



**Scottish
Book Trust**
inspiring readers and writers

Reading in Scotland: Reading over lockdown

Executive summary

'It's hard for me to imagine coping with the current lock-down situation without books.'

During the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, Scottish Book Trust set out to discover what impact the lockdown was having on readers in Scotland. We recruited a panel of people living in Scotland to complete regular surveys about their experiences of reading between March and August 2020. Over the weeks we built up a picture of Scotland's reading habits under lockdown and investigated whether reading had an impact on our panel's life and wellbeing.

Wellbeing

Throughout the study it was clear that that the majority of the panel found reading important to their wellbeing.

- 98% agreed that reading supports their wellbeing.
- 97% agreed that reading helps them to relax.
- 92% agreed that reading has been important to them in times of stress or anxiety throughout their lives.

'Reading is one of the few touchstones to my regular life. With a full time job, two small children at home, and a GP husband working crazy hours reading before bed is honestly the only time I feel in any way connected to my normal self.'

'Find it as essential as my daily walk as a mental break from the current situation.'

'I am being reminded of the positive power of reading and what I've been missing as my reading has slowed down so much over the last few years. It is transformational.'

Connection and isolation

Many panellists were using reading to connect with family, friends and colleagues during the lockdown. They reported that this had helped them bond with others, take their minds off the pandemic and relieve stress.

- 64% agreed that reading made them feel less isolated.
- 46% reported speaking about reading with someone new and 63% agreed that reading had helped them bond with others.
- 50% agreed that sharing their reading with family and friends made them feel less stressed.

'I have done some (remote) book swaps with friends and family (by post etc.) which is nice because then we can discuss something other than the pandemic!'

'Reading stories on FaceTime to 5 year old grandson a new regular treat for us both.'

Access to books

Most of our panellists had a collection of books at home they were working their way through during the lockdown. However, panellists stressed the important role public libraries play in their lives. Before the lockdown:

- 75% used the library to get print books for themselves
- 94% of those with children used the library to get print books for them

Some expressed their concerns about children who did not have access to books during the lockdown:

'I am concerned that many of the pupils at the school I work in are not so lucky. Many pupils do not all have books at home, they do not all have money for books, they do not all have internet access to access public library ebooks, and they do not all have adults at home encouraging them to engage with books and stories – this disparity was there before, but will be growing ever greater.'

Reading choices

Many panellists told us they were missing browsing in bookshops and libraries.

- Prior to the lockdown, 80% got ideas and books from browsing bookshops and 49% from browsing the library.

'I used to use the stands at the library where a selection of books had been curated/recommended by the librarian as I didn't have a lot of time to browse the adult section with impatient little ones.'

Each week, panellists gave their reasons for selecting their current reading material. Overall, the top six reasons were:

1. Chose something they knew they would enjoy
2. Looking for an easy read
3. Picked something they'd always meant to read
4. Chose something to challenge themselves
5. Wanted to try something new
6. Rereading an old favourite

'I am avoiding stuff that I think is going to be tough emotionally. I'm also re-reading books that I know I'll enjoy.'

'I am using this time to read books that I have been meaning to but never gotten round to.'

Reading habits

The majority of panellists reported reading more over the lockdown, with some noting they had more energy for reading due to working from home.

- 65% were reading more than they used to.
- 60% enjoyed reading things they would not normally have read.
- 25% discovered they really enjoyed a new genre.
- 49% discovered a new favourite book, author or series.

'I am still reading before bed but I think I am able to give more time to it because I am saving three hours on commuting so can get my household chores done in that time. I think this has helped me with sleep and I also feel happier.'

'I read a crime thriller over Easter and it removed me completely from real life. I loved it. I would have very rarely picked up something like this before.'

However, a significant minority found they had less time for reading due to caring responsibilities, work commitments and changing routines.

Over the course of the eight weekly surveys there was an increase in daily reading:

- Daily fiction reading rose from 55% to 72%
- Daily newspaper and/or magazine consumption doubled from 25% to 50%
- Daily poetry reading doubled from 3% to 6%
- Daily non-fiction consumption more than doubled from 9% to 23%
- Daily audiobook use tripled from 4% to 12%
- Daily ebook use more than doubled from 13% to 29%

Many panellists hoped to continue dedicating more time to reading, reading more as a family and exploring a wider range of genres and formats.

- 72% agreed that they would like to continue with some aspects of their lockdown reading habits.

'I have loved this time with my child and reading lots of books with her every day – I will strive to keep this up when things resume normality.'

Conclusion

At the time of writing much of Scotland is entering a period of further restrictions. This study shows the important role reading can play during this time – to ease anxiety, reduce isolation and provide some much-needed escapism.

However, it's clear that for many the stresses of the pandemic can make it difficult to read in the ways you might normally. Taking a lead from our panel, we would urge readers to be kind to themselves – read what you fancy, something that makes you happy or intrigued, calm or comforted. If for you that's *War and Peace* – great! But if it's rereading an old childhood favourite or listening to the audiobook of a fast-paced thriller that is equally valid. All reading is good reading, especially in times like these.

Introduction

In March 2020 we recruited a panel of readers living in Scotland to explore if, and how, the lockdown was impacting Scotland's reading. Each week from April to June a group of between 114–213 people completed surveys on their experience of reading that week. They were contacted again in mid-August for a follow-up survey. Participation in the panel was voluntary and the response rate varied from week to week.

Over the weeks we built up a picture of Scotland's reading habits under lockdown and investigated whether reading had an impact on our panel's life and wellbeing.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the *Reading in Scotland* study. The panel were incredibly generous with their time, energy and insights over the course of the project.

Response rate over the course of the study		
	Date of survey	Responses received
Week 0 (sign-up form)	30 March 2020	354*
Week one	17 April 2020	213
Week two	24 April 2020	179
Week three	01 May 2020	153
Week four	08 May 2020	171
Week five	15 May 2020	154
Week six	22 May 2020	134
Week seven	29 May 2020	121
Week eight	05 June 2020	114
Follow-up survey	07 August 2020	115

*385 completed the sign-up form, only 354 consented to be contacted for the study

Method

We contacted the panel weekly with a survey about their reading during the previous week. The panel were emailed on a Friday morning and asked to complete their survey over the weekend.

In our week one survey, we sought to get to know our panel and gain a picture of their reading habits before the lockdown started. For the week two survey we tweaked the set questions to incorporate feedback and recurring themes from the previous survey. In addition to the set questions, we dived deeper into a different theme each week to maintain variety for the panellists and gain different insights.

The set questions focused on the panel's reading habits and experiences. These remained essentially unchanged throughout the study to allow us to chart changes in attitudes and actions over time. These weekly questions established:

- What panellists read during the previous week
- Why they chose to read this

- How often they read each format (audiobooks, ebooks, physical books, reading aloud to someone else, comics or graphic novels, fiction, newspapers or magazines (including online), non-fiction, poetry, short stories)
- Words that resonated with their experience of reading that week

To maintain interest and encourage a sense of ownership over the study, we included two additional opportunities for panellists to speak to us through open text boxes. We also asked for any reading tips or suggestions for us to share with the rest of the panel when we sent out the following week's survey.

The panel

With a weekly survey that panellists spent around 5–20 minutes completing, participation was a significant time commitment. The panel were sent a total of ten surveys. They were incredibly generous with their time.

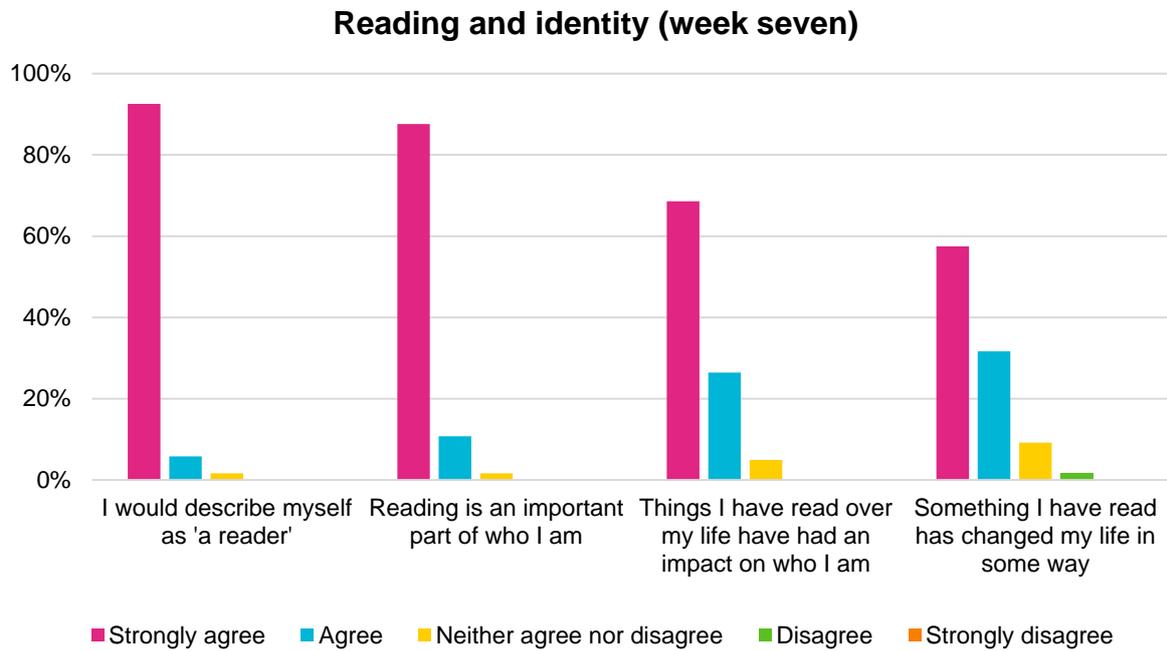
The panel were recruited through a single post across Scottish Book Trust social media channels in March 2020. To sign up to the panel participants were directed to a demographics form where they had the option of entering information about their characteristics before signing up. This gave us an indication of the make-up of the panel.

- The 354 people who chose to participate in the panel are not representative of the general population. This is most noticeable in the gender of panel members: 84% identified as women, 15% as men, and 1% were non-binary.
- 87% of the panel identified as White Scottish or British. Almost 7% indicated their ethnicity as not listed as an option. Other ethnic identities selected included Irish (3%), mixed or multiple background (2%) and Indian (1%). Some ethnicities with large populations in Scotland (notably Polish and Pakistani) were not represented at all.
- While the majority of the panel identified as heterosexual (82%), lesbian (3%), gay (1%) and bisexual (7%) people were represented.
- A range of age groups was represented on the panel, with the majority aged between 25 and 64: 25–34 (24%), 35–44 (29%), 45–54 (19%), 55–64 (17%).

Appendix 1 gives more information on the demographics of the panel.

As panellists signed up through Scottish Book Trust channels and volunteered to write about reading every week, they were generally avid readers. In week seven we asked more about how reading helped mould our panellists' identities. 98% of our panel agreed (93% strongly) that they would describe themselves as 'a reader'. It might not be surprising that a group of people who signed up voluntarily to participate in a reading study are voracious readers. What is more interesting is how their self-definition as readers reflects the importance of books to their sense of self. 98% of the panel agreed (88% strongly) that reading is an important part of who they

are. 95% agreed that things they have read over their life have had an impact on who they are.



