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## **Libraries, patrons, and e-books**

*12% of e-book readers have borrowed an e-book from a library. Those who use libraries are pretty heavy readers, but most are not aware they can borrow e-books.*

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# Summary of findings

**12% of readers of e-books borrowed an e-book from the library in the past year. But a majority of Americans do not know that this service is provided by their local library.**

Some 12% of Americans ages 16 and older who read e-books say they have borrowed an e-book from a library in the past year.

Most e-book borrowers say libraries are very important to them and their families and they are heavy readers in all formats, including books they bought and books lent to them. E-book borrowers say they read an average (the mean number) of 29 books in the past year, compared with 23 books for readers who do not borrow e-books from a library. Perhaps more striking, the median (midpoint) figures for books reportedly read are 20 in the past year by e-book borrowers and 12 by non-borrowers.

But most in the broader public, not just e-book readers, are generally not aware they can borrow e-books from libraries. We asked all those ages 16 and older if they know whether they can borrow e-books from their library and 62% said they did not know if their library offered that service. Some 22% say they know that their library does lend out e-books, and 14% say they know their library does not lend out e-books.

These findings are striking because more than three-quarters of the nation's public libraries lend e-books.<sup>1</sup>

In the general public, even many of those who presumably have an interest in knowing about the availability of free library loans of e-books are not sure about the situation at their local library:

- 58% of all library card holders say they do not know if their library provides e-book lending services.
- 55% of all those who say the library is “very important” to them say they do not know if their library lends e-books.
- 53% of all tablet computer owners say they do not know if their library lends e-books.
- 48% of all owners of e-book reading devices such as original Kindles and NOOKs say they do not know if their library lends e-books.
- 47% of all those who read an e-book in the past year say they do not know if their library lends e-books.

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<sup>1</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

## **E-book borrowers appreciate the selection of e-books at their local library, but they often encounter wait lists, unavailable titles, or incompatible file formats.**

Focusing on those who do borrow e-books from libraries, two-thirds say the selection is good at their library: 32% of e-book borrowers say the selection at their library is “good,” 18% say it is “very good,” and 16% say it is “excellent.” Some 23% say the selection is only “fair,” 4% say it is “poor,” and 8% say they don’t know.

We asked those who borrowed e-books whether they had experienced several of the difficulties that could be associated with such borrowing, and found that:

- 56% of e-book borrowers from libraries say that at one point or another they had tried to borrow a particular book and found that the library did not carry it.
- 52% of e-book borrowers say that at one point or another they discovered there was a waiting list to borrow the book.
- 18% of e-book borrowers say that at one point or another they found that an e-book they were interested in was not compatible with the e-reading device they were using.

## **Many Americans would like to learn more about borrowing e-books.**

We also asked all those who do not already borrow e-books at the public library how likely it would be that they might avail themselves of certain resources if their library were to offer them. The results:

- 46% of those who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to borrow an e-reading device that came loaded with a book they wanted to read.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a library class on how to download e-books onto handheld devices.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a course at a library in how to use an e-reader or tablet computer.

Those most interested in these services include some groups that librarians are especially eager to reach. African-Americans, Hispanics, and those who live in lower-income households are more likely than others to say they would be interested in borrowing pre-loaded e-reading devices and take classes about how to use the devices and download books.

## **58% of Americans have a library card, and 69% say that their local library is important to them and their family.**

Some 58% of those ages 16 and older have a library card, and 69% report that the library is important to them and their family. Women, whites, and parents of minor children are more likely to have library cards than other groups, and having a library card is also strongly correlated with educational attainment: 39% of those who have not completed high school have a library card, compared with 72% of those with at least a college degree. Those living in households making less than \$30,000 per year,

those living in rural areas, and adults ages 65 and older are less likely than other groups to have a library card.

At the same time, African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely than whites to say that the local library is important to them and their families. Overall, 38% of Americans ages 16 and older say that the public library is “very important,” and 31% say it is “somewhat important.” Some 17% say it is “not too important,” while 13% say it is “not important at all.” By comparison, some 48% of African-Americans say the library is very important to them, along with 43% of Hispanics, compared with 35% of whites.

When it comes to specific library services, African-Americans are more likely than whites 1) to use the local library to get access to historical documents or genealogical records; 2) to use the library to get access to databases such as legal or public records; and 3) to use the library to access or borrow newspapers or magazines or journals.

