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National Endowment for the Arts Releases Report About Changes to Nation's Reading Habits

For people concerned about the future of books, the National Endowment for the Arts' report *How Do We Read: Let's Count the Ways* brings good news. Using data from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), the report shows that declines in book-reading may not be as severe as previously reported. Instead, the nation's readership appears to be shifting from print-only to digital and audio platforms. By including e-readers and audiobooks in the way we track overall book-reading, the 2017 rates are closer to those in 2012 and 2008.

In addition to examining reading rates using different formats, *How Do We Read: Let's Count the Ways: Comparing Digital, Audio, and Print-Only Readers* looks at how adults participate in other literary activities, such as author readings, book clubs, and creative writing. It also explores the relationship between reading books and attending arts and cultural events. The National Endowment for the Arts conducts the SPPA with the U.S. Census Bureau approximately every four years.

Key Findings

More than half of all U.S. adults (55 percent, or 132 million) did some form of book-reading in 2017, whether via print, digital media, or listening to audiobooks.

Of all adult readers, more use digital/audio platforms than read print-only. For digital/audio readers, the breakdown is:

- E-books (but not audiobooks): 50.6 percent
- E books and audiobooks: 35.6 percent
- Audiobooks (but not e-books): 13.8 percent

Younger adult readers, especially 18-24-year-olds, are more likely than older adults to read via digital/audio formats.

- Nevertheless, more older adults read books than do younger adults.
- Yet digital/audio readers consume more books per year than do print-only readers.

Digital/audio readers are much more likely than print-only readers to participate in literary activities per the following:

- Being part of a reading group; digital/audio readers at 16 percent compared to 2.6 percent of print-only readers
- Doing creative writing; digital/audio readers at 19.4 percent compared with 6.7 percent of print-only readers
- Overall, audio book listeners participate more in literary activities than e-book readers.

Digital/audio readers engage in other cultural activities and support the arts, more than print-only readers.

- For digital/audio readers, 56.7 percent attended a live performance compared to 34 percent of print-only readers.

Arts Endowment Director of Research & Analysis Sunil Iyengar looks at some of the report's findings and compares them to other national studies [in this blog post](#).

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit arts.gov to learn more.