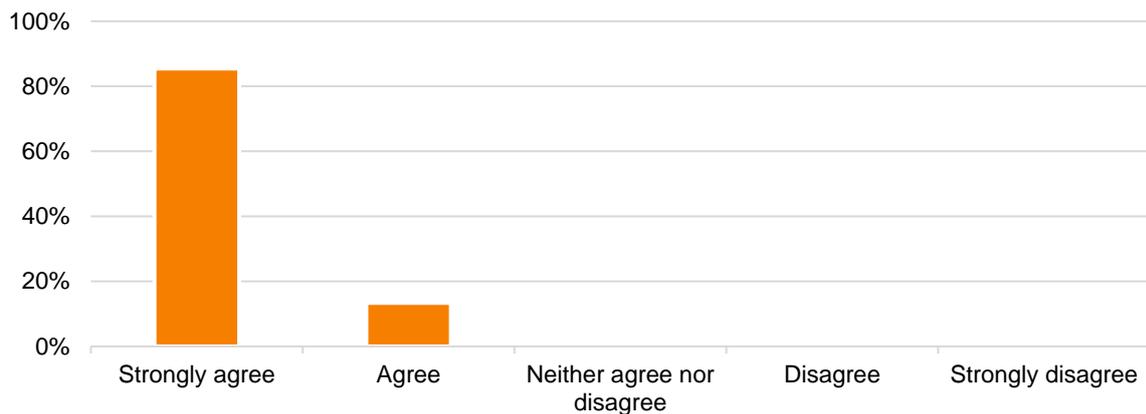
Wellbeing

- 'Reading is always a joy, but I feel it's a particularly intense experience at the moment.' (Week two)

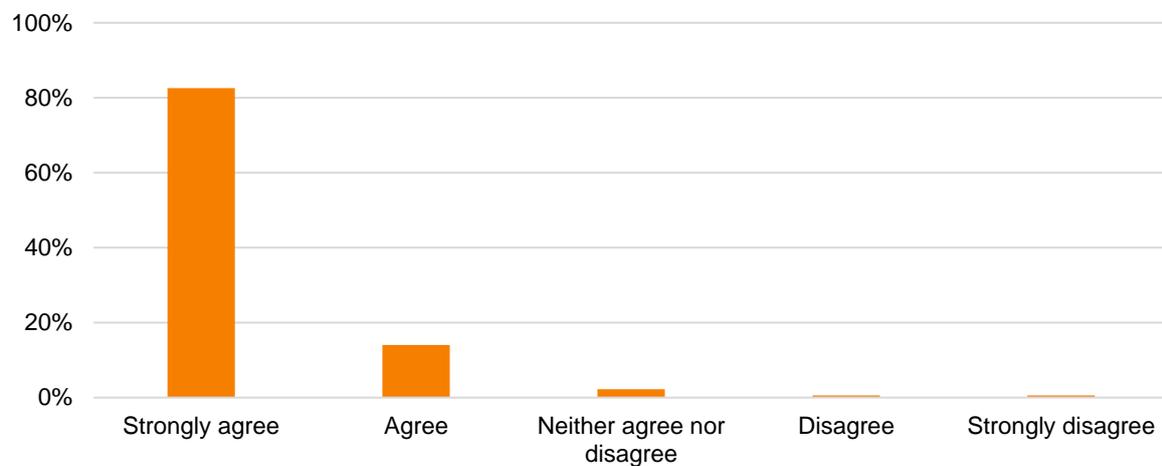
Themes of health and wellbeing appeared in the comments throughout the study. Many of these were unsolicited, though the week two survey focused specifically on aspects of wellbeing and reading during lockdown. This section relates some of the key findings from week two, along with material from other weeks that touches on the topic.

- 'Reading is vital to my wellbeing, not to mention my work, so it's been both strange and upsetting not to be able to really make the most of this time to read. But, even in reading less, and more distractedly, it remains central to me, and what I have read has been valuable and unsettling and challenging and transporting and all of the things I want my reading material to be.' (Week eight)

'Reading for enjoyment supports my wellbeing' (week two)



'Reading helps me relax' (week two)



98% agreed (85% strongly) that reading for enjoyment supports their wellbeing. 97% agreed (83% strongly) that reading helps them to relax.

- 'Reading is one of the few touchstones to my regular life. With a full time job, two small children at home, and a GP husband working crazy hours reading before bed is honestly the only time I feel in any way connected to my normal self.' (Week two)
- 'A poem a day keeps the doom away.' (Week five)
- 'More reading because I have been sick with covid 19. Recovery is hard and reading helps enormously.' (Week five)

They mentioned that reading has a positive impact on their mood and detailed the ways they have used reading to alleviate or cope with symptoms related to anxiety, loss, or depression:

- 'Find it as essential as my daily walk as a mental break from the current situation.' (Week one)
- 'I am being reminded of the positive power of reading and what I've been missing as my reading has slowed down so much over the last few years. It is transformational.' (Week one)
- 'Enjoying escaping to a book because it takes me away from the current anxieties.' (Week one)
- 'My father died after a long illness. I've been reading a lot of poetry, some familiar and for my own benefit, and some new to find funeral readings. It has been very moving. The poetry that I have read and loved over the years has been a bedrock at this time, and the poem that has helped most, Arundel Tomb, wasn't one that I'd needed before.' (Week three)

Wellbeing and reading history

In the week seven survey, we asked the panel about their history of reading and whether this had impacted their health and wellbeing at different points in their lives. 92% of the panel agreed (65% strongly) that reading has been important to them in times of stress or anxiety.

A number described using reading as a leisure activity throughout their lives to promote their wellbeing through relaxation and distraction. Some used reading to inform, educate and support themselves or others through a range of health issues. Others cited reading as key to tackling stress, difficult life experiences, insomnia and mental health issues:

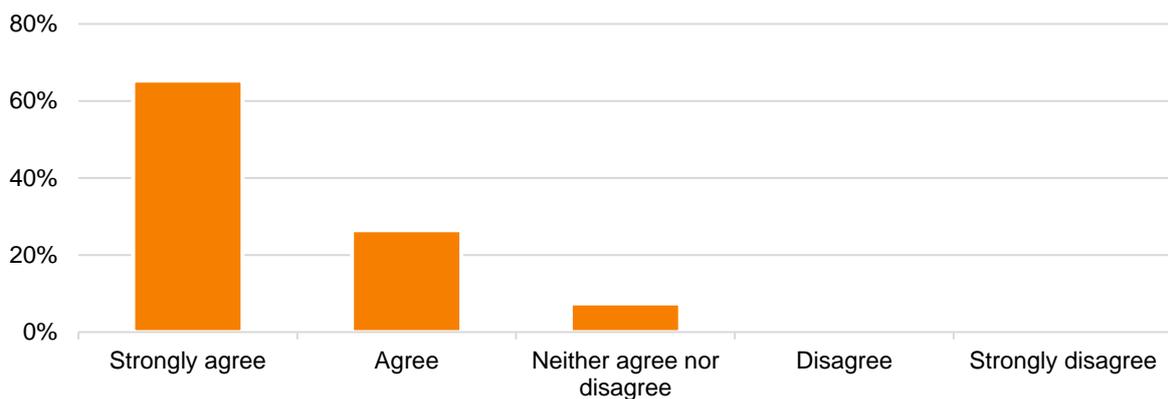
- 'Listening to audio books during sleepless nights when severely depressed, quite literally saved my life, and were what got me through the night and safely into the next morning.' (Week seven)

- 'I use audiobooks when I suffer from insomnia, or panic attacks to help calm me.' (Week seven)
- 'I've read whilst ill, I've read whilst in labour, whilst feeding a newborn and over an incubator in NICU. I read in the hours after my father died as a distraction. I've read on boats, planes, trains and in cars. T.S. Eliot may have written about a life measured out in coffee spoons but mine could be measured out in books.' (Week seven)

Some described reading to escape as a child when they were stuck in difficult home situations:

- 'I had a high ACEs score. Books were literally my escape!' (Week seven)
- 'Reading was essential escapism from a difficult home life.' (Week seven)

'Reading has been important to me in times of stress or anxiety' (week seven)



Wellbeing and focus

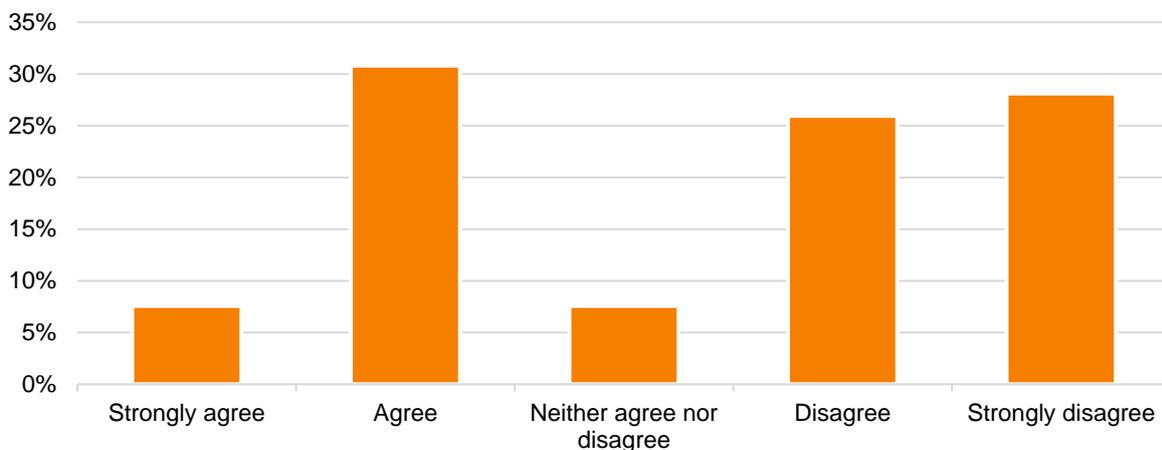
- 'I've again found it more difficult to focus on reading this week. There seems to be a "rollercoaster" of emotions right now, and at the highest anxiety, the first thing to go is reading.' (Week three)

Those who were able to read reported enjoyment and enthusiasm, feelings associated with positive mental wellbeing. However, in week two a significant minority agreed (38%, 7% strongly) that they had found it difficult to concentrate on reading since the lockdown started. Some panellists stressed that loss, unemployment and mental health issues were affecting their reading. Many expressed frustration at not being able to focus on reading, particularly if reading was an activity they used to support their wellbeing:

- 'It has been more difficult this week. Events surrounding my job have been upsetting and I haven't been able to concentrate on reading.' (Week three)

- 'This week the challenges of lockdown was having quite an impact. Normally I enjoy reading but just couldn't focus on a book. The audiobooks however was a bit of a lifesaver, filled the silence of the house.' (Week two)
- 'I miss the way I used to be able to fall easily into books. I've only managed to find one book so far that has brought me comfort.' (Week one)
- 'It's similar to my experience of reading when I was diagnosed with cancer. I struggled then with concentrating, feeling disconnected, and my reality being so different from the reality in books. I know from that my reading will return to normal it will just take time.' (Week one)

**'I find it difficult to concentrate on reading at the moment'
(week two)**



As lockdown progressed, some panellists observed that their ability to focus was volatile:

- 'I think my reading has become more dramatic which I'm aware sounds strange, but I either struggle to read at all or I'm completely invested and often lose a whole day to finishing a book.' (Week five)
- 'At the beginning of lockdown I couldn't get motivated to read then about 3 weeks ago I read a book which I enjoyed then another but now have gone back to a reading lull. Can't concentrate on anything.' (Week five)

In early surveys, panellists expressed frustration with themselves if they were unable to focus on reading. In the 'reading tips' they submitted to the rest of the panel they urged each other to be gentle with themselves if they were struggling to concentrate. By week five those reporting negative feelings about their focus tended to link this to external factors such as low mood, increased screen time at work, job instability and health:

- 'I have struggled with concentration and I do think it is partly because I am now using a screen for work all day. I don't seem to have much more time for

reading and there's a feeling of guilt of the 101 things u should be catching up on around the house etc.' (Week five)

- 'In the beginning of lockdown I found the opportunity to read more very welcome and refreshing. As time has gone on, many anxieties about developments, such as potentially losing my job, and the wider disruption to society, has made it harder to enjoy reading and the escapism that it previously afforded me.' (Week five)

Some panellists who had previously reported positive feelings about their reading were finding it difficult to concentrate by week five of the study. Others observed that, while they had struggled with focus in the first month of lockdown, they now felt more settled. Those who were finding reading difficult in the first few weeks of lockdown noted that changing to a new genre or format helped them get back to reading. These responses were positive and relieved (and occasionally triumphant) about this turn in their reading journey:

- 'I was struggling to concentrate on reading in the first few weeks of lockdown, but have found now, perhaps getting used to lockdown, that my hunger for reading is increasing.' (Week five)
- 'I seem to have got my reading mojo back this week. No stopping me.' (Week five)

Any frustration attached to difficulties focusing on reading does not appear to have negatively impacted the panel's attitude to reading as a whole:

- 'Although at times I feel it a bit more difficult to concentrate on reading any of my current books – I would feel lost without them. I'm surrounded by books – they bring me security and comfort.' (Week two)

Pressure and reading

To further investigate this frustration caused by an inability to focus, we asked if the panel felt under pressure to read more during the lockdown. Only 18% agreed (6% strongly) that they did.

However, a couple of panellists mentioned they felt an intense pressure to read more than they normally do, with one expressing feelings of extreme failure that they were not reading as productively as they felt they should.

As the study progressed, panellists reported feeling less anxious about their reading habits. Sometimes they specified that this was due to their concentration improving. Others were simply being less harsh on themselves or had felt reassured that they were not the only ones struggling. In the 'tips' section of the weekly survey they urged others not to judge themselves for reading what they felt like at that moment.

- 'My ability to concentrate has greatly improved and I'm able to enjoy the experience of picking up a book far more than the week before. I am still

purposely choosing to reread some old favourites, as well as a couple of new titles.' (Week two)

- 'Finding it easier to not stress about how little or how much I'm reading, feel less pressured to be doing something 'worthy' and more comfortable just choosing to read what I want.' (Week three)

Towards the end of the study (week eight) one panellist was unsure if reading for the sake of it was positive for their mental health. They noted feelings of pressure, competitiveness, avoidance and addiction in relation to their reading habits. This was the only instance where reading for pleasure conflicted with a panellist's wellbeing.

Connection and isolation

- 'Talking about reading has been an enjoyable distraction and book suggestions feel like a practical way to support each other and allow yourself to be supported.' (Week three)

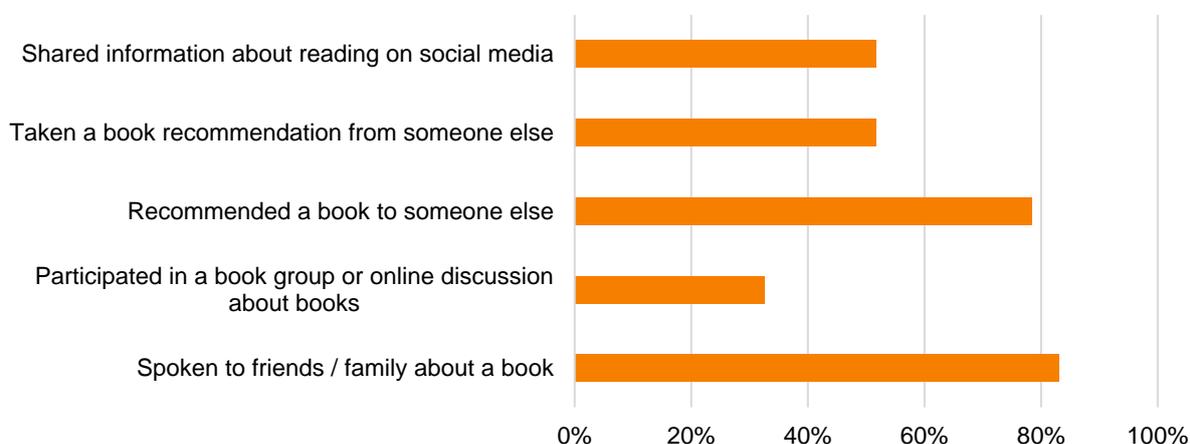
12% of our panel lived alone during lockdown. The majority lived with a partner and/or children. A couple mentioned relocating to a family home for the lockdown. We were keen to find out if reading had an impact on feelings of isolation and if people were using books to connect with others over the lockdown.

Connecting through reading

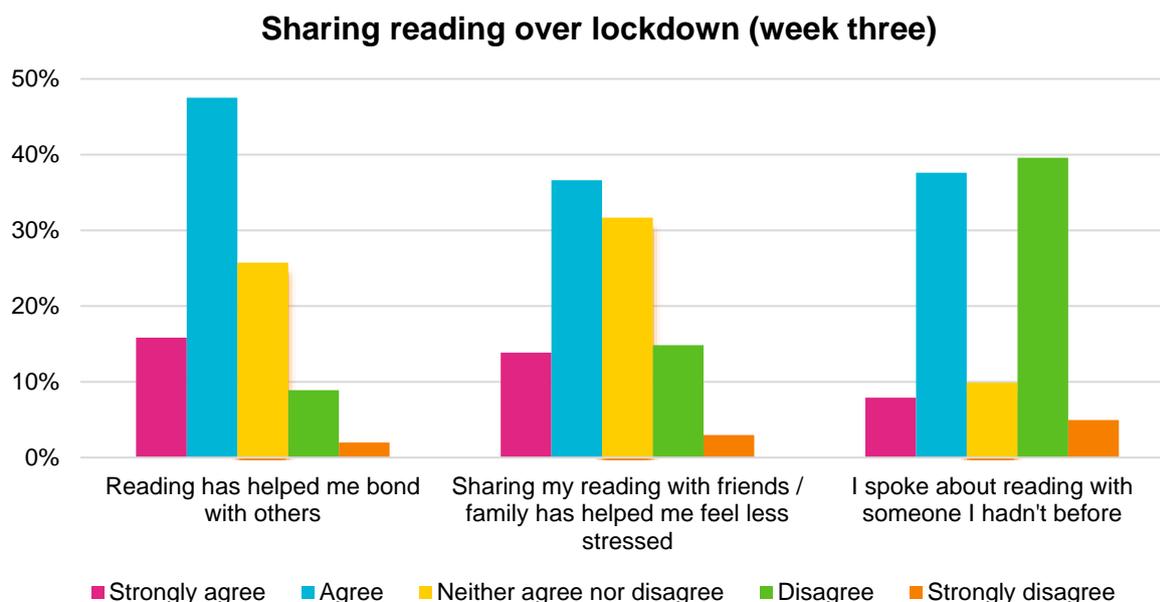
Our panel told us they connected with others through reading in a variety of ways. 83% had spoken to a friend or family member about a book since the lockdown began. 78% had recommended a book to someone else, though only 52% had taken a book recommendation from another person. Just over half reported sharing information about reading on social media and 33% had participated in a book group or online discussion about books. They provided additional comments describing how discussing books with others deepened their understanding of a text and mentioned a wide variety of ways in which they had connected with other people through books:

- 'I love poetry, and it's a good, shareable form online.' (Week two)
- 'I've started a wee postal book exchange with a group of friends which has been lovely and gives us all a wee treat to look forward to in the post!' (Week two)
- 'I love talking about books and reading. Talking or messaging as the case might be at the moment, deepens my experience of a book and widens it if I chance on someone who's read the same book and offers me their perspective.' (Week two)

Connecting through books during lockdown (week two)



In response to the week three survey 46% of the panel reported speaking about reading with someone new and 63% agreed that reading had helped them bond with others. They described finding time to discuss books or reading with people in their household or online. Often these discussions happened organically, but sometimes panellists deliberately participated in organised social activities centred on books with friends, family, strangers or colleagues. These included joining book groups, arranging book swaps and themed discussions.



A recurring theme was that reading offered an opportunity to move the conversation away from distressing or overwhelming current events:

- 'I have done some (remote) book swaps with friends and family (by post etc.) which is nice because then we can discuss something other than the pandemic!' (Week three)
- 'Joining an online book group has been great. It was a huge relief to talk in detail about something that I'm interested in, something other than the current situation.' (Week three)

A couple of panellists offered insights on the ways that they found solitary reading a way to recharge. These responses noted that not sharing their reading was not negative for them:

- 'I like reading when I can keep it to myself, as an introvert and someone who does lots for others, having something that is purely mine is really special and important. Hence the lack of sharing and discussion with others.' (Week three)

The panel described inventive ways of connecting with others through books. Perhaps surprisingly, this often involved physical books:

- 'During the dry weather leave books out for passers-by to take. Maybe call it a street library except they don't have to return them but pass them on.' (Week two)
- 'Swap books with friends given libraries closed. Also good idea to put books you no longer want at front of house for other to pick up.' (Week five)
- 'I use my children's drawings as bookmarks. They love to tell me about what the picture is and it makes them proud that I use it.' (Week five)

Some told us how important they have found reading for connecting with children in their lives:

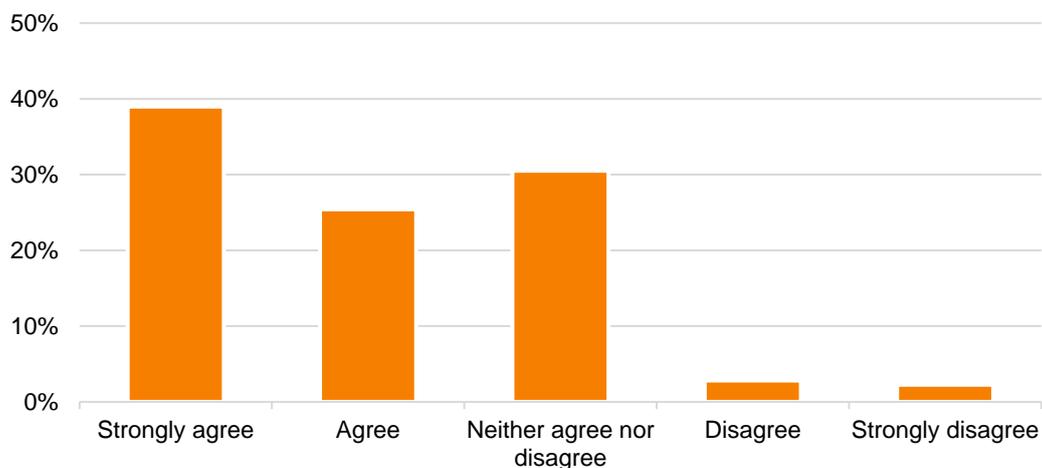
- 'I have enjoyed making a children's book display in my window for the enjoyment (hopefully) of passing families. Just about to take down The Very Hungry Caterpillar and contemplating what next.' (Week five)
- 'Reading stories on FaceTime to 5 year old grandson a new regular treat for us both. And lending books to three year old neighbour in absence of library.' (Week four)
- 'I love BookBug. We snuggle while reading bedtime stories and a daily nature poem, real family time.' (Week four)

Social reading and wellbeing

- 'Chatting about what we are reading eases anxiety.' (Week three)

In week two, 64% agreed (39% strongly) that reading made them feel less isolated. Our findings indicate that reading both reduces isolation and supports wellbeing. The responses received about connecting with others through reading suggested that there was a link between sharing reading with others and wellbeing.

'Reading makes me feel less isolated' (week two)



In week three, panellists mentioned that connecting with people in their lives through books was having a positive impact on their mental wellbeing:

- 'This week I started an online reading for wellbeing group with colleagues where we discuss what we've read and how it has made us feel. Having just started my job in January I had not physically met some of the people in the group before, but we were able to comfortably share our love of books virtually.' (Week three)
- 'I am reading like I've never read before. I seem to be reading almost 3 books a week. My online shopping purchases are books. A colleague even phoned this week because she just wanted to talk books. Books are keeping me calm through this crisis.' (Week three)

This anecdotal evidence is strengthened by the 50% in week three who agreed that sharing their reading with family and friends made them feel less stressed.

Access to books

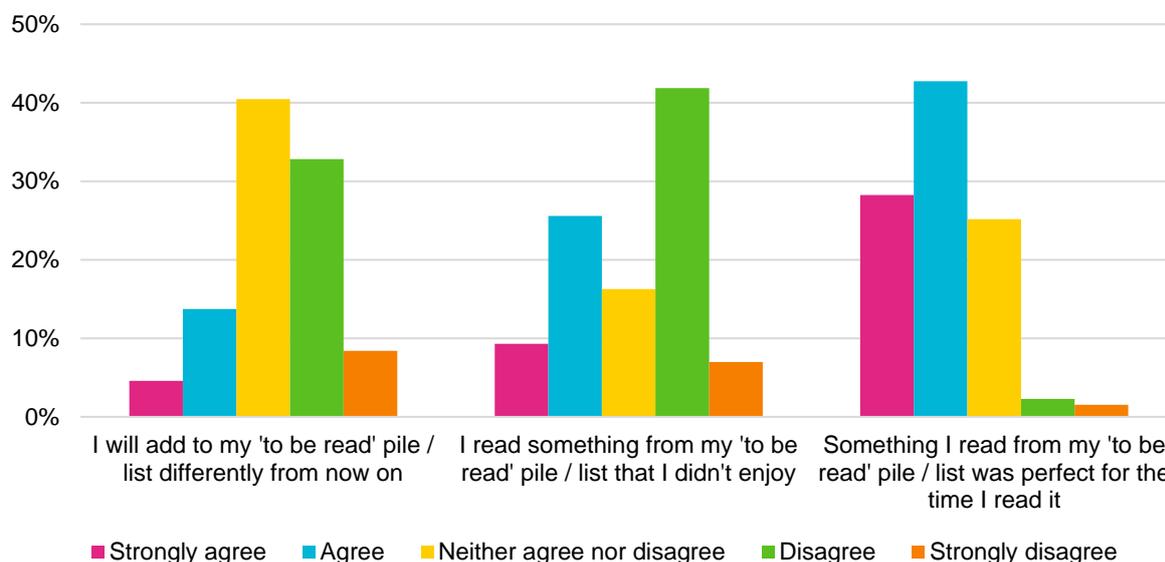
- 'I used to use the stands at the library where a selection of books had been curated/ recommended by the librarian as I didn't have a lot of time to browse the adult section with impatient little ones.' (Week four)

Books at home

The panel told us that they were mainly reading their existing books rather than acquiring new ones. 95% of the panel said they have access to lots of books at home. Many told us that they were working through their 'to be read' pile. 71% agreed that something they found in their 'to be read' pile was perfect for the time they read it during lockdown.

- 'Without the library for new to me titles I've been scanning my bookshelves and re-reading. Also checking out my husband's shelves.' (Week one)
- 'I have always bought books quicker than I could read them. I now have chance to reduce some of the piles of unread books at a faster rate, and have not been buying new books. There are books I want to buy but I will wait until the lockdown is over.' (Week one)

The 'to be read' pile during lockdown (week six)



Most of those with children noted that they have access to lots of children's books at home and 96% said having access to books at home reassures them about their child's learning. 21% worried about running out of books for their children. Some (both those who live with children and those who do not) expressed their concerns about children who do not have access to books at the moment:

- 'I am concerned that many of the pupils at the school I work in are not so lucky. Many pupils do not all have books at home, they do not all have money

for books, they do not all have internet access to access public library ebooks, and they do not all have adults at home encouraging them to engage with books and stories – this disparity was there before, but will be growing ever greater and it may be even more difficult post-lockdown to engage these children with reading for pleasure.' (Week four)

- 'As a school librarian, I am really concerned about my young people perhaps not having access to books. Professionally, I'm finding it harder to promote books because I cannot give the young people access to them – my library only has physical books, not ebooks.' (Week four)

Purchasing and borrowing

In week one panellists reported on how they would usually select books to read. 80% got ideas and books from browsing bookshops and 49% from browsing the library. 36% were guided by offers or promotions in bookshops.

Accordingly, recurring themes in comments from the panel included missing the experience of browsing, less opportunities to see things they want to read, and less impulse buying. A number of these panellists said that they were going through their 'to be read' piles and were not intending to stockpile books in the same way as before.

A minority (16%) stated they were reluctant to purchase new books due to financial concerns. A couple of responses specified that the household's income had an impact on whether they were in a position to buy books. Some mentioned an initial flurry of book buying at the beginning of lockdown, with many noting that this was temporary. Only a handful mentioned that this increased purchasing extended further into the lockdown.

- 'I've ordered more books more quickly than usual! I had a frenzy of book buying early in lockdown (a security blanket of books), but obviously quickly realised that working full-time still, I wasn't going to have any extra time for reading.' (Week six)
- 'I ordered a book or two every time I ordered something online – I felt I had to give the delivery driver a reason to be out- not just for one item. I now have a giant box that takes up room, and it seems overwhelming. It's made me realise I spend too much money on books, and I will be using my library card as soon as libraries open again.' (Week six)

A few panellists mentioned that they had been reallocating money saved due to lockdown to buy books:

- 'The money I have saved on commuting and clothes shopping has allowed me to buy more books than I usually would! Buying books has been essential to me, lacking usual library access. Perhaps lockdown will wean me off all the clothes purchases!' (Week eight)

- 'We've purchased two books each month (using saved petrol money), children are choosing their own books.' (Week six)

Lack of physical access to a library or bookshop was mentioned as a concern, particularly by people who indicated a preference for physical books. Panellists who mentioned libraries or bookshops suggested they valued the expertise of staff, the chance to see books in advance of purchase and the element of chance which allowed them to stumble on an interesting title. Frequent library, charity shop, or second-hand book shoppers were particularly confined by the lockdown:

- 'I can't go to charity shops or bookshops so there are fewer opportunistic purchases.' (Week one)
- 'I have no access to charity shops or the library. At the moment I am only buying books where I want to support the author with a new release, usually because I already know and like their work, or for a specific purpose like a reading group.' (Week one)

A few specified that they were waiting for bookshops or libraries to reopen before choosing new titles. These responses indicate that the physical or social experience of browsing books is difficult to replicate remotely for some:

- 'I'm adding to my to be bought pile and counting down the days until I can visit Waterstones with my friends again.' (Week six)
- 'I'm buying fewer books for me as I prefer browsing in bookshops / the library to buying books online (though I have bought more books as gifts at this time via my local independent bookshop). I'm definitely compiling a list of books to explore further when it's safe to be back in a bookshop...' (Week six)
- 'Been writing them down for when library and bookshop reopens.' (Week six)

Perhaps surprisingly, people reported buying less books than usual online in the first few weeks of lockdown. A number of panellists mentioned ordering books from large online retailers such as Amazon or Hive. Some also mentioned buying books from the supermarket during lockdown to combine a book purchase with another trip:

- 'Bought a book in the supermarket while on essential shopping trip which I would never have done before lockdown.' (Week four)
- 'I am a huge fan of libraries. As they are currently closed, I'm buying not borrowing books, either picking them up in supermarkets as part of my weekly shop or online. I also love buying books in charity shops, again not an option right now. So the way I get my books has changed more than my reading habits, as daily reading has always been an important part of my routine.' (Week one)

Others reported concerns for, and investment in, the future of local or independent bookshops. A number specified that they turned to these shops when they bought physical books:

- 'I follow a number of indie bookshops on twitter, and am trying to order from them rather than amazon. I am concerned that they are still around when lockdown is over.' (Week four)
- 'Usually I browse charity shops and look out for books I have heard are good – now I am ordering from independent book sellers based on recommendations and reviews.' (Week six)

We received a number of comments around concerns of putting booksellers or delivery people at risk by ordering books online:

- 'I would not order physical books from any chains or large distributors such as Amazon or Hive without knowing staff are kept safe.' (Week four)
- 'I have bought some books online but I am never sure if this is an ethically good thing to do or not – I want to support authors, independent bookshops and small presses but am not sure if ordering books is bad because it means more demand for workers doing deliveries/ in warehouses. If the books go through Royal Mail I feel like that is OK because the postie would be there anyway, but if they use couriers I then feel bad. Daft really, for all the difference this probably makes.' (Week four)
- 'I am very reluctant to purchase books at the moment. I don't feel like they are an essential item for me (as I have plenty at home to choose from) and I don't want to create any risk for anyone else. On the other hand, I am concerned about wanting to support independent book sellers etc. during this uncertain time.' (Week four)

