching videos, TV, or movies as the top daily leisure activity in 2023, but the rest of the list hasn't changed significantly from 2022.

If we drill down to just reading or listening to books, we find that 80% of Canadians chose to use at least some of their leisure time in 2023 with a book.

Readers and their leisure activities

The perception of leisure time for those 80% of Canadians who read a book in 2023 matches up almost exactly with the overall Canadian perceptions. Exactly half of readers said they had enough leisure time (50%), 29% said they had more than enough, and 20% said less than enough.

Readers were a little bit more likely to say that their reading time had increased when they compared it to 2022 (20%), a bit less likely to say it had stayed the same (58%), but just as likely to say it decreased as Canadians overall (19%).

Readers' perception of leisure time, 2020–2023
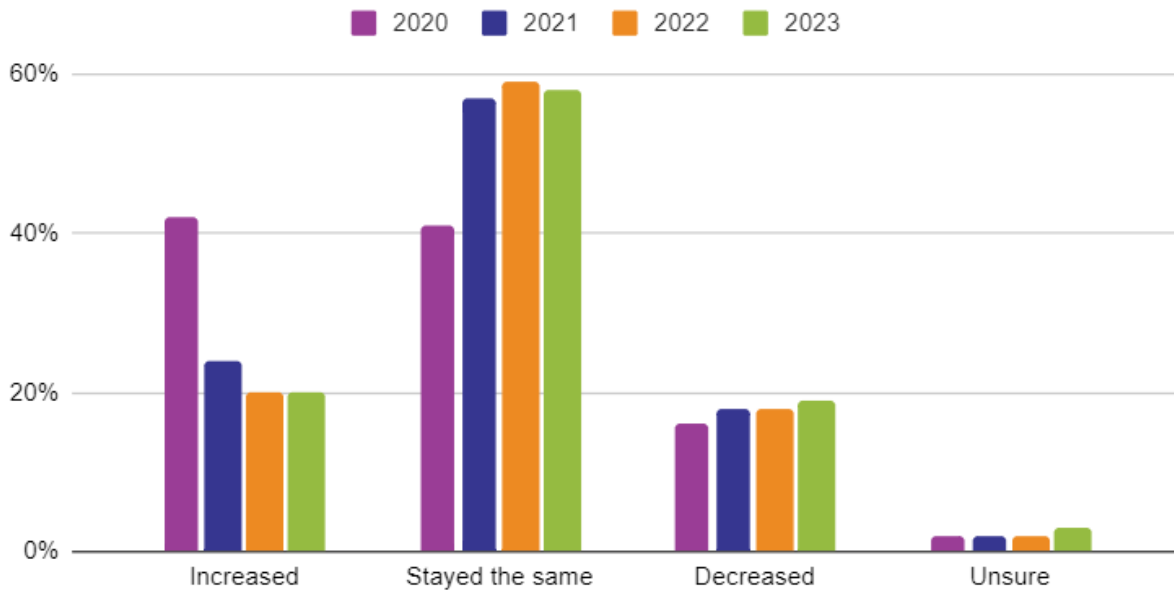
Source: BookNet Canada

How are readers spending their leisure time? Very similarly to all Canadians. The leisure and recreational activities done by readers weekly in 2023 were:
1. Watching videos/TV/movies (89%)
2. Cooking (89%)
3. Browsing social media/web (88%)
4. Listening to music (86%)
5. Spending time with family (72%)
6. Exercising/working out (69%)
7. Shopping (66%)
8. **Reading or listening to books (61%)**
9. Listening to radio shows (54%)
10. Playing video games (43%)

Leisure and recreational activities done by readers at least once a day in 2023:
1. Browsing social media/web (76%)
2. Watching videos/TV/movies (73%)
3. Cooking (69%)
4. Listening to music (66%)

5. Spending time with family (51%)
6. Exercising/working out (40%)
7. **Reading or listening to books (38%)**
8. Listening to radio shows (36%)
9. Playing video games (25%)
10. Listening to podcasts (22%)

These are also very similar to 2022, with the exception of reading falling 2% down to 38% and switching spots with exercising and working out.

Browsing social media and the web also took top spot in the daily activities for readers in 2023. Over half of all readers said they visited a social networking site at least daily (53%), but only 10% of them viewed a book-specific social media post with that same frequency. However, 23% saw a book-specific social media post at least once a week and half had seen one at least once in 2023 (50%).

Other online activities for readers were visiting a book-specific social network site (e.g., Shelfari, Goodreads, 49th Shelf, Wattpad, FanFiction, Archive of Our Own, etc.) — 47% of readers had done so in 2023, 20% of whom did so at least weekly.

Reading as a leisure activity

A quarter of readers prefer reading or listening to books over other leisure activities (24%). Just under half said they sometimes prefer reading to other activities (45%). The last quarter say they don't mind reading books, but would prefer doing other things instead (27%).

Just over half of all readers read between one and five books in 2023 (52%). A quarter read or listened to 6-11 books (25%), 16% read or listened to 12-49 books, and 7% read or listened to 50 or more books that year.

Number of books read, 2023
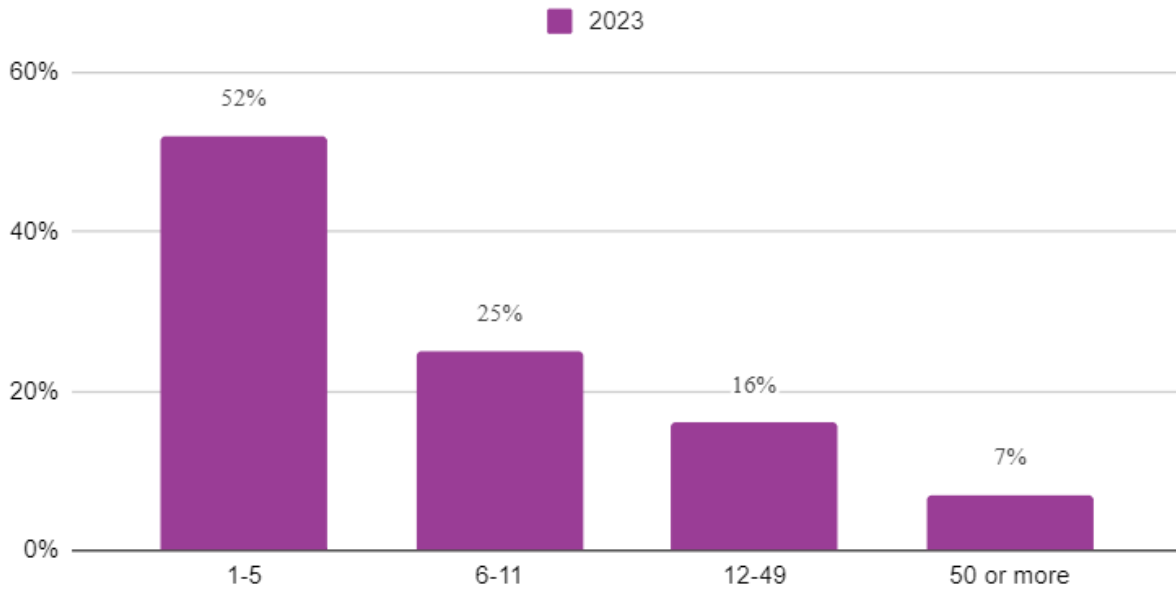
Source: BookNet Canada

Readers 65 and over were again the most likely age group to have read 12 or more books in 2023. Readers 18 to 29 were more likely in 2023 to have read 1 to 5 books than they were in 2022 (52% in 2023 compared to 45% in 2022) and they were less likely to read 6 or more books (49% in 2023 compared to 56% in 2022).

Number of books read by age, 2023

	18-29	30-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All readers
1-5	52%	56%	53%	50%	46%	52%
6-11	28%	26%	29%	24%	19%	25%
12-49	14%	14%	13%	16%	23%	16%
50 or more	7%	5%	5%	10%	12%	7%

Reasons for reading

We asked readers for their top three reasons that they generally choose to read or listen to books. When we put their responses all together, we found that the top five reasons readers read or listened to books in 2023 were:

1. For enjoyment / entertainment (52%)
2. To relax or for comfort (48%)
3. To learn things or improve things (for school/study/work or personal) (28%)

4. For brain health (improve memory, prevent diseases) (27%)
5. To become immersed in another world or to escape reality (24%)

Last year we saw some trends emerge when comparing 2020 to 2022 answers: readers seemed to be reading more for informational or enrichment purposes and less for escapism and pure enjoyment. We wondered if those trends would continue this year, but the top five reasons are all the same as in 2022 and the percentage of respondents who chose them were almost identical.

Reading activities

Audiobook listeners continued to multi-task while doing their reading; 81% of audiobook listeners said they listened to their books while doing other things (working, commuting/traveling, housework, etc.). Perhaps surprisingly, half of ebook and print readers also did other activities while reading (listening to music, watching TV, etc.) at least some of the time (51% of ebook readers and 50% of print readers).