### **Library card holders are more than twice as likely to have bought their most recent book than to have borrowed it from a library. Many e-book borrowers purchase e-books, too.**

In our December 2011 survey, 78% of those ages 16 and older said they had read a book in the past year. We asked those book readers about their borrowing and buying habits.

Among those who had read a book in the previous year, 48% say they had bought their most recent book; 24% borrowed it from a friend; 14% borrowed it from the library; and 13% got it another way. Among library card holders, a similar proportion (47%) say they had bought their most recent book, while 20% borrowed it from a friend, 20% borrowed it from the library, and 12% got it another way.

Among those who read e-books, 41% of those who borrow e-books from libraries purchased their most recent e-book.

We also asked book readers about their general preferences when it came to getting books. Fully 55% of the e-book readers who also had library cards said they preferred to buy their e-books and 36% said they preferred to borrow them from any source—friends or libraries. Some 46% of library card holders said they prefer to purchase print books they want to read and 45% said they preferred to borrow print books.

When it comes to e-book borrowers, 33% say they generally prefer to buy e-books and 57% say they generally prefer to borrow them.

The importance of buying books to e-book borrowers is also apparent when it comes to the places where they get book recommendations. Some 71% of e-book borrowers say they get book recommendations from online bookstores and websites; 39% say they get recommendations from the staff at bookstores they visit; and 42% say they get recommendations from librarians.

Asked where they look first when they are trying to find an e-book, 47% of those who borrow e-books from libraries say they first look at online bookstores and websites and 41% say they start at their public library.

## Library card holders use more technology, and they report that they read more books.

Library card holders are more likely to own and use digital devices than those who don't have cards. Card holders are more likely than others to be internet users (87% vs. 72%), more likely to own a cell phone (89% vs. 84%), and more likely to have a desktop or laptop computer (81% vs. 67%). And they are more likely than others to say they plan to purchase an e-reader or a tablet computer.

Library card holders also report they read more books than non-holders. In the 12 months before our December survey, library card holders report that they read an average (the mean number) of 20 books, compared with 13 books for non-card holders. The median (midpoint) figures for books reportedly read are 10 by library card holders and 5 by non-holders.

## Leading-edge librarians and patrons say that the advent of e-books has produced a major transformation in book searching and borrowing at libraries.

In addition to conducting a representative phone survey, we also solicited thousands of comments online from library staff members and library patrons about their experiences in the relatively new world of e-books and e-book borrowing. Here are some of the main themes in their answers:

- **Book-borrowing habits are changing.** Some of the most avid library users report they are going to library branches less and using the library website more for book and audio downloads. Additionally, patrons' browsing is moving from in-library catalogs to online searches of library websites. As a result, "routine" traditional library interactions between patrons and librarians are receding in some places as interactions shift to online communications and downloads.
- **Library holdings are changing.** A number of librarians report that some funds for purchasing printed books have been shifted to e-book purchases. Others' libraries have cut back on other media purchases, such as CD audiobooks, to free up funds for purchases of e-books.
- **Librarians' roles are changing.** A majority of the librarians who responded to our query said they are excited about the role that e-books have played in their institutions and the way that e-books have added to patrons' lives. At the same time, many report that much more of their time is devoted to providing "tech support" for patrons—both in their hardware needs and mastering software and the web—and away from traditional reference services. Librarians often are anxious about the new set of demands on them to learn about the operations of new gadgets, to master every new web application, and to de-bug every glitch on a digital device. A notable portion of librarians report they are self-taught techies. Staff training programs often help, but librarians report wide variance in the quality of some training efforts.

## Imagining the future of libraries

Patrons and librarians were fairly uncertain about the exact way that libraries would function in the future. Overall, most librarians from our online panel thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for libraries, and all but a few thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for reading in general.

Still, there was a strong sense in answers from librarians and users that significant change was inevitable, even as readers' romance with printed books persists. Some patrons talked about libraries with fewer printed books and more public meeting and learning spaces. Some librarians struggled to see past a murky transition. There was a combination of apprehension and excitement in their answers without a clear consensus about the structure and shape of the institution.