Library use

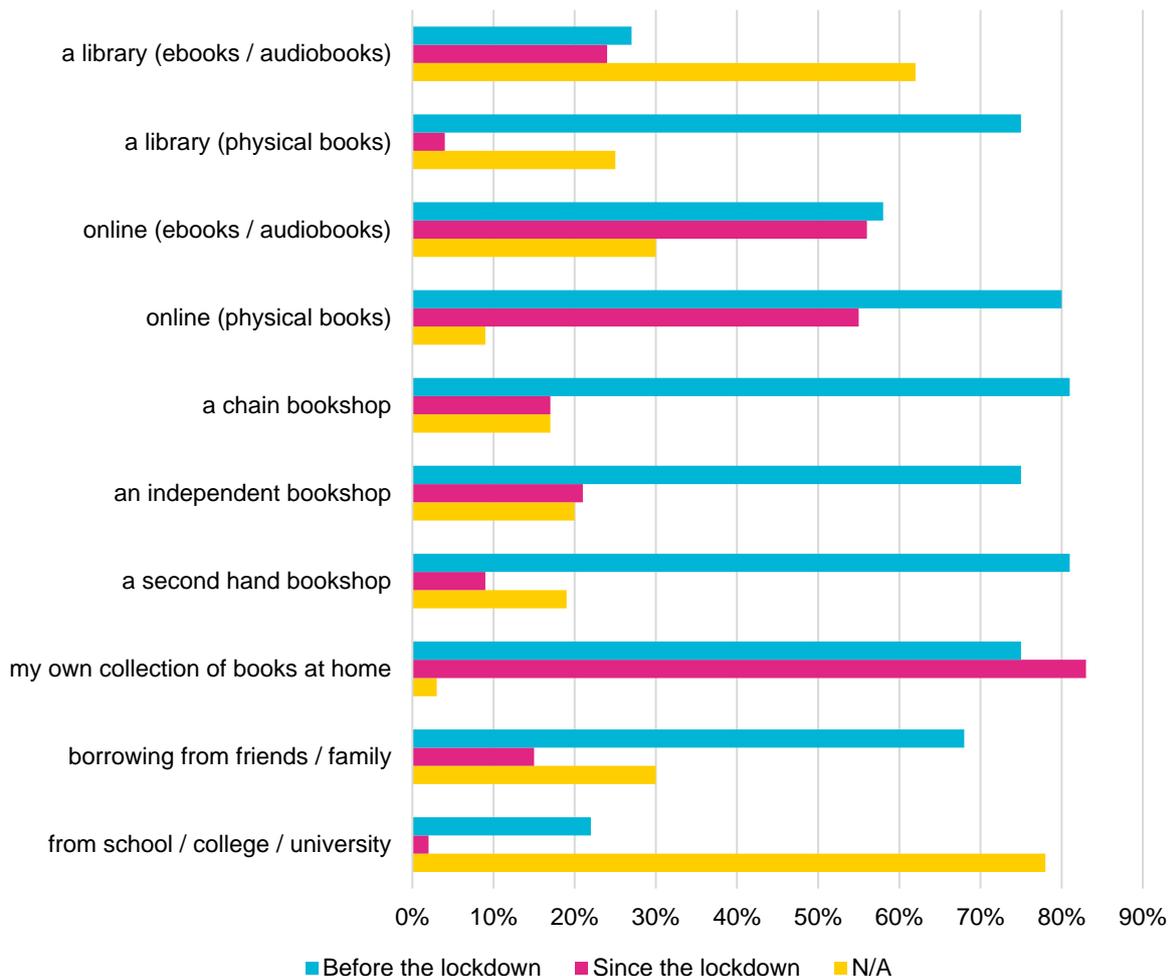
75% were using the library to get physical books before the lockdown. For panellists with children, the library played an even more significant role in their access to books – 94% had been using the library to get books for their children prior to the lockdown. However, the numbers of panellists using the library for digital formats during the lockdown remained relatively stable, suggesting that most of those accessing these were people who were already regularly doing so before; 23% of panellists noted that they did not feel confident using library e-resources.

The panel's high regard for libraries often started in childhood. 92% reported that they used the public library as a child. The panel not only commented on how they felt supported by libraries as children but how they considered public libraries to be essential to their growth as readers. Panellists who grew up in poverty or without access to a range of books in their homes were especially enthusiastic about libraries, noting that they would not have had access to books without their local

library and expressed concerns that children may not have the same opportunities in the future.

- 'I grew up in poverty so the local library was essential for me. I worry for children today with so many libraries closing.' (Week seven)
- 'Libraries are important. Without my parents taking me to my local library as a child, I wouldn't have had the wider reading experience that I had.' (Week seven)
- 'Reading can transport us to places and ideas that we wouldn't dream of ourselves. It is ESSENTIAL that a free well-stocked library is readily available for everyone.' (Week seven)
- 'For me a library was and is now one of my essential life services. After lockdown I will be delighted to get back to the library. My local library does some amazing things for eg new mums, school children on a Friday and older groups.' (Week seven)

Where do you regularly get books from? (week four)



Changing reading habits

- 'It's hard for me to imagine coping with the current lock-down situation without books.' (Week two)

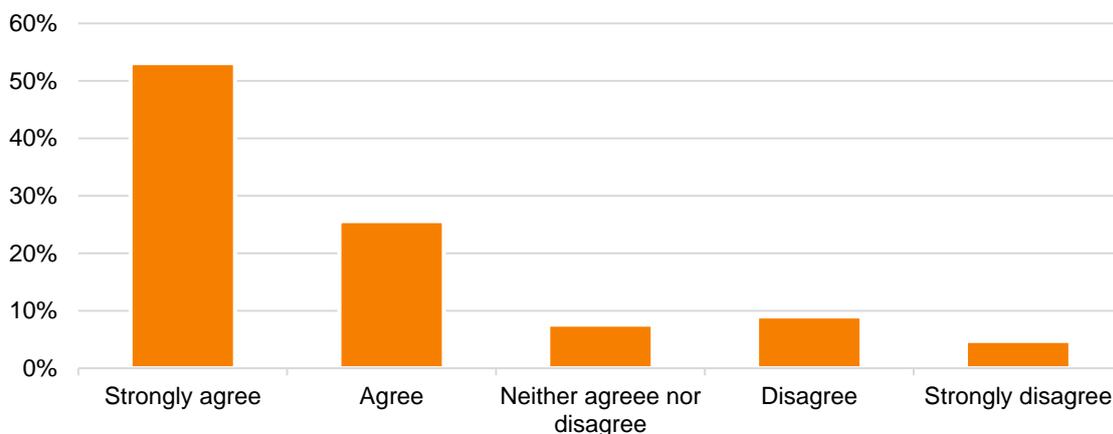
As expected, people who volunteered to join our panel were avid readers before the lockdown began. Most read physical books either every day (51%) or several times a week (30%). The most popular times to read were before bed (81%) and at lunchtime (36%). Comments indicated that others snatched reading time in the bathroom, between other tasks or read as part of their jobs. More people read at the weekend (70%) than during the week (48%).

In our first survey, the majority agreed (85%, 53% strongly) that their lives had changed significantly since the lockdown. 81% of panellists felt that their reading habits had changed since the lockdown began.

Time to read

- 'Reading has helped me keep my day structured with relaxation time, having gone back to work (at home) after a period of holiday.' (Week two)

'I have more time to read at the moment' (week one)



Many on our panel agreed (79%, 53% strongly) that they had more time to read in the lockdown. Many agreed (65%, 36% strongly) that they were reading more than they used to. Of those who mentioned an increase in time available for reading, a few also noted they had more energy for reading as they were working from home:

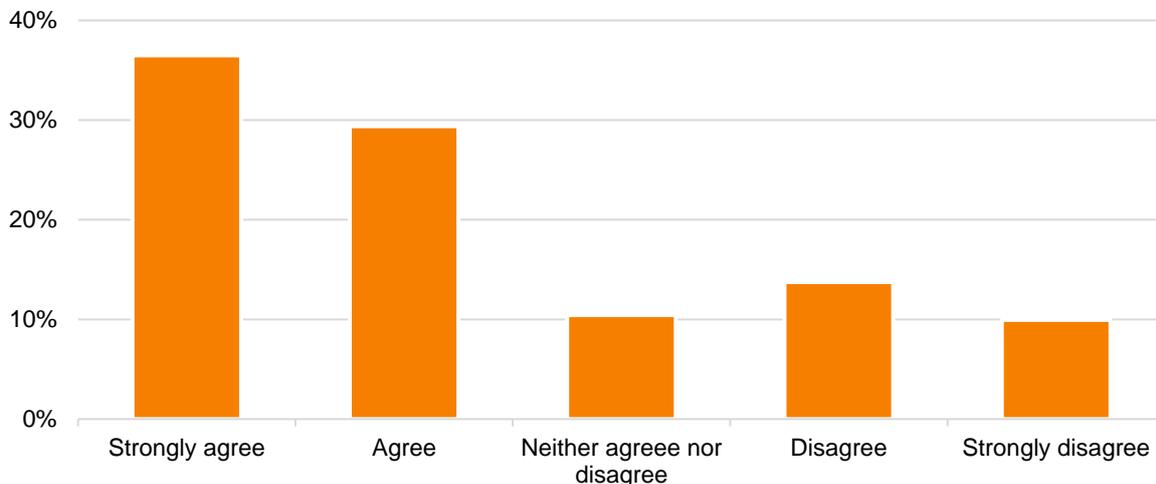
- 'I am still reading before bed but I think I am able to give more time to it because I am saving three hours on commuting so can get my household chores done in that time. I think this has helped me with sleep and I also feel happier.' (Week one)
- 'Reading much more now I am at home. As I'm not so tired after a day at work, I will read for longer when I go to bed.' (Week one)

- 'I've been reading a lot more. This is because I'm furloughed from my job so I have a lot more time for reading which is lovely. I now read at lunchtime or in late afternoon which I wouldn't do on a working day.' (Week one)

A number of panellists with additional time on their hands deliberately set aside time for reading in the new structure of their day:

- 'I have not changed what I am reading, or what I had planned to read, but I am reading a little bit more each day. This is mostly because I am finding other times of day to read, and I am reading at bedtime for longer. I am still trying to read before and after work as I would have done on my commute, even though I am staying at home.' (Week one)
- 'I am reading far more to my children (ages 3 and 5) as they are home with me during the day. We try and do stories a few times a day as well as before bed.' (Week one)
- 'I have started listening to audiobooks every day on my walk. I also read at least a little every day because I have the time.' (Week one)
- 'Have been having a lunch break which I just don't have time for at work, sit in garden for an hour with a book.' (Week one)

'I am reading more than I used to' (week one)



Others mentioned that while their life had changed, this did not necessarily mean they had additional time for reading. Reports from panellists in lockdown with young children ranged from reading more with their children to having less time to read.

- 'I'm working from home so some aspects of life haven't changed that much and my reading time hasn't actually increased dramatically!' (Week one)

- 'Since I have all 3 of my children home and requiring a lot of attention, I've had less reading time and what I do have is often broken up.' (Week one)
- 'I'm finding it harder to fit in reading around homeschooling my children and trying to get my own work done.' (Week one)

Others noted that the lockdown had no impact on their reading habits because they were still working outside the home or were retired. A minority commented that the pandemic had had an extremely negatively impact on their reading time due to the breakdown of support networks, increased childcare, longer working hours, or concentration issues:

- 'I am disabled with a 3 year old and now that the nurseries are shut and my normal support from my parents is not available I have less time and energy to read. I also suffer from depression which has lowered my motivation to read.' (Week one)
- 'I am still working, longer hours than ever.' (Week one)
- 'I never thought I'd miss my morning commute but I miss that dedicated reading time.' (Week one)

Reading routines

The times at which the panel read changed markedly between their estimate of their 'normal' reading routine and their reported reading routine in week five.

Unsurprisingly, those reading during their commute to and from work dropped dramatically (from 25% to 1%). There was a small increase in panellists reading at bedtime (by 5%). Reading in the morning nearly doubled from 22% before the lockdown to 43%. Overall, the panel reported reading more across the week, with a significant number now reading on weekdays as well as weekends.