In terms of other ways readers engaged with books and their reading, a majority of readers did at least one thing in the list below in 2023 (73%).
- Read all or part of a book aloud to another person (a child, young adult, or adult) (48%)
- Searched for other books by that author (36%)
- Shared the experience, book, or photo of the book with others (25%)
- Went online to read about the author or follow them on social media (21%)
- Added the book to a list of books they were currently reading or finished reading (20%)
- Took an action as a direct result of the book (16%)
- Considered the book part of a reading challenge (13%)
- Read or listened to the book in another format (12%)

As we noted last year, reading challenges and tracking books they read continue to trend upwards, as shown in the graph below.

Reader engagement activities, 2019–2023

● Considered the book part of a reading challenge
● Added the book to a list of books they were currently reading or finished reading
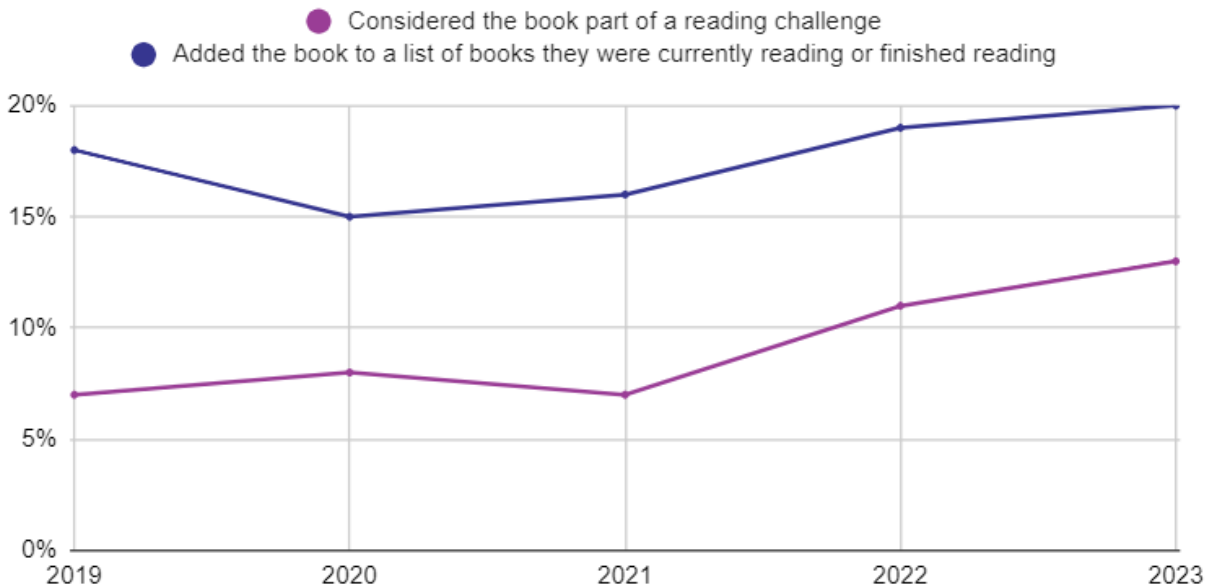
Source: BookNet Canada

Readers are also attending book clubs in 2023 more frequently than they were in 2022 continuing the trend we saw last year as well. A third of readers attended an online book club (33%), up from 28% in 2022. Another third of readers attended an in-person book club or reading group (33%), up from 26% in 2022.

A similar trend emerges for book events, more readers attended them online in 2023 (35%) when compared with the 30% who did so in 2022. And 32% of readers attended an in-person book event (e.g., book launch or reading, award show, festival, presentation, etc.), up from 28% the year previous.

Monthly attendance of book clubs and events by age, 2023

	18-29	30-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All readers
Participated in a book club or reading group meeting in person by age	43%	38%	15%	4%	1%	23%
Attended an online author or book-related event by age	39%	40%	13%	6%	0%	22%
Attended an in-person author or book-related event by age	40%	33%	8%	4%	1%	20%

Book discovery

Word-of-mouth continues to be the main driver of book discovery. However, for the second year in a row it dropped in popularity; from 36% in 2021 to 30% in 2022 and now to 28% in 2023.

Respondents were able to choose up to three main ways they generally discovered their books the top five answers were:
1. Word-of-mouth (including book clubs or reading groups) (28%)
2. Bookstore (staff, browsing, displays, newsletter, etc.) (27%)
3. Public library (staff, browsing, displays, catalogue, reader list, newsletter, etc.) (25%)
4. Social media (TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) (22%)
5. Online book retailers (Amazon, Chapters, Kobo, Audible, etc.) (22%)

Awards in and of themselves did not drive much book awareness, only 7% of readers chose this as a main way they discovered their books, however, 61% of readers were aware of at least one of the awards in the list below in 2023.

Awareness of Canadian literary awards:
● Governor General's Literary Awards (29%)
● Scotiabank Giller Prize (29%)
● Canada Reads (27%)
● Canadian Children's Book Centre's CCBC Book Awards (12%)
● Forest of Reading (9%)
● Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize (9%)
● Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction (8%)
● All of the above (4%)

Choosing which books to read

Most readers have long TBR lists, what influences their choice to read a specific book? Well in 2023, the top five reasons readers read the book(s) they did were:
1. the subject/topic (42%)
2. the author (31%)
3. the book's description (28%)
4. recommendations (25%)
5. the main character/series (17%)

The author, while still important in terms of choosing which book to read, is on a bit of a downward trend over the last couple of years — from 40% in 2021 to 33% in 2022 and now 31% in 2023. It will be interesting to keep an eye on that in the years to come.

Acquisition by format

For the first time in our survey, readers across all formats were acquiring books from free sources more than from paid sources. Last year, print readers buying their books still eked out a small margin over those getting them for free (52% bought vs. 46% borrowed or found other free sources in 2022). This year 47% of print readers bought their books and 51% found a free source for their reading material.

Audiobook and ebook readers continued to get a majority of their books from free sources and this continues the rising trend in borrowing or receiving from other free sources we saw in last year's report.

Purchased books by format, 2019–2023
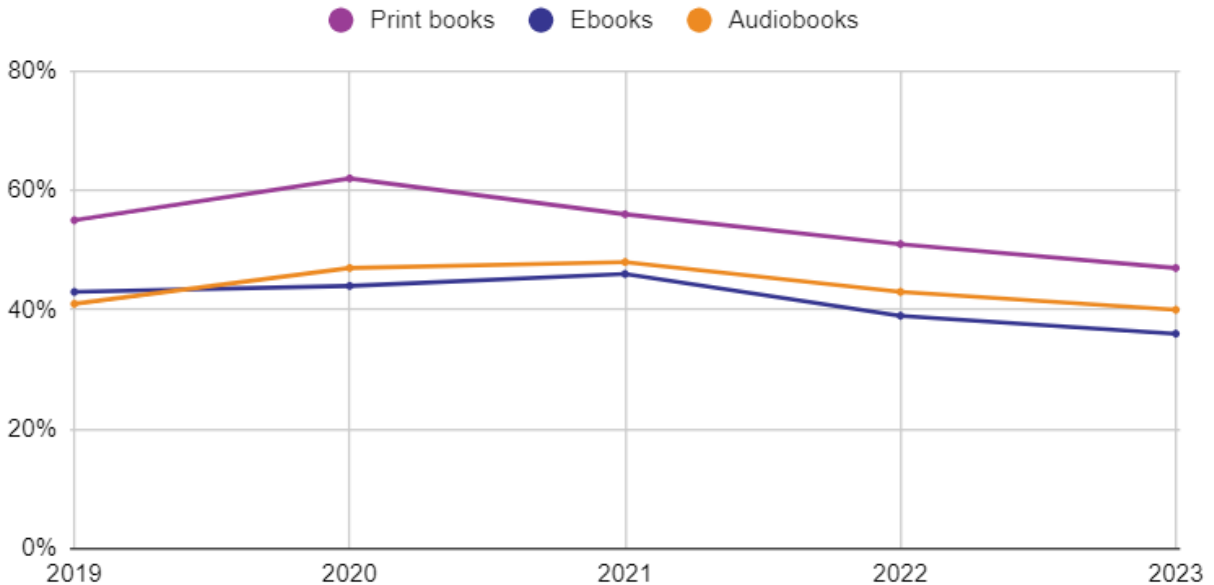
Source: BookNet Canada

Book acquisition from free sources

Ebook readers were the group most likely to get their books from a free source (62%) and the public library was their source of choice (23%). Public library use was up for ebook acquisition from 19% in 2022 to 23% in 2023. Free internet sites were used just as much as in 2022, but had moved to second place in 2023 (19%).

Just over half of audiobook listeners acquired their books for free in 2023 (58%). They were most likely to find them on a free internet site (e.g., LibriVox, YouTube, public domain, etc.) (20%), followed by the public library (18%), and 10% received their audiobooks as gifts. This breakdown was similar to 2022.

