

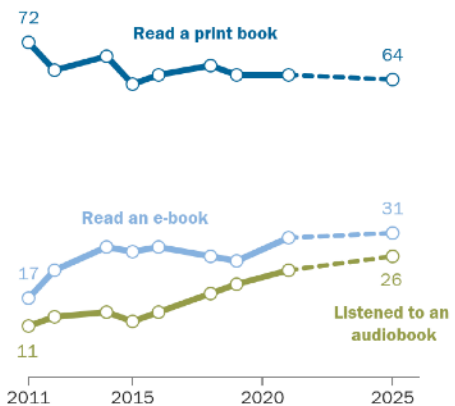
Last month, the Pew Research Center [released a study](#) on the reading habits and preferences of Americans. Let's see how we can compare their results to what we see at BDL.

For starters—and it's a very good stat!—Pew reports that 3/4 of American adults have read a book in the past year, at least partially. This one is very hard to compare, since we at BDL have no way of knowing what people are reading outside of the library's collection. But we can say that about 2,000 unique cardholders in a given month are checking out either a physical or digital item. That's about 4.3% of population in our service area using the library. Most of that will be books, but not all. Hopefully, the full picture of how many people in the service area are reading a book is much closer to that national number!

But how are people consuming their books? Nationally, print books are still on top, but audiobooks are rapidly increasing in popularity. The number of people who read ebooks has nearly doubled since 2011. The number of unique active users of BDL's digital services Libby and Hoopla have both tripled over a similar time frame.

**Print books still dominate in the U.S., but use of e-books and audiobooks has grown over the past decade**

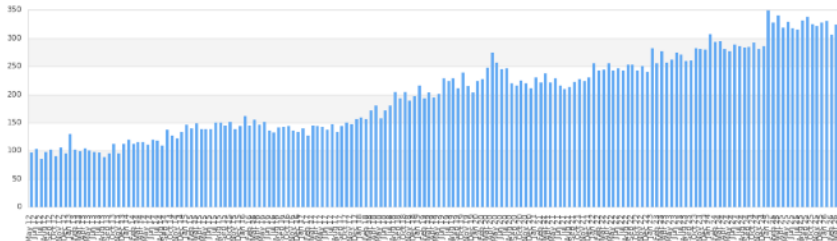
% of U.S. adults who say they have \_\_\_ in the past 12 months



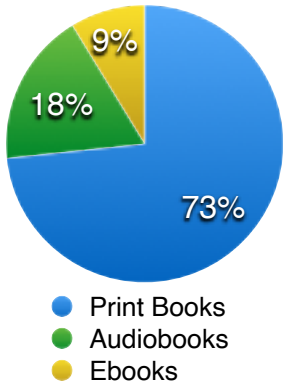
Note: Dashed lines indicate a change in survey mode. We conducted the poll via phone from 2011 to 2021, and via web and phone in 2025. Those who did not answer or said that they did not read any books either all or part of the way through in the past 12 months are not shown.  
Source: Survey conducted Oct. 6-16, 2025.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

District Active OverDrive Users



When looking at unique users of Libby and Hoopla, I am surprised at how little overlap there is between the two services. Looking at last month, for example, out of 823 users combined, only 114 used both platforms. Another way of looking at that is that with 709 unique users, our "digital branch" had the largest number of individuals last month.

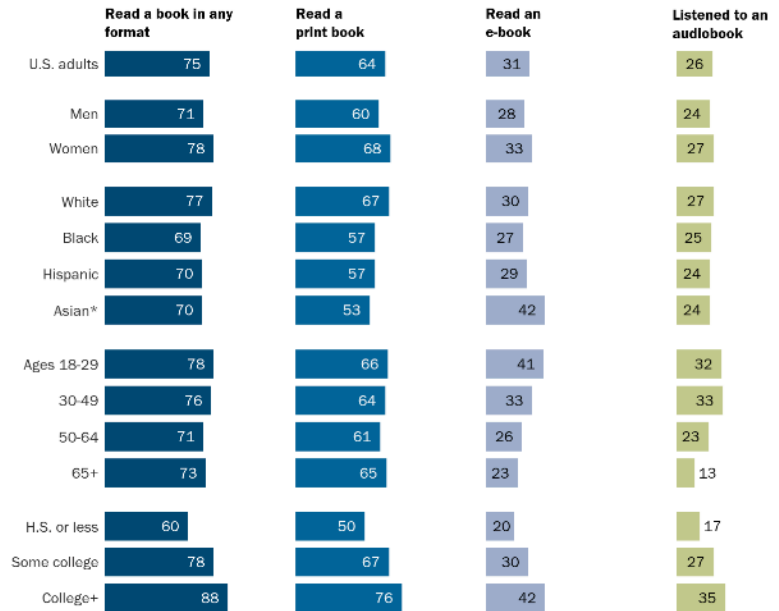


Since we do not track our users habits, we can't compare directly to this Pew survey with regard to how many users prefer what formats. But looking at last month at BDL, there were 1,734 audiobook checkouts across physical and all digital platforms, vs. 846 ebooks and 7,102 physical books.

Pew also broke things down by age in the chart at right.

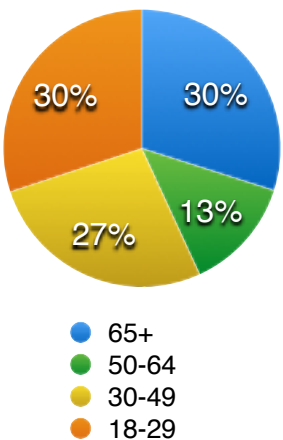
**Book reading habits in the U.S. vary by education, age and other factors**

% of U.S. adults who say they have \_\_\_ in the past 12 months



\* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.  
 Note: Those who did not answer or said that they did not read any books either all or part of the way through in the past 12 months are not shown. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 6-16, 2025.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



It is not easy for us to look at age groups across the platforms, so for now we'll just compare with print items. The chart at left shows the percentages of the total unique users at BDL who checked out a print book last month. Here, our numbers nearly exactly match the national ratios of the print reader age groups.

Finally, Pew also looked at book club participation, where 7% of Americans report participating in a book club. Our bookclub participation varies, of course, but on a good month about 2% of our active cardholders are participating in BDL bookclubs, lower than the national average, to be sure, but a number that is regularly increasing for us!

Submitted by John Rucker