Reading times	Before lockdown (week one)	During lockdown (week five)
At bedtime	81%	86%
At weekends	70%	78%
On weekdays	48%	64%
In the morning	22%	43%
Over lunch	36%	34%
At a child's bedtime	22%	19%
During the commute to / from work	25%	1%

Some highlighted ways they were adapting reading into their days or how they were settling into a new routine which included reading:

- 'Reading is helping me to stay grounded. I am systematically reading a poem a day. This helps to maintain a daily routine. Other reading is built in round eg gardening cooking.' (Week three)

Halfway through the study we began to receive more responses from panellists who were finding it difficult to integrate reading into their new routines (particularly around home working) as the lockdown progressed. They noted that changes to their usual reading times disrupted their reading habits:

- 'I read at most opportunities, but the opportunities feel like they are becoming less frequent as I get a more established routine in this new situation.' (Week five)
- 'I thought at first that I would have more time to read – and bought lots of books in anticipation. But working from home has been tiring, my hours have been longer than usual, and sometimes I haven't wanted to or felt like sitting reading when I've been reading (on a screen) all day. Also, with less physical activity – no commute etc. – I find my mind less easy to settle, so I reach for my phone, for example, because I know I won't be able to settle with a book.' (Week five)

Pre-lockdown structures that allowed for reading during the workday (particularly commutes and lunchtimes) were being replaced by fluid working arrangements, busy households and restricted access to the places where panellists usually read.

Reading choices

Each week, panellists gave their reasons for selecting their current reading material. Overall, the top six reasons were:

1. Chose something they knew they would enjoy
2. Looking for an easy read
3. Picked something they'd always meant to read
4. Chose something to challenge themselves
5. Wanted to try something new
6. Rereading an old favourite

A desire for escape and immersion was often cited by panellists:

- 'Reading has become more important and a focal point for escape since the lockdown.' (Week one)
- 'It's my saviour. I can forget about what's going on.' (Week one)

While some mentioned escapism in general as a motivation for reading, some panellists mentioned reading as an alternative to being outside or travelling. They spoke about reading books they had bought for a holiday and reading to compensate for being unable to go outside or visit different parts of the world:

- 'The Summer of the Bear – had always meant to read because of the setting, which is the island I have been going to all my life but can't visit this summer.' (Week two)

- 'Planning on reading something nature based next. Feeling the need to be reminded of all the amazing places & wildlife that is out there.' (Week two)
- 'Entertaining myself with virtual travel. Chose a novel set in Uruguay for this reason.' (Week two)

From the outset panellists mentioned, unprompted, that they were returning to books that they had read in the past, including childhood favourites. Comments about rereading books sometimes mentioned that they knew they would enjoy the reading experience or that it was comforting to read a familiar text:

- 'I am avoiding stuff that I think is going to be tough emotionally. I'm also re-reading books that I know I'll enjoy.' (Week one)
- 'I've been reading short articles, focusing more on science and politics. I've found it very difficult to concentrate on novels, with the exception of some comfort-reading of a series I read as a teenager.' (Week one)
- 'Returning to a familiar character by a familiar author was like a reset. It helped me connect with a book again and helped my concentration when moving on to something new.' (Week two)

Some reported combining these old favourites with new or abandoned books for variety:

- 'I'm definitely being drawn more to science fiction dystopian type novels but on the other hand, have a sudden desire to read the things which gave me comfort as a child, such as Enid Blyton/Diana Wynne Jones.' (Week one)
- 'I have been revisiting old favourites to find out if I still love them; I have also tried audiobook performances of books I really didn't enjoy first time round to see if a compelling reading can change my mind.' (Week one)

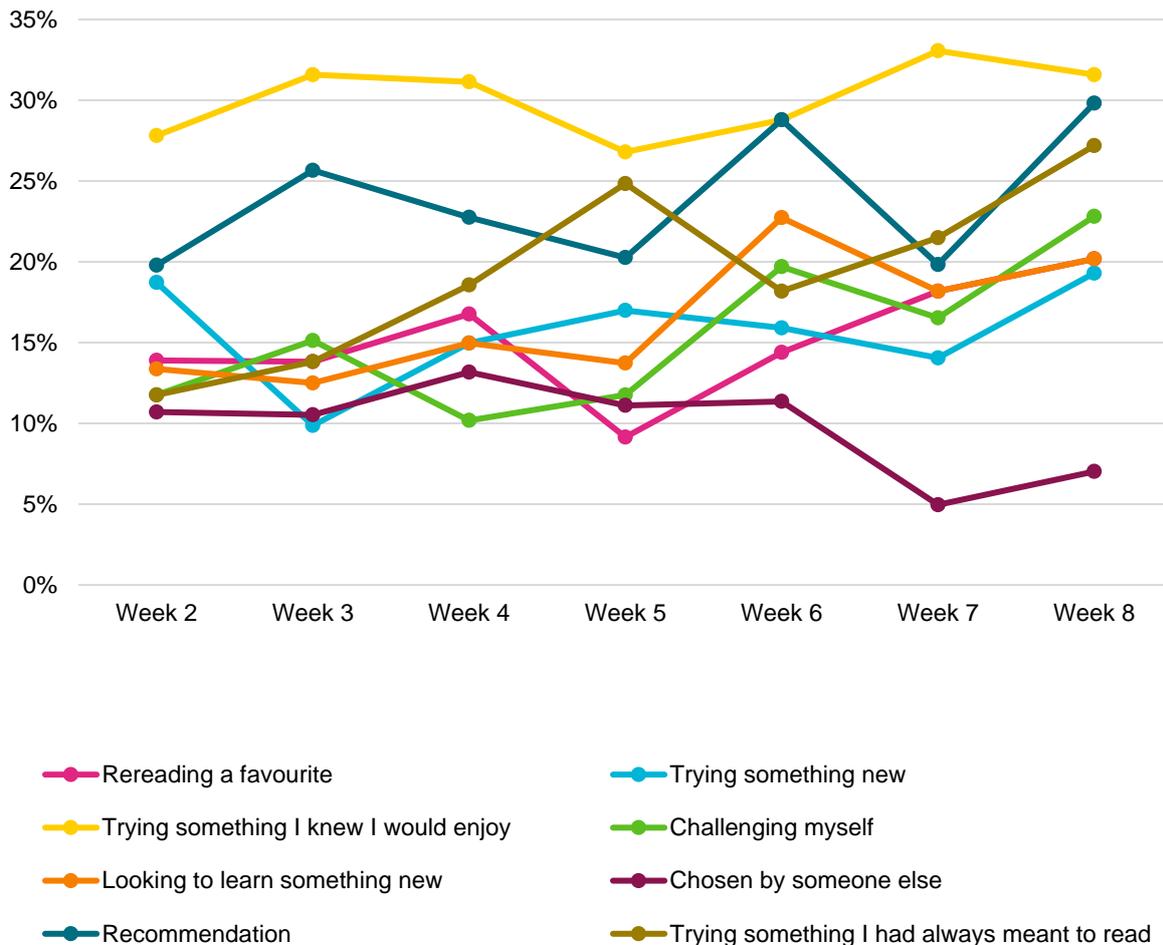
Others found that they enjoyed new genres or delved into books they had not read before, including classics:

- 'I read a crime thriller over Easter and it removed me completely from real life. I loved it. I would have very rarely picked up something like this before. I have some meatier books I thought I'd be reading but I am really not interested.' (Week one)
- 'I am using this time to read books that I have been meaning to but never gotten round to.' (Week one)

Current events influenced some of the panel's reading, in particular #BlackLivesMatter and the spread of coronavirus.

- 'The Plague Charmer is set during the plague pandemic of the 14th century, and is a timely reminder that although we are living through a pandemic, things could be worse!'
- 'Trying to consciously choose more books by women of colour – which had been my approach prior to lockdown, but had suffered from my general lack of motivation to read in the first few weeks of lockdown.' (Week six)

Changing choices over lockdown

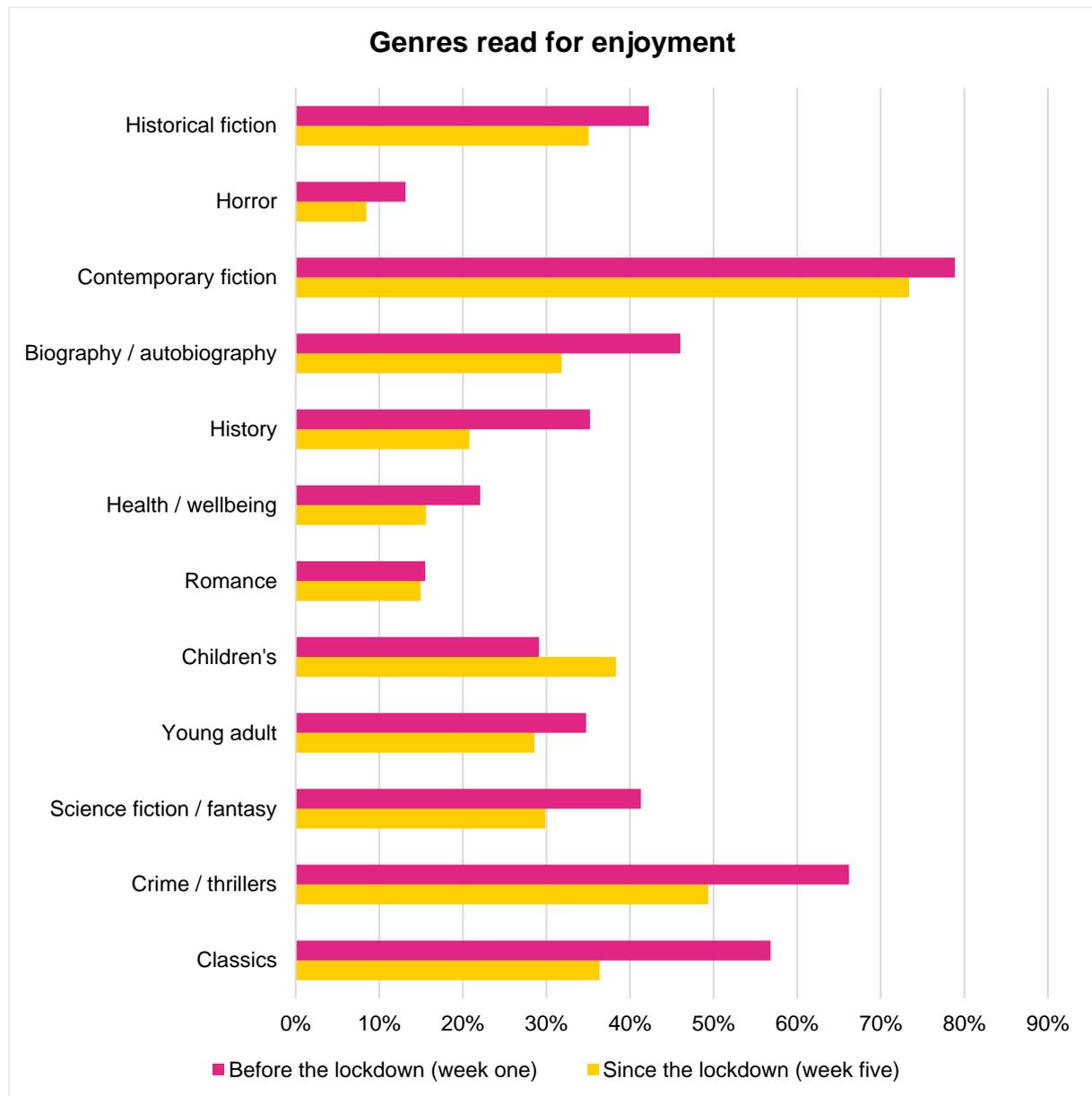


Genres and materials

We compared the daily reading habits of the panel before the lockdown and in our last weekly survey. 55% reported reading fiction daily before the lockdown and 72% read fiction daily in week eight. Daily newspaper and/or magazine consumption also increased from 25% to 50%. While the sample is too small to be significant, it is worth noting that daily poetry reading doubled (from 3% to 6%) and non-fiction consumption more than doubled (from 9% to 23%).