Print readers were least likely of all format readers to get their books for free, but still 51% did so. The public library was the most-used free source of acquiring books at 22% for print readers. Public library use has stayed at 22% since 2020 for print readers. Borrowing the book from another person (11%), receiving as a gift (10%), or receiving them for free (e.g., freebie, Free Little Library, ARC, etc.) (8%) were the final three ways print readers acquired free books. These are for the most part unchanged from 2022.

The readers who most got their books from free sources were ebook readers between 18 and 29 years of age (65%) and they got them mostly from free internet sites (23%). Audiobook listeners who were 45 to 54 were not far behind — 64% of this group got their reading material from free sources in 2023 and also from free internet sites (23%).

Free or paid acquisition by format and by age, 2023

	18-29		30-44		45-54		55-64		65+	
	Paid	Free	Paid	Free	Paid	Free	Paid	Free	Paid	Free
Print books	51%	48%	53%	46%	43%	52%	39%	59%	43%	54%
Ebooks	33%	65%	39%	62%	32%	63%	36%	62%	40%	55%
Audiobooks	44%	56%	44%	55%	32%	64%	38%	62%	32%	62%

We asked OverDrive, the world's leading digital reading platform for libraries and schools, for a look at their data to compare. When we see their checkouts, we find

that ebooks have remained relatively stable since 2020, but audiobook checkouts have continued to rise since 2014, up 20% in 2023 over 2022.

Canadian ebook and audiobook library checkouts, 2014–2023
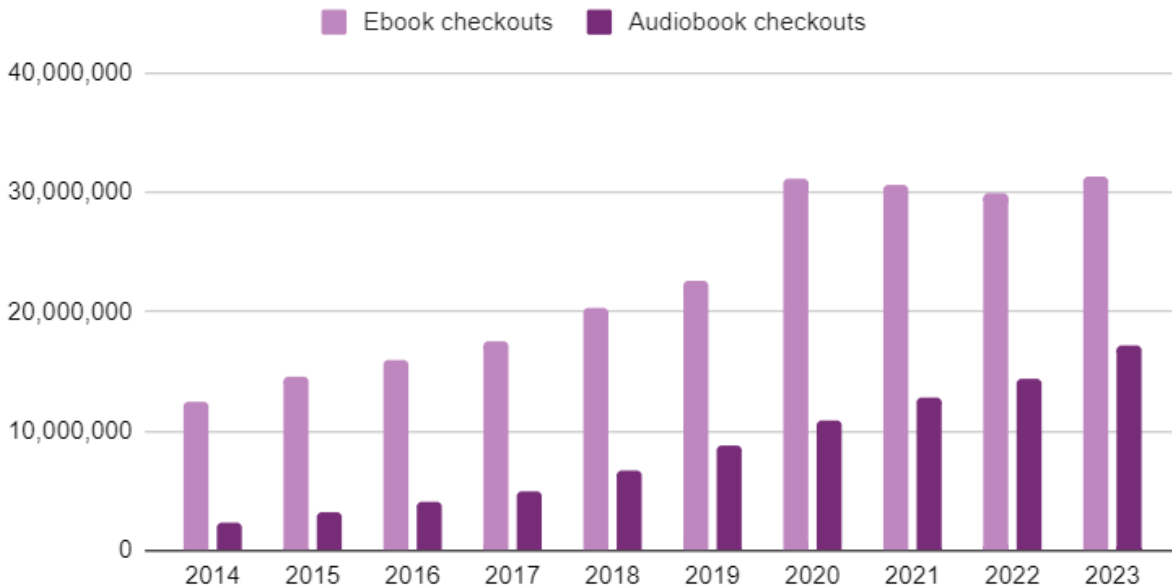
Source: OverDrive

Buying books by format

Print readers were the most likely to purchase their books in 2023 at 47%. These books were mainly acquired from physical bookstores that primarily sell new books (12%), online retailers (12%), or from used bookstores or thrift stores (11%). General retailers (e.g., Costco, Walmart, Shoppers Drug Mart, grocery store, etc.) also accounted for 9% of print book purchases.

The 40% of audiobook buyers who purchased their audiobooks mainly did so from online retailers (e.g., Amazon/Kindle Unlimited, Audiobooks.com, iTunes, etc.) (16%) though this avenue has been declining since 2020. Other audiobook purchases were made from a subscription service (13%), from a general retailer (e.g., Costco, Walmart, Shoppers Drug Mart, grocery store, etc.) (6%), or from a physical bookstore (6%).

Just over a third of ebook readers paid for their ebooks in 2023 (36%). Ebook purchases were made from an online retailer or via a retailing app (19%). This category has also been trending down for ebooks since 2019 when it made up 34% of ebook acquisitions. Subscription services (11%) and general retailers (e.g.,

Costco, Walmart, Shoppers Drug Mart, grocery store, etc.) (7%) made up the remainder of purchasing platforms for ebooks.

Money spent on books and perception of value

In terms of spending on leisure activities in a given month, most Canadians spent between $1 and $49 (19%) or between $50 and $99 (19%). The third largest share spent between $100 and $149 per month (14%). No real clear trends emerged when comparing spending in 2023 to spending in 2022. It will be interesting to see if the cost of living increases in food and rent prices will be reflected in next year's spending on leisure activities.

**Amount spent on all leisure activities by readers in a typical month, 2022–2023**
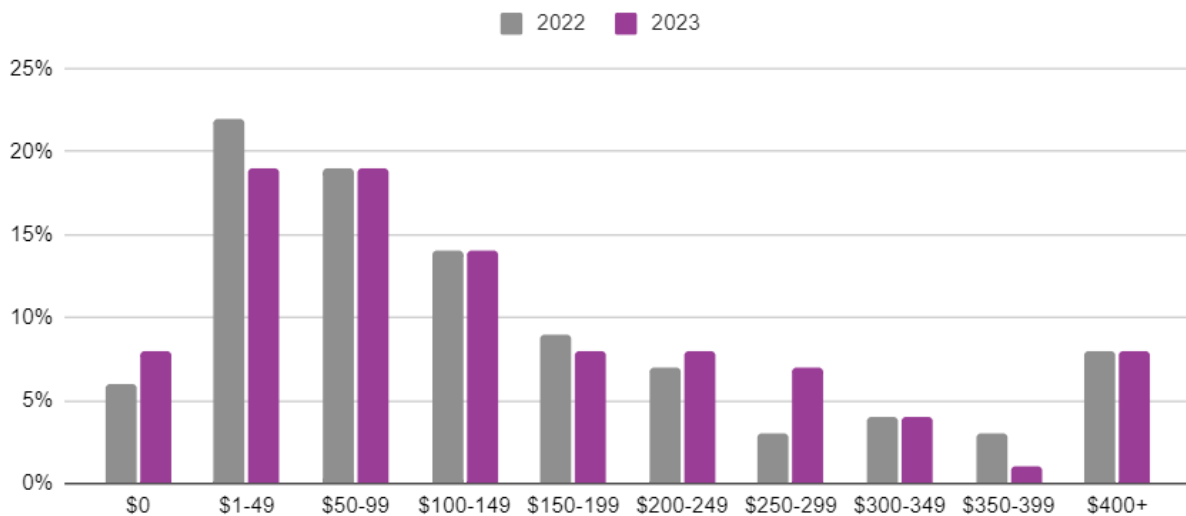
Source: BookNet Canada

When we narrow down leisure spending to just book purchases, we found that readers are spending much the same amounts in 2023 as they did in 2022. The largest share of readers still spent between $1 and $49 per month on books (36%), 27% did not spend any money, and 13% spent between $50 and $99.

Amount spent on books by readers in a typical month, 2022–2023
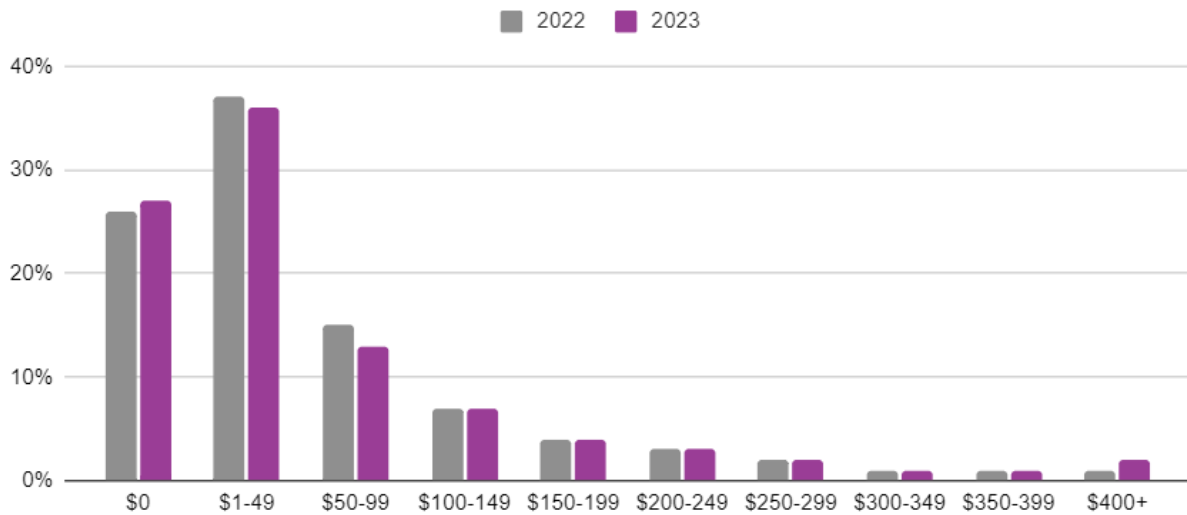
Source: BookNet Canada

Although we do not see any obvious changes in spending habits for readers in 2023 compared with 2022, we do see changes in how they answered questions about their budget for books. More readers said they chose books within their budget in 2023 (44%) than in 2022 (40%) or 2021 (37%), and fewer readers had no restrictions on the books they bought (23% in 2023, 30% in 2022 and 29% in 2021).

Reader spending habits, 2021–2023
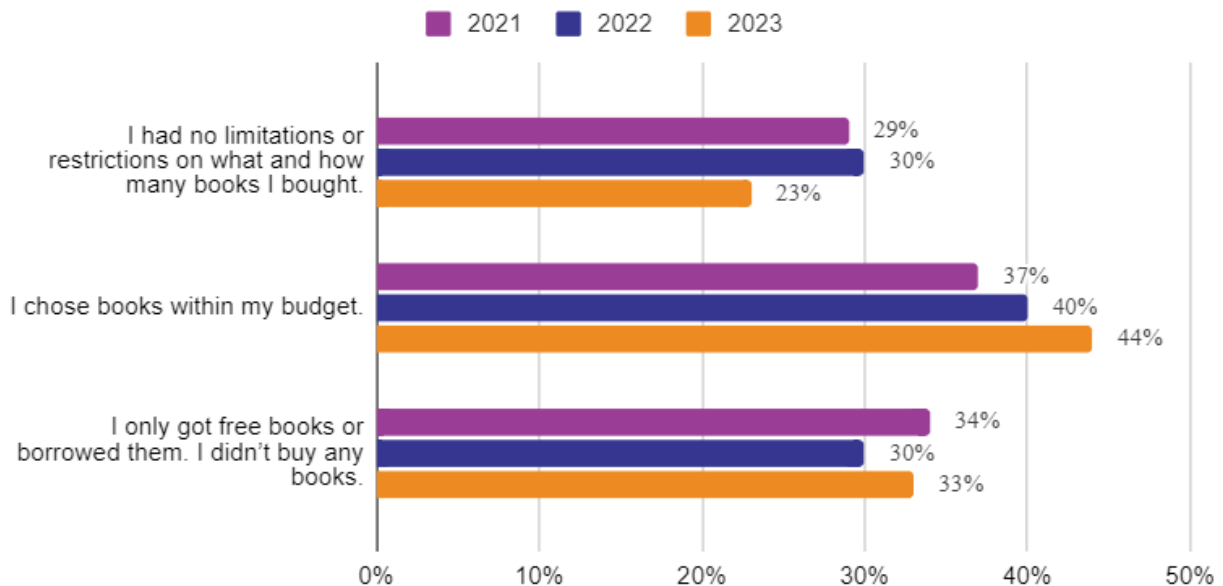
Source: BookNet Canada

Readers were likely to spend more on print books than other formats. Once the threshold was $50 or above, print books came out ahead in each tier of spending. Readers were most likely to spend nothing on ebooks (17%) than other formats.

"Price of books seems to be getting extremely expensive."

"New books are too expensive."

"You need to offer more affordability to increase readership."

Amount spent on books by format, 2023

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
$0	4%	17%	14%
$1-49	32%	34%	35%
$50-99	25%	22%	19%
$100-149	13%	12%	11%
$150-199	8%	5%	6%
$200-249	8%	5%	7%
$250-299	3%	2%	2%
$300-349	2%	1%	1%
$350-399	1%	0%	0%
$400+	4%	2%	3%

When we look at perceptions of value, we can see a bit of a shift from 2022. While the percentage of readers who answered "no" to the question, "I get good value for [print books/ebooks/audiobooks] at the price I pay" has stayed pretty flat since last year, the percentage of readers who said "yes" went down, while the percentage who said "sometimes" went up for both print books and ebooks, though it stayed

the same as 2022 for audiobooks. So it seems there might be a bit of a shift in how readers are perceiving value for print and ebooks in 2023.

"I get good value at the price I pay" by format, 2022–2023

		2022	2023
Print books	Yes	44%	41%
	Sometimes	39%	42%
	No	9%	10%
Ebooks	Yes	43%	38%
	Sometimes	35%	41%
	No	11%	11%
Audiobooks	Yes	38%	38%
	Sometimes	42%	43%
	No	11%	10%

Format preferences and frequency of reading

The percentage of Canadian readers without a format preference continues to decline, from 17% in 2021 to 9% in 2022 ending up at 7% in 2023. So readers know how they want to read. The majority of them would prefer to read in print books (59%), followed by ebooks (20%), and audiobooks (13%).

The preference for print has been dropping since 2019 (from 65% to 59% in 2023), while at the same time, preference for audiobooks has been rising (from 8% in 2019 to 13% in 2023), and ebook preference rose in 2023 (20%) for the first time since 2019 (16%).

> "Keep paper books coming."
>
> "Physical books are still important, not everyone likes audio or ebooks."
>
> "Touching, smelling and feeling the texture of a book is the food of life."
>
> "Embrace digital formats and explore innovative ways to engage readers through e-books, audiobooks, and interactive media."
>
> "Publish in audio."
>
> "Keep on publishing ebooks."

Audiobook listeners were mostly, but not exclusively, listening to digital audiobooks. In 2023, 28% only listened to digital audiobooks and 64% listened to a mix of physical and digital.

Readers in the 45 to 54 age group were most likely to prefer print books at 76% and 18 to 29 year olds were least likely to prefer print at 50%. The group that most preferred ebooks were 30 to 44 year olds at 24% and they were tied with the 18 to 29 year olds for audiobook preference (20% for each group). Readers 65 and older were most likely to not have a format preference (11%).

Format preference by age, 2023

Legend: Print books · Ebooks · Audiobooks · No preference
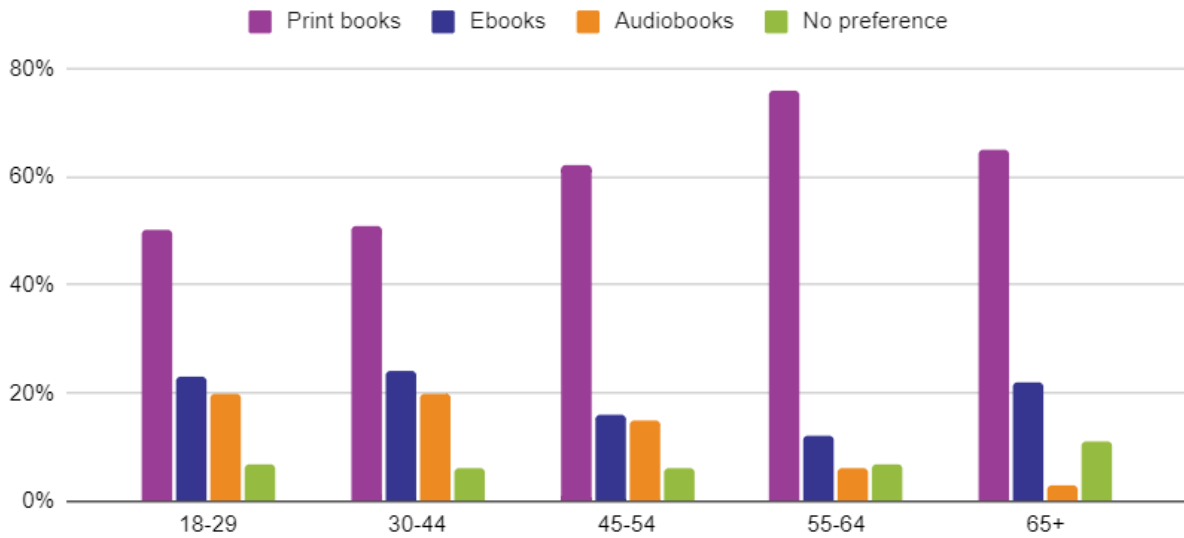
Source: BookNet Canada

Just under a quarter of readers will only read their preferred format (22%), while 71% either always read the format that is available to them at the time they are looking to read or at least do so some of the time.

Print book readers are most likely to stick to their preferred format; 30% said if they could not find the print version of a book, they would not read it in another format. Ebook readers were the most flexible, only 18% would forgo a book if they could not find that format. Audiobook readers were in between, 21% said they would not read a book if they could not listen to it. This format preference breaks down much the same as it did in 2022.

Readers' agreement with the statement "If I can't find the _____ version of the book, I won't read it in another format", 2023

Legend: ■ Print books ■ Ebooks ■ Audiobooks

Response	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
Yes	30%	18%	21%
Sometimes	26%	33%	34%
No	37%	44%	39%
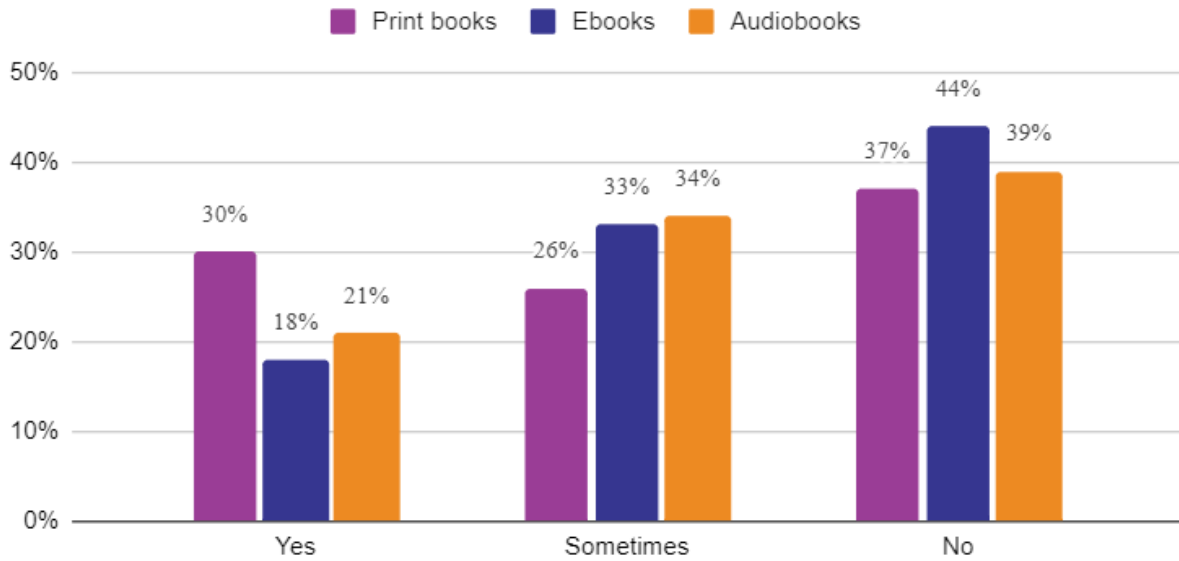
Source: BookNet Canada

Whether it's their preferred format or not, the number of readers who listened to an audiobook at least once in 2023 continued to rise from 49% in 2019 to 54% in 2023. Readers who read an ebook at least once has also increased from 61% in 2019 to 69% in 2023. The vast majority of readers continued to read a print book at least once in 2023 (92%), but this is down from 96% in 2019.

Readership by format, 2019–2023

Print readers ● Ebook readers ● Audiobook listeners
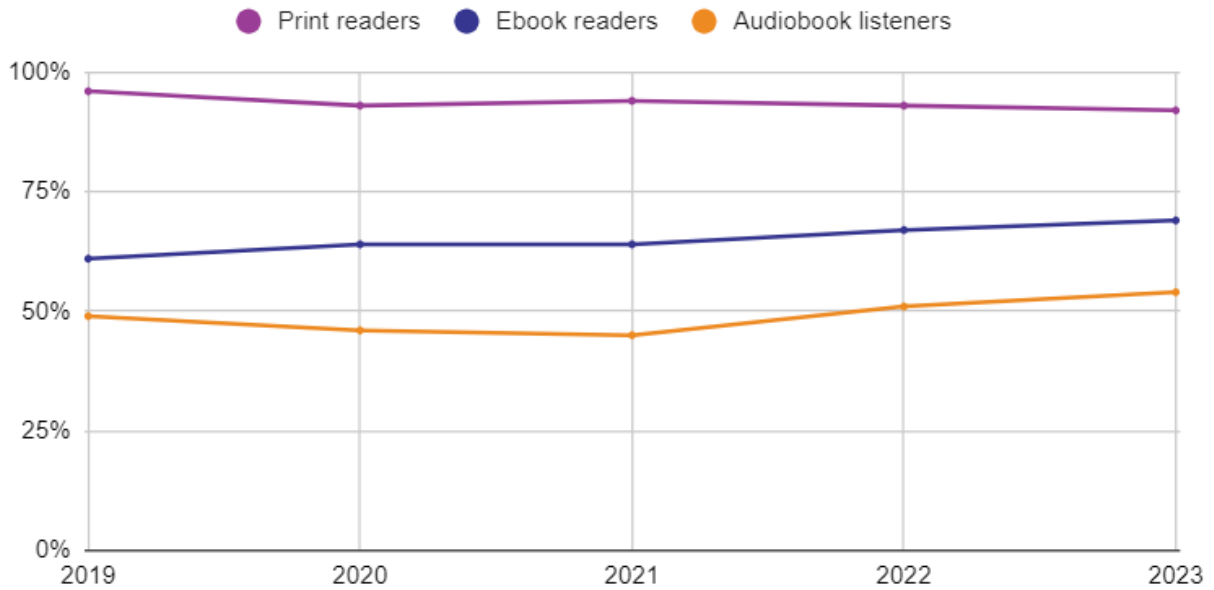
Source: BookNet Canada

Across all formats, readers were most frequently reading once a week (print 23%, ebooks 16%, and audiobooks 14%).

Reading frequency by format, 2023

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
More than once a day	8%	6%	3%
Once a day	18%	13%	9%
Once a week	23%	16%	14%
Once a month	16%	12%	9%
Less than once a month	12%	9%	8%
A few times a year	17%	13%	11%
Never	8%	31%	46%

For the most part, readers reported that they had just as much time in 2023 to read as they did in 2022 and this is true across all formats as seen in the graph below.

**Perception of time spent reading by format, 2023**
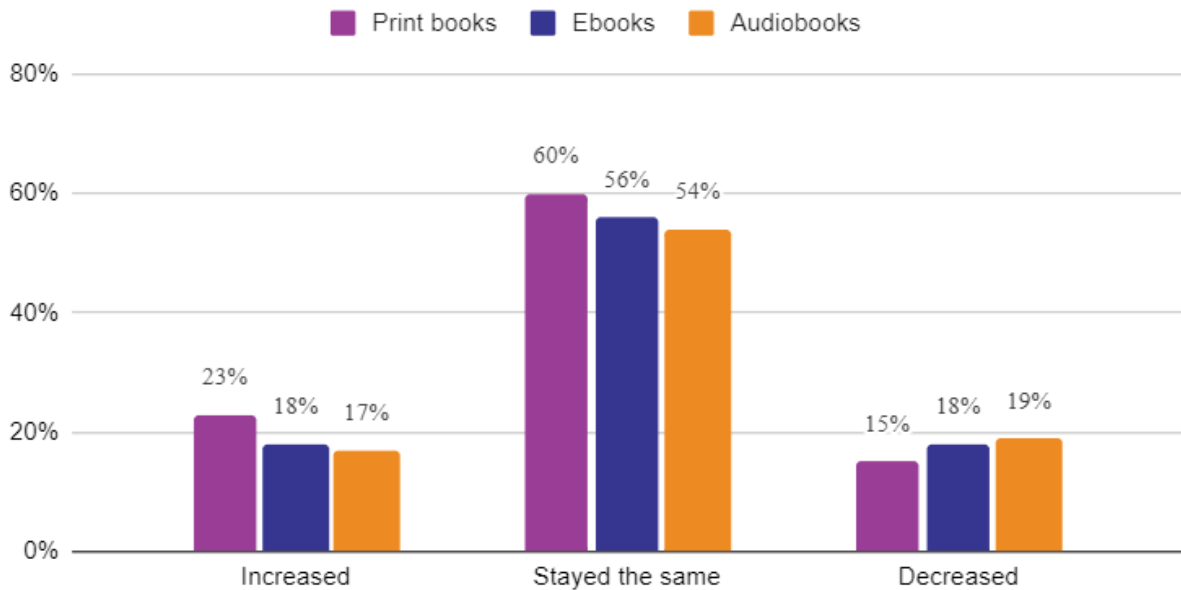
Source: BookNet Canada

Number of books read

Just over half of Canadian readers read between 1 and 5 books in 2023 (52%). Audiobook listeners were most likely to belong to the group who listened to five or fewer books in 2023 (63%), but ebook readers were likeliest to have read between 12 and 49 books in 2023 (17%).

Number of books read by format, 2023
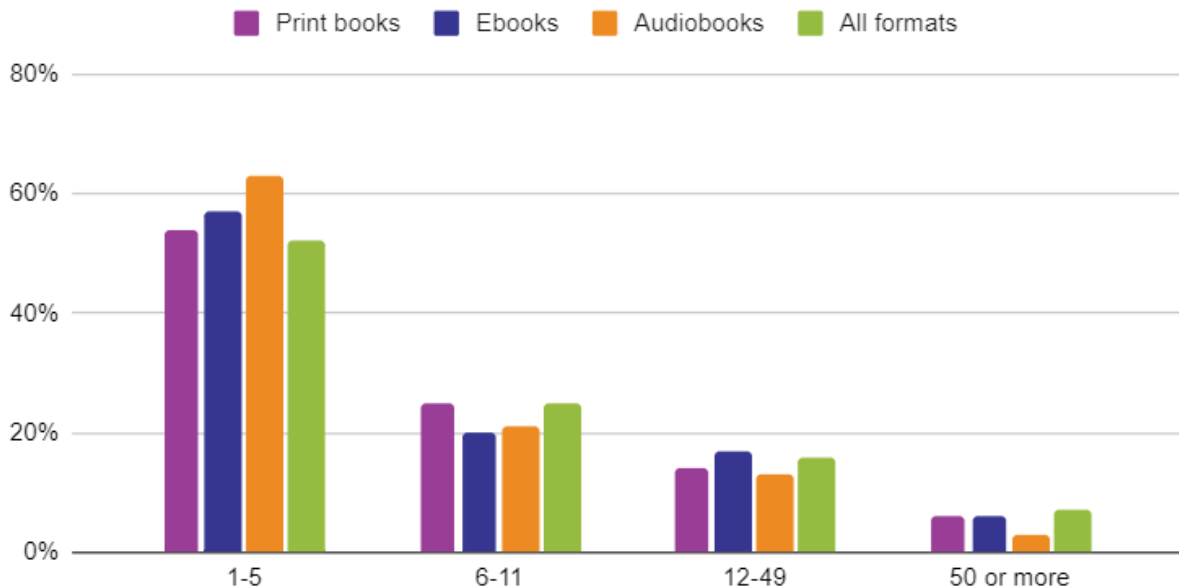
Source: BookNet Canada

Reading behaviours and preferences

Most Canadian readers don't feel obligated to complete books they are not enjoying — 83% said they will not or sometimes will not finish a book they do not like. One in six readers only read or listen to sections of the book that they are interested in at least some of the time (60%).

Many readers also chose to skim or speed read the books they read. Over half of print readers did so at least occasionally (55%) and 62% of ebook readers. Almost a third of audiobook listeners said that they listened at an increased/faster or decreased/slower speed (65%) — but it's difficult to compare that directly to the speed reading since it's possible that many audiobook listeners slow down the speed of the book.

Print readers show strong preferences for environmental considerations around their books:
- I donate or give away a print book after I finish reading it (76%)
- I want books to be made from sustainably-sourced paper (70%)
- I want my books delivered in ecological-friendly packaging (66%)
- I want to know where books are printed or shipped from (53%)

These preferences have remained at similarly high levels since 2021 when these questions were first included in our survey. However, their interest in knowing where the books are printed or shipped from has increased from 46% in 2021 to 53% in 2023 suggesting perhaps a growing awareness of this environmental impact.

> "Use recycled materials."
>
> "Keep using sustainable paper."
>
> "Need to be eco friendly."

Ebook readers showed more of a preference for embedded audio or video in 2023 than they did in 2022. In 2023, 37% of ebook readers sometimes preferred ebooks with embedded audio or video, 20% always preferred it, and 34% did not prefer these types of ebooks. In 2022, only 33% sometimes preferred embedded audio or video and 38% did not prefer it.

The percentage of audiobook listeners who at least sometimes preferred audiobooks with sound effects and/or music jumped quite a bit; from 65% in 2022 to 74% in 2023.

Other audiobook preferences were:
- I prefer listening to a human narrator over synthetic (AI) narration (82%)
- I have stopped listening to an audiobook because of the sound of the narrator's voice (65%)
- I search for specific narrators when looking for audiobooks to listen to (68%)
- I listen to an audiobook while following along in a physical/print book or ebook (59%)

"We know when the voice is AI generated and it is very difficult to listen to for an extended period of time."

"Do not use AI for audio books."

"I absolutely love having different options for someone's voice to read the book to me."

"It would also be nice for narrator to do voices for different characters or have multiple narrators actors for certain books."

One preference that has changed quite a bit over time for audiobook listeners is the statement: I specifically look for abridged (shortened) versions of audiobooks. In 2019, only 38% of audiobook listeners at least sometimes sought out shorter audiobooks, which has risen to 63% in 2023.

Readers' agreement with the statement "I specifically look for abridged (shortened) versions of audiobooks", 2019–2023

Yes or sometimes
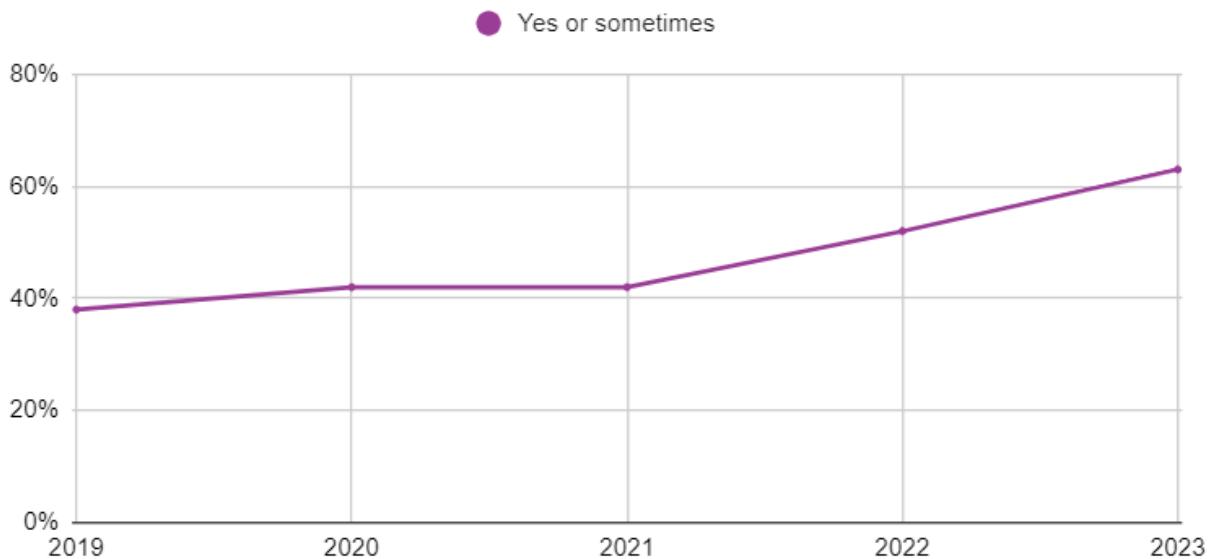
Source: BookNet Canada

Reading devices and apps

Smartphones continue to be the most popular way for ebook readers and audiobook listeners to use for their reading. The growth of the past five years continues for ebooks but has slowed down a little bit for audiobook listeners.

Smartphone use for ebooks and audiobooks, 2019–2023
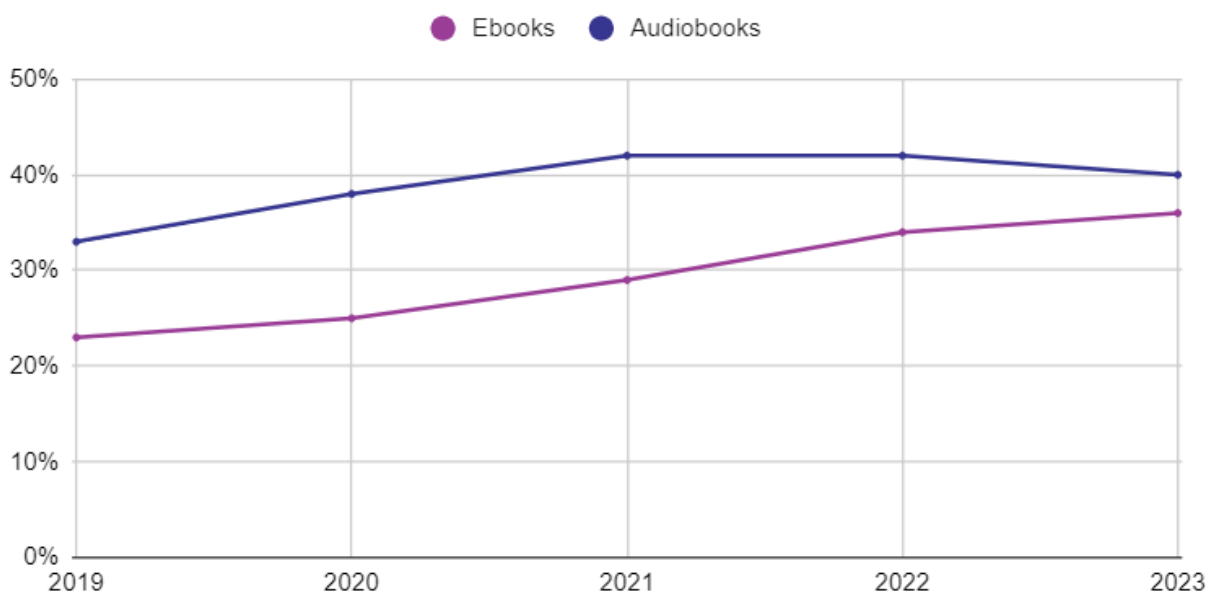
● Ebooks   ● Audiobooks

Source: BookNet Canada

The decline in smartphone share for audiobook listeners in 2023 was possibly partly due to gains in tablet use for listening — tablets rose to 22% in 2023 from 18% in 2022.

Devices used to read ebooks and listen to audiobooks, 2023

	Ebooks	Audiobooks
Smartphone	36%	40%
Tablet	28%	22%
Computer	18%	18%
Dedicated e-reader	14%	5%
Smart speaker	-	6%
Car stereo	-	6%
CD/tape player	-	3%
Braille display/terminal	2%	-
Other	2%	0%

For the fifth year in a row, YouTube is the most popular platform or app used to listen to audiobooks (33%). Amazon Kindle is the most popular for reading ebooks (34%) also for the fifth year in a row. Though Google Play (21%) and Google Books (22%) are gaining popularity in 2023.

Most popular apps to read ebooks and listen to audiobooks, 2023

	Ebooks	Audiobooks
Kindle	34%	15%
YouTube	-	33%
Internet browser	23%	17%
Google Books/Google Play	22%	21%
Audible	-	21%
Spotify	-	21%
iTunes/Apple Books	16%	14%
Kobo	15%	7%
Adobe Reader or Digital Editions	12%	-
Audiobooks.com	-	11%
OverDrive/Libby	10%	9%
None of the above	11%	6%

Accessibility and reading features

Print books

While not as many options for accessibility features are available to print readers, we did find that in 2023, 18% of print book readers preferred large print formats, 4% preferred Braille books, and 27% of print book readers used a magnifier to read their books.

Ebooks

Ebook readers are as likely to at least sometimes use the bookmark function in their reading device (75%) as they are to adjust the font or spacing to increase the text size or space out letters/lines (75%). They also are likely to adjust the screen magnification/zoom to make the text larger (73%).

Ebook features used by readers, 2023

	Yes	Sometimes	No
I use the reading mode on a tablet or smartphone.	34%	34%	27%
I use the Bookmark button.	33%	36%	26%
I adjust font size or spacing to increase the text size or space out letters/lines.	32%	43%	22%
I turn on the night display when reading in dim/low lighting.	32%	38%	26%
I adjust the screen magnification/zoom to be larger.	31%	43%	23%
I use the table of contents.	31%	44%	22%
I use the search function.	28%	41%	26%
I change text or background colour(s) for a brighter contrast.	27%	40%	31%
I use reference page numbers or the percentage metric.	25%	37%	34%
I make notes or highlight text.	24%	34%	39%
I change the text orientation from portrait to landscape.	24%	36%	36%
I turn on the screen reader to use the text-to-speech feature or a Braille device.	20%	27%	49%
I use voice control, eye tracking, or switches.	17%	26%	51%
I don't know how to use most or all of these features.	24%	35%	33%

Readers under 45 were the ones most likely to use each of the accessibility features in the list above. Which is similar to the breakdown by age groups that we saw in 2022 and 2021 as well.

> "With the population aging, consider always using larger, more readable print."
>
> "Books with large print and Braille are an absolute necessity."
>
> "I'm visually impaired — make ebooks so you can make the font size even larger."

Audiobooks

Listeners were most likely to replay parts of audiobooks to re-listen to them (79%), use speakers or hands-free features (76%), or listen to a sample of an audiobook before listening to the whole book (74%). These features retain the same order as in 2022, but each of them has increased slightly in 2023 as well.

Audiobook features used by listeners, 2023

	Yes	Sometimes	No
I use the speaker, Bluetooth, or hands-free feature.	38%	38%	20%
I listen to a sample of the audiobook before I listen to the full audio.	34%	40%	23%
I replay parts of the audiobook to re-listen to.	34%	45%	18%
I use the Bookmark feature.	30%	42%	24%
I use the table of contents or chapter list to read ahead.	29%	40%	27%
I reference the chapter or "minutes left" feature.	28%	45%	22%
I listen at an increased/faster or decreased/slower speed.	26%	39%	30%
I don't know how to use most or all of these features.	25%	40%	29%
I set a timer to stop listening after a certain amount of time.	23%	34%	38%

As with ebook features, readers under 45 were most likely to use all of these features in 2023.

Subjects and types of books

Readers across all formats were most likely to read adult fiction: 68% of print book readers and ebook readers and 62% of audiobook listeners read adult fiction in 2023.

Subject breakdown by format, 2022–2023

	Print books		Ebooks		Audiobooks	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Adult fiction	73%	68%	45%	68%	60%	62%
Adult non-fiction	66%	63%	39%	53%	61%	55%
Children's books	16%	15%	7%	15%	13%	16%
Young adult books	18%	19%	11%	17%	14%	18%

The rise of children's and young adult books for readers of all formats continued the trend we observed in 2022 beginning in 2019 to 2023.
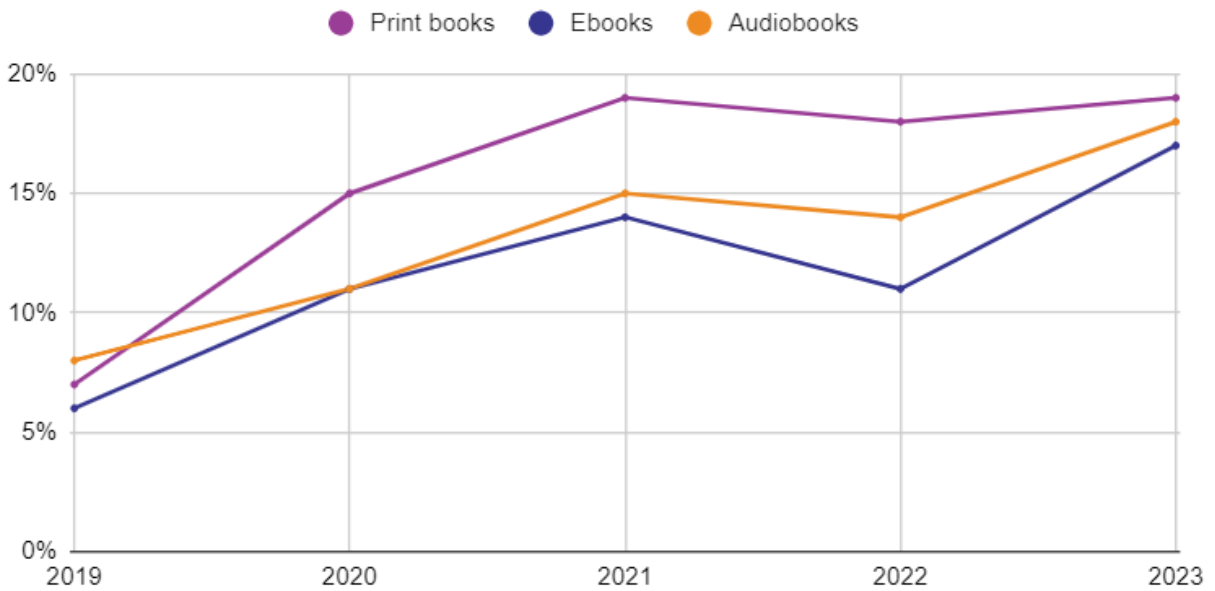
Reading by format for Children's books, 2019–2023
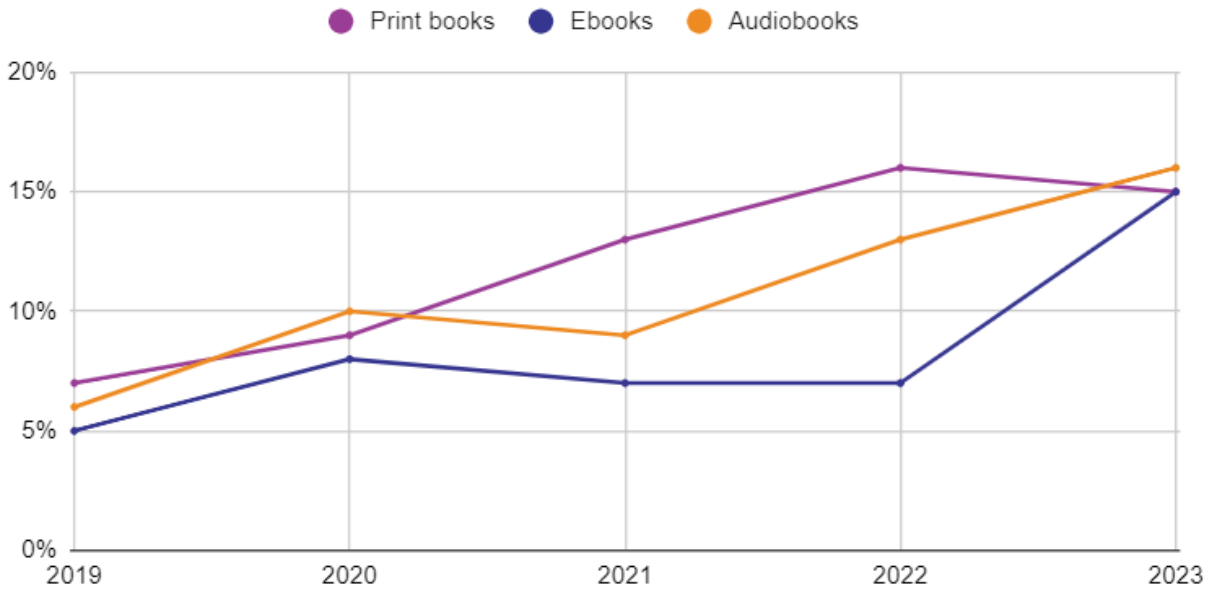
Source: BookNet Canada