## In brief: About this research

### Quantitative data

All the statistics in this report, including all specific data about various groups, comes from a series of nationally-representative phone surveys of Americans. They were conducted in English and Spanish, by landline and cell phone. The main survey, of 2,986 Americans ages 16 and older, was conducted on November 16-December 21, 2011, and extensively focused on the new terrain of e-reading and people's habits and preferences. This work was underwritten by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Several other nationally-representative phone surveys were conducted between January 5-8 and January 12-15, 2012 to see the extent to which adoption of e-book reading devices (both tablets and e-readers) might have grown during the holiday gift-giving season, and those growth figures are reported here. Finally, between January 20-February 19, 2012, we re-asked the questions about the incidence of book reading in the previous 12 months in order to see if there had been changes because the number of device owners had risen so sharply. In general, however, all data cited in this report are from the November/December survey unless we specifically cite the subsequent surveys.

### Qualitative material

The qualitative material in this report, including the extended quotes from individuals regarding e-books and library use, comes from two sets of online interviews that were conducted in May 2012. The first group of interviews was of library patrons who have borrowed an e-book from the library. Some 6,573 people answered at least some of the questions on the patron canvassing, and 4,396 completed the questionnaire. The second group of interviews was of librarians themselves. Some 2,256 library staff members answered at least some of the questions on the canvassing of librarians, and 1,180 completed the questionnaire. Both sets of online interviews were opt-in canvassings meant to draw out comments from patrons and librarians, and they are not representative of the general population or even library users. As a result, no statistics or specific data points from either online questionnaire are cited in this report.

# Acknowledgements

## About Pew Internet

**The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project** is an initiative of the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. The Pew Internet Project explores the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care and civic/political life. The Project is nonpartisan and

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# Part 1: An introduction to the issues surrounding libraries and e-books

The emergence of digital content has disrupted industries and institutions that have enjoyed relatively stable practices, policies, and businesses for decades. News organizations, record companies, broadcast and movie producers, and book publishers have all been dramatically affected by the change.

So have libraries. Interest in e-books took off in late 2006 with the release of Sony Readers, and accelerated after Amazon's Kindle was unveiled a year later. And this public interest prompted many libraries to offer e-books to borrow, and this patrons' interest in e-books has only grown over time.

For instance, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library system found several months ago that "circulation of the system's 10,346 electronic volumes is skyrocketing—at the same time that circulation of traditional materials has been remaining steady or dropping slightly," according to an article in *The Buffalo News*. "In a four-day period after Christmas," the article reports, "library cardholders downloaded 3,028 library-owned electronic titles onto devices including home computers, [cell phones] and digital readers such as NOOKs and Kindles."<sup>2</sup>

These changes are systemic. There are over 16,600 library buildings in the nation's 9,000 public library systems in the United States, according to the American Libraries Association,<sup>3</sup> and some 76% of them now offer e-books for patrons to borrow—up from 67% last year.<sup>4</sup> Though overall use of e-books is still relatively low compared to print books and other types of digital content, libraries across the country have seen significant growth in patron demand for e-book titles, especially new releases and bestsellers.

OverDrive, a global distributor of digital content to library patrons, reported that in 2011<sup>5</sup>:

- Its library website traffic more than doubled to 1.6 billion page views and visitor sessions also doubled to nearly 100 million.
- Mobile device use increased to 22% of all checkouts. During the year, the OverDrive Media Console (a free e-book and audiobook app) was installed on 5 million devices, up 84% during the year and making the total install base 11 million users.
- 35 million digital titles were checked out of libraries in 2011, with 17 million holds on e-books that people were waiting for.

The company also reported in March 2012 that more than 5 million visitors viewed 146 million pages in 12.6 million visits to the firm's hosted digital catalog.<sup>6</sup> On average, e-book catalogs hosted more than 408,000 visits each day. Visitors viewed 11.6 pages and browsed the site for 9 minutes 34 seconds on

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<sup>2</sup> Charity Vogel, "Era of e-books has arrived." *The Buffalo News*, January 17, 2012. Accessed January 17, 2012. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/article712552.ece>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet01>

<sup>4</sup> "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012," the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012.

[http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

<sup>5</sup> <http://overdrive.com/news/eBook-Discovery-and-Sampling-Skyrocketing-at-Public-Libraries>

<sup>6</sup> Material available at: <http://www.overdrive.com/news/OverDrive-to-Preview-Library-eBook-Data-at-London-Book-Fair->

average. The firm also reported that e-book browsing is an evening activity: Visitors are most active from 8-9 p.m. in their respective regions, followed by 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

According to OverDrive, about 60% of those accessing the collection browsed public library e-book collections to discover new content, rather than searching for a specific title. Among those browsers, romance was the most popular genre, followed by all fiction, mystery and suspense, historical fiction, and science fiction and fantasy.

Libraries are sometimes hard-pressed to keep up with this demand. