

MEDIA RELEASE

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Revealing Reading: A Survey of Australian Reading Habits

The Australia Council for the Arts has today released a summary of new research into Australian book reading habits which reveals Australians rank reading as their favourite leisure activity and they still prefer a printed book in their hands.

A **Survey of Australian Reading Habits** was undertaken in partnership with Macquarie University as the final stage of the University's major three-part study of Australia's changing book industry. Conducted in 2016, the Survey provides unique insights into current preferences, attitudes and reading behaviours of Australians, and was developed in consultation with a wide range of industry organisations and participants, including authors, publishers, booksellers, librarians and educators.

Dr Wendy Were, Executive Director Strategic Development and Advocacy, said the Australia Council was proud to partner with Macquarie University on this project. The survey outcomes were vital to making the case for the role of books and reading in the lives of Australians and the imperative to support a vibrant and sustainable literary culture.

"This research explores the role of books in our lives, how we decide what to read, what we enjoy, where we acquire books, and how we value them," Dr Were said.

"The findings highlight how reading helps Australians transcend their daily lives and become absorbed in stories – in fiction and non-fiction, for escapism or thought-provoking reflection. We are delighted that this survey shows 92% of Australians are classified as readers and the majority believe that books provide much greater value to our lives than the price we pay for them."

Australia Council Director of Literature, Wenona Byrne said the Australian book industry had experienced significant change in recent years, with the development of digital publishing and retailing and the introduction of e-books. This new research reveals there is a strong culture of books and reading in Australia, and while many readers are accessing books in both print and digital forms, nearly nine in ten are still reading print books.

"Although digital technology and an array of entertainment and information options have changed some of our daily habits, reading books is still an important and highly valued part of our lives, ranking above time online and watching TV as a preferred leisure activity," Ms Byrne said.

"It is encouraging to see that Australians value our stories and on average, read more than three books per month and spend five hours a week reading. The good news is that in general Australians want to read more, so the challenge in the literature sector is to find ways and spaces to capture the hearts and minds of Australians."

Key insights from the research:

- **We value and enjoy reading and would like to do it more** – 95% of Australians enjoy reading books for pleasure or interest; 68% would like to read more, with relaxation and stress release the most common reason for reading; and almost three-quarters believe books make a contribution to their life that goes beyond their cost. Over 80% of Australians with children encourage them to read.

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- **Most of us still turn pages but many are swiping too**– while print books still dominate our reading, over half of all readers include e-books in the mix, and 12% audio books. Most Australians (71%) continue to buy books from bricks-and-mortar shops, while half (52%) are purchasing online. Word of mouth recommendations and browsing in a bricks and mortar bookshop are our preferred ways to find out what to read next. At the same time, nearly a third of us interact with books and reading through social media and online platforms.
- **We are reading more than book sales data alone suggests** – each month almost as many people borrow books (41%) as those who buy them (43%) and second-hand outlets are the third most popular source for buying books (39%), after major book chains (47%) and overseas websites (40%). Those who borrow books acquire them almost as frequently from public libraries as they do by sharing among friends.
- **We value Australian stories and our book industry** – 71% believe it is important for Australia children to read books set in Australia and written by Australian authors; and 60% believe it is important that books written by Australian authors be published in Australia. While there is a common perception among Australians that books are too expensive, more than half believe Australian literary fiction is important. Almost two-thirds of Australians believe books by Indigenous Australian writers are important for Australian culture.
- **We like mysteries and thrillers best** – the crime/mystery/thriller genre is the most widely read and takes top spot as our favourite reading category. We also love an autobiography, biography or memoir.

For more information and to explore interactive dashboards visit the Australia Council [website](#).

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. The Australia Council is committed to making the vitality of our arts and culture more visible, and to recognising and supporting the evolving way that Australians make and experience art. Our role is to support the unimagined along with the reimagined, the unknown and experimental along with the keenly anticipated. We are a champion for Australian arts both here and overseas.

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