Similarly, young adult reading has also increased noticeably from 2019 for all formats.

Reading by format for Young Adult books, 2019–2023
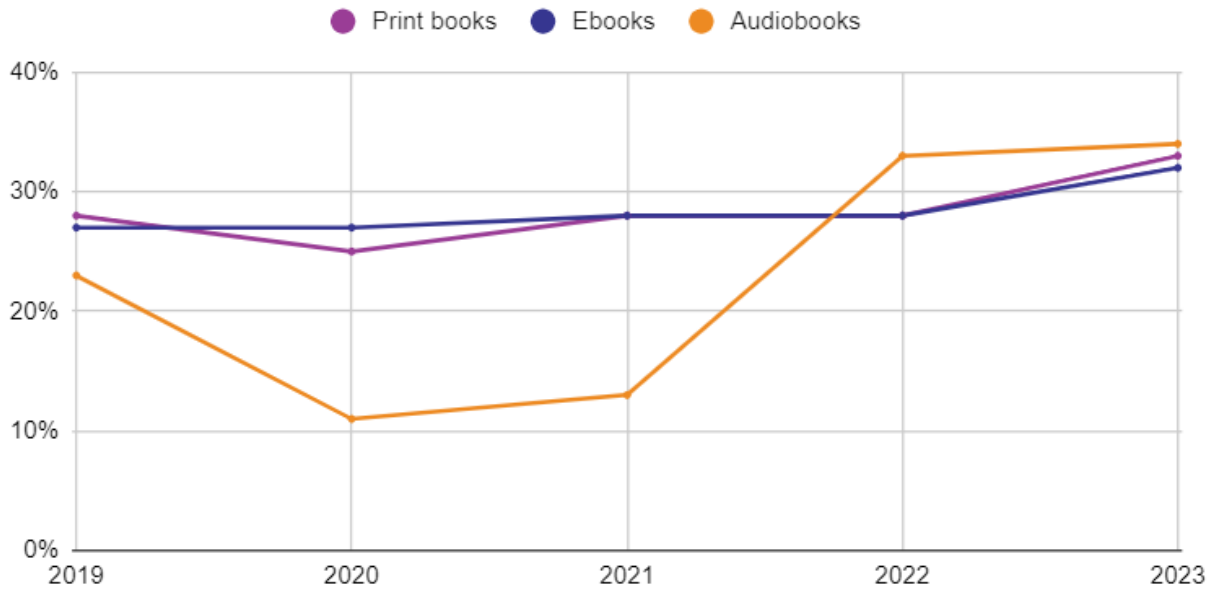

Source: BookNet Canada

Breaking down the subjects into genres, we found that most fiction readers chose Mysteries or Thrillers across all formats (55% for print readers, 46% ebook readers, 42% for audiobook listeners).

Fiction genres read by format, 2023

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
Mysteries or Thrillers	55%	46%	42%
Romance	33%	32%	34%
Fantasy	30%	28%	31%
Historical Fiction	30%	27%	30%
Science Fiction	28%	32%	32%
Literary Fiction	23%	20%	18%
Short Stories	20%	21%	28%
Comics or Graphic Novels	13%	12%	-
Chick Lit	5%	8%	8%
Other fiction subjects	3%	3%	2%

Romance was the second most popular fiction genre, and it was also up across all formats as well when compared to 2022.

Reading by format for Romance books, 2019–2023

Source: BookNet Canada

As for last year, History remained the most popular non-fiction genre for readers of all formats. True Crime was the third most popular genre for audiobook listeners, but it has been growing steadily since 2019 when 27% of respondents listened to that genre to 32% in 2023.

Comics and Graphic Novels is the genre that has grown the most for ebook readers, from 7% in 2019 to 14% in 2023.

Non-fiction subjects read by format, 2023

	Print books	Ebooks	Audiobooks
History	38%	33%	36%
Biographies or Memoirs	36%	29%	27%
Health or Fitness	27%	26%	27%
Cookbooks	26%	21%	20%
Self-Help	25%	30%	34%
True Crime	23%	26%	32%
Business	17%	19%	19%
Personal Finance	16%	20%	19%
Comics or Graphic Novels	12%	14%	-
Other non-fiction subjects	7%	4%	3%

For more on the performance of specific subjects, you can find a subject spotlight series on the BookNet blog where we take a deep dive into the Canadian sales and library circulation of a specific BISAC subject. Or watch our Tech Forum presentation, Trending now: Book subjects on the move in the Canadian market to learn more about the emerging trends in the types of books Canadians are buying.

Across all formats and across all subjects and genres, in 2023, Canadians read:
- Books that have been made into movies or TV shows (41%)
- Books with a sequel (duology, trilogy, series, etc.) (34%)
- Comics, manga, or graphic novels (20%)
- Books written in a language other than English (17%)
- Poetry, books in verse, or plays (14%)

This breakdown above is virtually the same as it was in 2022.

For the readers who had read a book in a language other than English, the top languages were French (30%), Spanish (13%) and Punjabi (10%).

Non-English languages read by Canadian readers, 2021–2023

	2021	2022	2023
Arabic	3%	6%	5%
Cantonese	5%	4%	6%
French	28%	37%	30%
Italian	4%	8%	6%
Mandarin	9%	12%	8%
Punjabi	7%	8%	10%
Spanish	8%	10%	13%
Tagalog	3%	6%	6%
Urdu	5%	8%	10%
Russian	6%	3%	8%
German	4%	6%	6%
Something not listed	30%	25%	31%

Diversity and representation in books

The same proportion of readers as last year agree or sometimes agree that books should be representative of a variety of experiences (90%) and that it is important that authors accurately represent their material through research, fact-checking, and/or hiring reviewers and sensitivity or beta readers (85%).

Reader opinions on diversity and representation in books, 2023

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Books should be representative of a variety of experiences.	57%	33%	5%
It is important that authors accurately represent their material through research, fact-checking, and/or hiring reviewers and sensitivity or beta readers.	53%	32%	8%
A greater variety of authors should be published and stocked.	47%	29%	7%
It is important that books about a group or culture should be written by people from that group or culture.	36%	35%	18%

Books about people who belong to religious minorities, people with immigrant status, and books about disabled people have been trending up with readers over the last five years.

Representation in books, 2019–2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Books by or about Canadians/locals	30%	27%	28%	24%	28%
Books by or about people who belong to religious minorities	8%	8%	14%	14%	17%
Books by or about Black, Indigenous, or person/people of colour	10%	10%	19%	14%	16%
Books by or about people with immigrant status	10%	10%	13%	12%	16%
Books by or about disabled people	8%	6%	10%	10%	12%
Books by or about LGBTQIA+ people	7%	8%	8%	8%	9%

"More books with characters who have an invisible disability."

"We need to continue an emphasis on featuring diverse authors and stories. One very underrepresented group in the book world are persons with disabilities."

"Have more international authors, more translated works."

"Different types of writers are important."

"Keep supporting Canadian authors."

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 operations are remote and our colleagues contribute their work from the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wyandot, the Mi'kmaq, the Ojibwa of Fort William First Nation, the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations (which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie), and the Métis, the original nations and peoples of the lands we now call Beeton, Brampton, Guelph, Halifax, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Vaughan, and Windsor. 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 Study 2023*: New results from our quarterly survey of Canadians about their book buying, borrowing, and more in 2023.
- *Canadian Book Market 2023:* A comprehensive guide to the Canadian market in 2023 with in-depth category data.

- *Tapping into Ebooks: Ebook Use in Canada 2022:* An overview of ebook buying, borrowing, and reading in Canada in 2022.

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