At the beginning of the study we asked the panel about the genres they generally read for enjoyment before the lockdown started. Before the lockdown, the top three

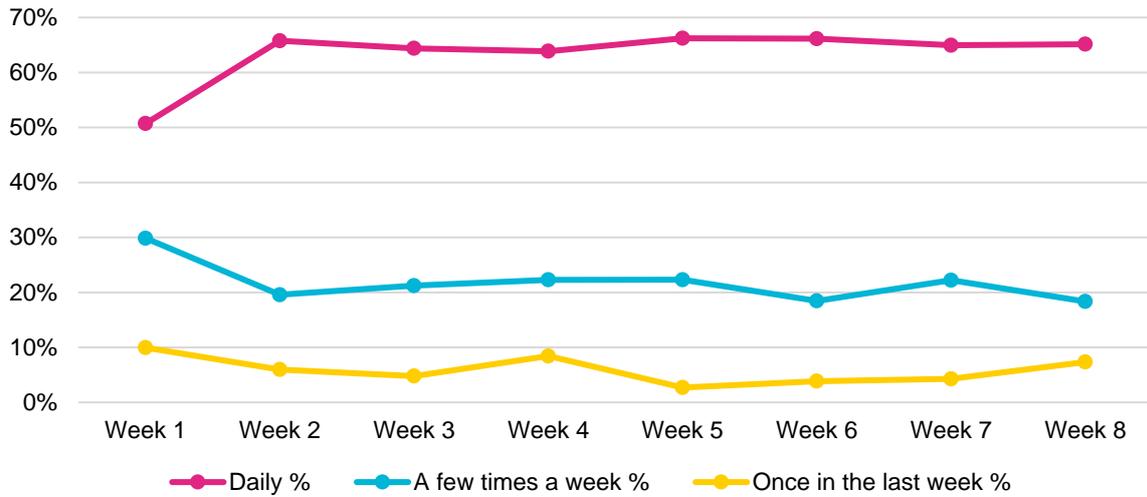
genres were contemporary fiction (79%), crime / thrillers (66%) and classics (57%). By week five, the panel were reading contemporary fiction (73%), crime / thrillers (49%) and children's literature (38%). The increase in people reading children's literature is notable, rising from 29% before the lockdown to 38% in week five.



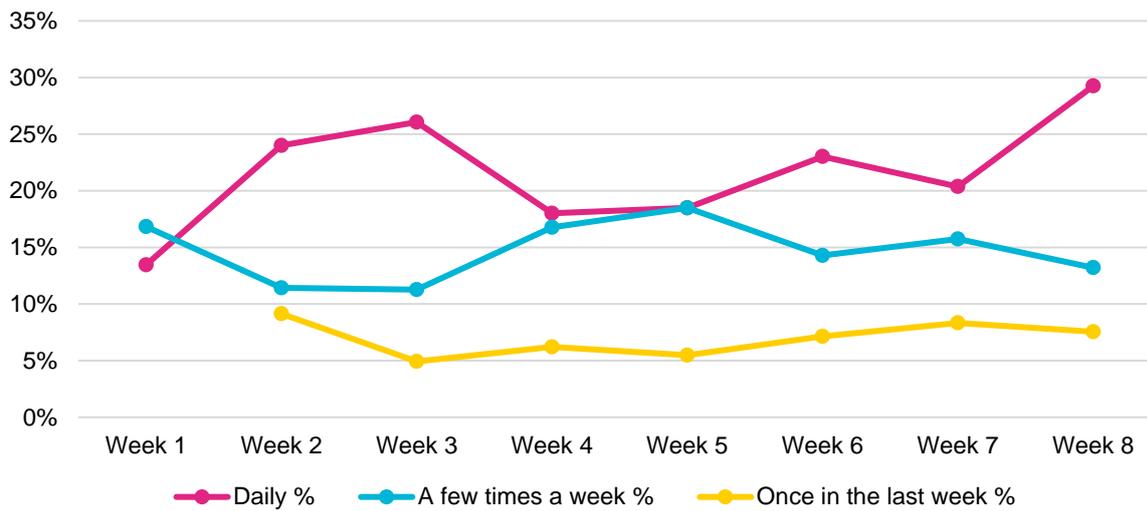
Formats

The ways in which the panel read altered over the course of the study. The panel reported reading more physical books daily and there was a small but noticeable drop in people reading aloud to someone else. The use of digital formats was restricted to a minority of panellists but there was evidence that this method of consumption grew quickly during lockdown. Daily audiobook use tripled (from 4% to 12%) and ebook use more than doubled (from 13% to 29%) between the first and last weekly surveys.

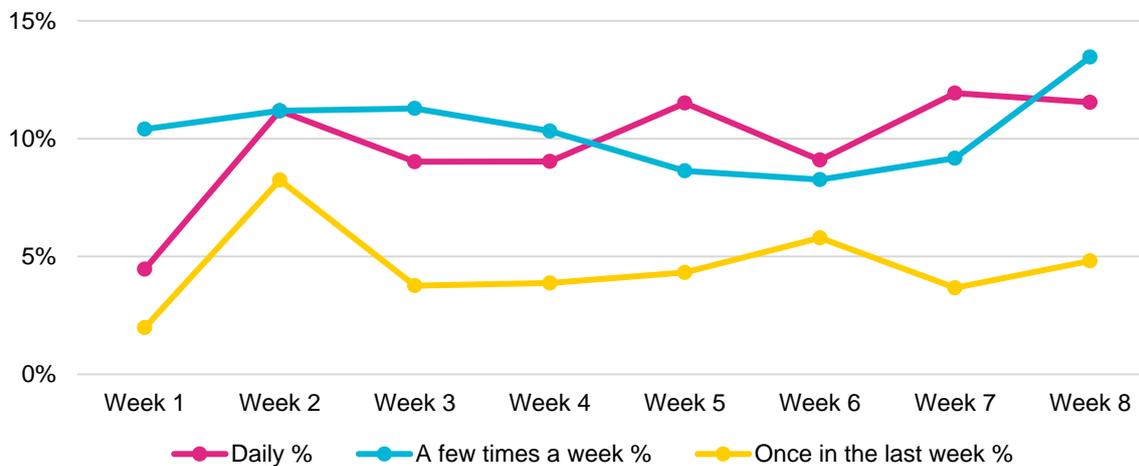
Physical books



Ebooks



Audiobooks



From the very first survey we received a number of comments which mentioned starting or increasing ebook or audiobook use:

- 'I have been trying different genres, exploring more ebooks and I have even started listening to e-audiobooks. I have borrowing and reading more books online via the library service. Previously I bought/borrowed print copies of books or purchased ebooks but didn't borrow ebooks.' (Week one)
- 'Find myself drawn to read less often (although still enjoy it as much when I do) Experimenting with different formats (e.g. audio books) – partly because it's harder to get new physical books / library books and partly just because I am experimenting with more of the new online cultural content.' (Week one)
- 'I'm a bit worried as I might have to resort to ebooks! Glaring not good on old eyes and terrible before bedtime which is my reading habit.' (Week one)

While some panellists saw digital formats as a last resort, others were positive about their experience and frequently mentioned making use of free library resources:

- 'I have been buying ebooks since lockdown started, but I kind of resent buying them as it's not possible to pass them on to someone else after reading. But I like how they are immediately accessible.' (Week four)
- 'Borrow Box has been a lifeline as I am recovering from coronavirus. I don't know how people are coping without books.' (Week four)
- 'Fife library service has a great digital selection of reading material, including magazines that I would otherwise not be able to afford. I love that I can dip in and out, it's such a pleasure.' (Week four)

Looking to the future, quite a few panellists stated their intention to continue using ebooks and audiobooks as well as, or instead of, physical books.

- 'It has changed how I access them since I'm now more likely to check the public library for an electronic version than I was before.' (Week six)
- 'BorrowBox and Amazon Unlimited make recommendations that I take notice of now. In the past I did not really use ebooks. I will probably have a mix of ebooks and paper once (if!) the lockdown ends.' (Week six)
- 'I have learned over the past few weeks that my Kindle is definitely more suited to me. I joined the local library with a friend with the advice to 'Use it or Lose It.' Feel there is almost a bit of 'elitism' around reading paper books rather than using a Kindle. I've realised that I love my Kindle, feel much more relaxed when using it than I did at start of Lockdown and also feel that, be it a paper book or a Kindle, there is so much enjoyment in being able to 'escape' into a good story.' (Week six)

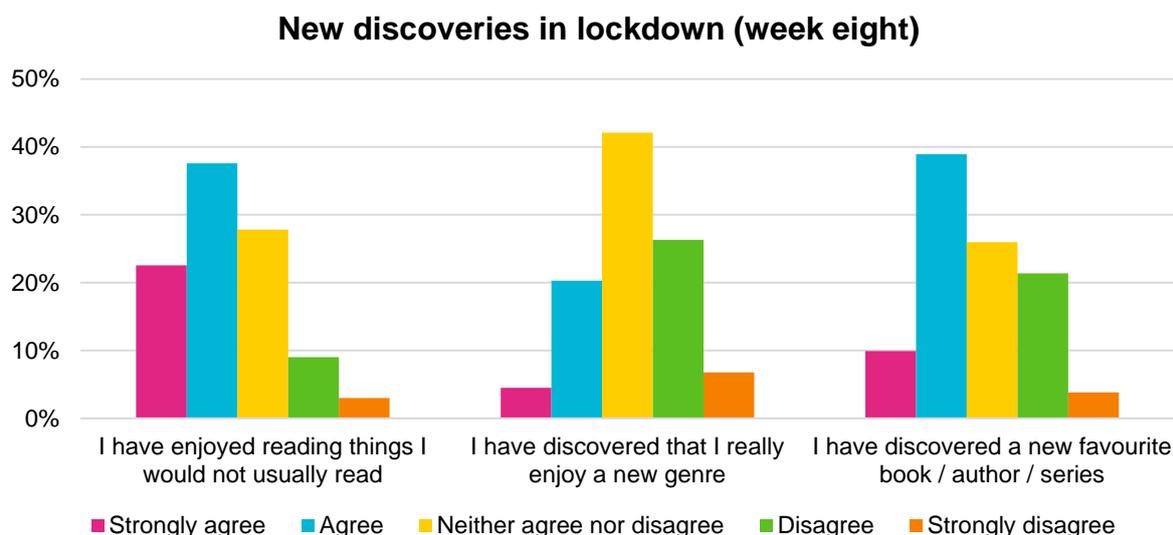
- 'I had a daily commute to Edinburgh and back (from Fife) and it was dead, wasted time. Now I have Audible and it has really opened up literature for me: Ali Smith, Brave New World, the wonderful Stephen Fry. I haven't read (well, listened) so much since Uni thirty years ago. My commute is now time well spent (or it will be again after lockdown :))' (Week six)

Looking back on lockdown

- I definitely think I will continue some of my lockdown reading habits and it has certainly introduced me to a few writers that I wouldn't have yet encountered.' (Week eight)

The period when we carried out our research (March to August 2020) covered the most restrictive period of the spring 2020 lockdown in Scotland. In our final weekly survey (June) and follow-up survey (August), we asked the panel to reflect on their overall experience of reading in lockdown and their future reading plans.

71% agreed that something they found in their 'to be read' pile was perfect for the time they read it during lockdown. A significant minority (35%) read something from their pile that they did not enjoy. 60% agreed that they had enjoyed reading things they would not normally have read during lockdown. A quarter reported that they discovered they really enjoyed a new genre in lockdown. Almost half (49%) discovered a new favourite book, author or series during the lockdown.



Planning future reading

Towards the end of the study, we found that panellists were still using a mixture of purchasing, virtual lists and physical lists to save books for reading later:

- 'Lockdown has widened my 'to be read' pile – I have added books to the list that I might not have considered prior to lockdown.' (Week six)

Some of the panel reported that they had an increased amount of time and energy to spend seeking book recommendations since the lockdown began:

- 'I've been spending more time online looking through recommendations that have been made for certain book genres. I'm also using more online reading

challenges to ensure I get prompted to read in different genres – including short weekend or week long challenges.' (Week six)

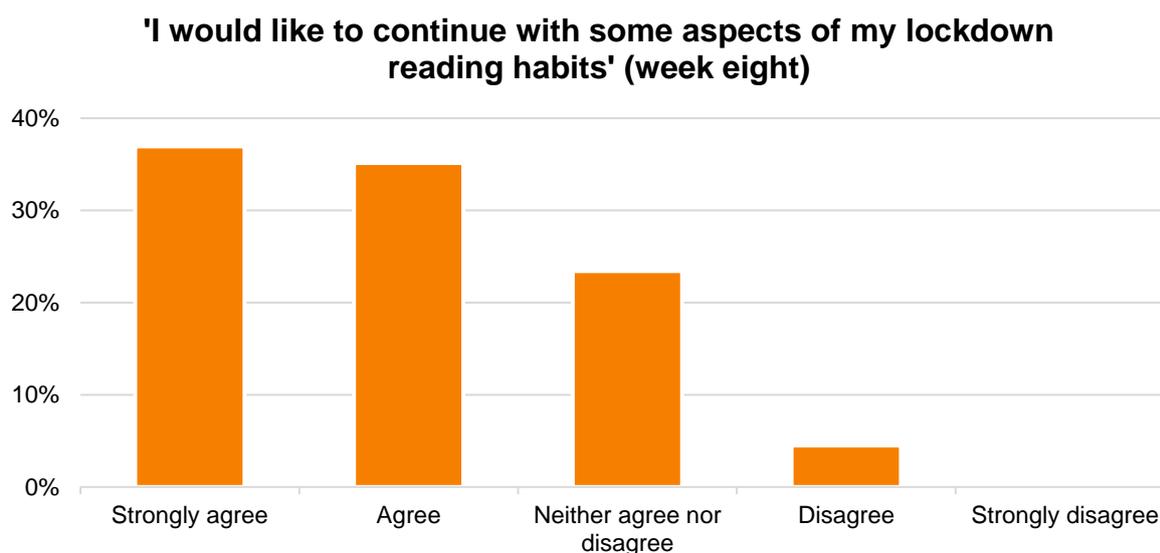
- 'Yes, the list has definitely got a lot longer! This is because I've been listening to even more radio than usual & have heard about books I like the sound of there. I've also had more (& longer) phone calls with friends than I would normally & I love hearing what they're reading, sometimes they recommend books too.' (Week six)

However, panellists who were not as social online had struggled to find recommendations for future reading materials from their usual sources:

- 'I get fewer recommendations as I am not looking at social media.' (Week six)
- 'I have a stack of books I got out from the library so I am working my way through them. As I don't have access to the library and I am not following my usual emails from The Bookseller, I am not as uptodate as I would usually be.' (Week six)
- 'I've been getting fewer recommendations – seeing fewer people, stumbling across books less. So I've only added a few to my list.' (Week six)

Adopting lockdown reading habits

We asked the panel whether they would keep any elements of their lockdown reading habits. 72% agreed that they would like to continue with some aspects. 20% agreed that they were looking forward to returning to their 'normal' reading habits. Some were uncertain, with 19% finding it difficult to plan or imagine what their reading will look like in the future.



When a panellist had found the lockdown had had some positive effects on their reading, things they wanted to continue included time dedicated to reading, reading as a family and exploring a more diverse range of genres and formats:

- 'I have loved this time with my child and reading lots of books with her every day – I will strive to keep this up when things resume normality.' (Week eight)
- 'Time pressure, work and social commitments will be very hard to take after the weightlessness of lockdown, the lack of guilt and the freedom to simply sit and read.' (Week eight)

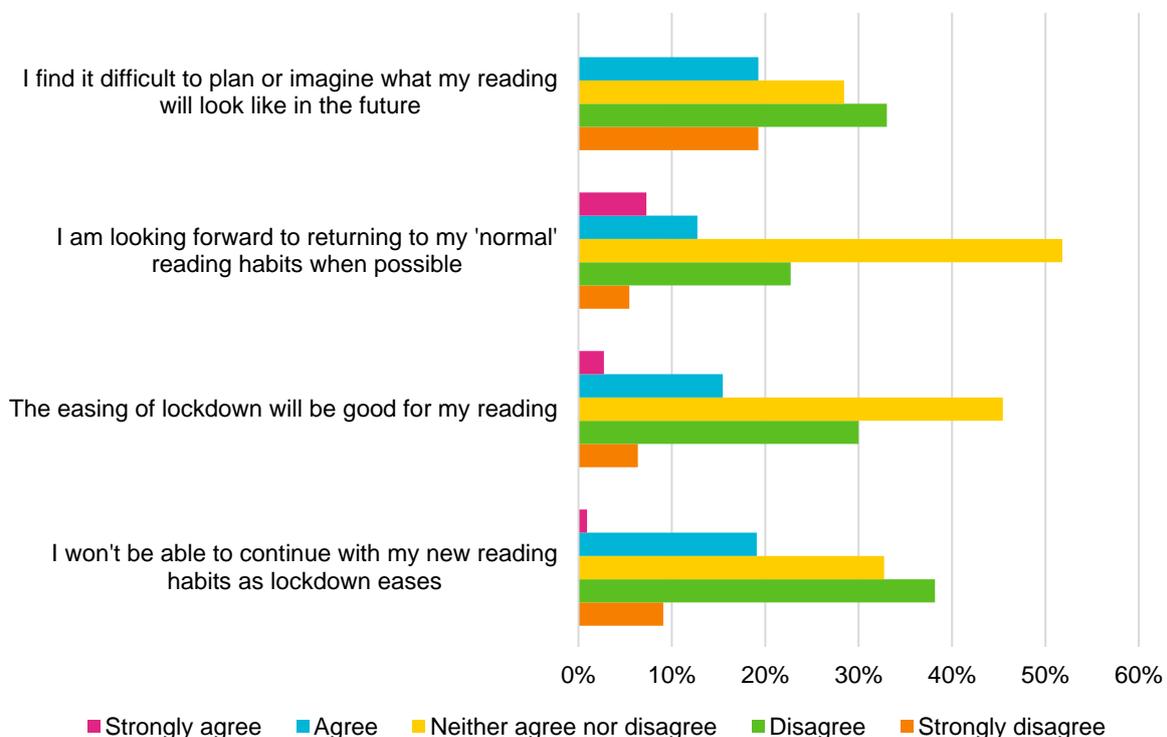
20% stated they would not be able to continue with their new reading habits and only 18% agreed that the easing of lockdown would be good for their reading:

- 'Although I fully intend to read as much, there will be many more demands on my time as lockdown eases.' (Week eight)

Those who had developed positive reading habits during lockdown hoped to keep them going as lockdown eases:

- 'Switching off social media and reading every night.' (Week eight)
- 'I have done more rereading during Lockdown because of lack of access to bookshops. I have lots more books I'd like to reread and will continue to do this.' (Week eight)

Reading habits as lockdown eases (week eight)



Conclusion

Over the course of the study we found that, in general, the panel reported reading more under lockdown. However, a notable minority found that life under lockdown gave them less time or energy for reading. This was due to disrupted routines, care commitments, stress or lack of time. Only a small minority of panellists found that the lockdown had not impacted their reading in any significant way.

The panel's responses suggested that, as well as reading more, they were reading more widely. They told us that, whether out of choice or necessity, they were experimenting with different genres, formats, routines and methods of accessing books. Overall, people told us that they were reading more and that they were finding reading a useful way to pass the time in lockdown:

- 'I have a teenage daughter and since lockdown began, she has read more books than she did in the whole of last year. I am finding reading a huge comfort and distraction.' (Week one)

Despite some difficulties with concentration, the panel found reading to be a generally positive experience for entertainment, relaxation, and their overall mental wellbeing:

- 'I am not sure how I would have coped without having reading as a distraction, as a pleasure and as a way of living life vicariously when you are living in lockdown. I love the fact that I can still live a "million lives" even if I am in the house pretty much all of the time!' (Week four)

The panel reported using reading to connect with others. Some described bonding over books with their households while others came up with inventive ways of socialising remotely:

- 'Reading aloud with friends via video a chapter per night is comforting at a stressful time. It's also been an unexpected way to stay connected with children who are missing friends and family members outwith their household during lockdown.' (Week six)

Panellists mainly committed to reading their (sometimes considerable) stock of books rather than purchasing new ones under lockdown. Some purchased books during supermarket shopping trips or online through independent bookshops or large online retailers. Others explored ebooks and audiobook offerings, sometimes for the first time, through their local library. Many were eager for libraries and bookshops to open again.

Appendix 1

Panel demographics

Age		
Under 18	1%	2
18–24	4%	13
25–34	24%	84
35–44	29%	99
45–54	19%	67
55–64	17%	58
65+	6%	21
I prefer not to say	1%	2

Ethnicity		
African / African Scottish / African British	<1%	1
Bangladeshi / Bangladeshi Scottish / Bangladeshi British	<1%	1
Indian / Indian Scottish / Indian British	1%	3
Irish	3%	10
White Scottish / White British	87%	301
Mixed or Multiple background	2%	7
I prefer not to say	1%	4
Other	7%	23

Gender		
Male	15%	51
Female	84%	290
Non-binary	1%	3
I prefer not to say	<1%	1
Other	<1%	1

Sexuality		
Bisexual	7%	25
Gay man	1%	3
Lesbian / Gay woman	3%	9
Straight / Heterosexual	82%	282
I prefer not to say	7%	23
Other	1%	4

Appendix 2

Participating in the study

Reading in Scotland has given Scottish Book Trust an insight into people's changing relationship with reading over the course of the spring 2020 lockdown. It is encouraging that many on the panel appear to have found it an enjoyable or useful experience. Some described enjoying writing about their reading, feeling motivated and making space to reflect on their reading habits:

- 'All the tips were like little connections every week. It was nice to know how other people were coping. Some of them helped me through the harder times.' (Week eight)
- 'Reading is so essential to my life that I rarely analyse it. Your questions about my reading habits are really making me think and realise how much I depend on reading. Thank you.' (Week seven)
- 'I've felt I've had a voice. Thank you for letting me take part.' (Week eight)
- 'I have really enjoyed it and felt it gave my reading a purpose beyond my own entertainment. It made me proud to be part of a nation of readers.' (Week eight)

We must note however that this feedback was submitted towards the end of the project as part of the weekly surveys rather than in a separate evaluation survey. This means that we only received feedback from people who were actively participating in the final weeks of the study. This suggests that those who gave feedback were more likely to have had a positive experience – people who did not find participating in the study rewarding are likely to have simply stopped engaging earlier.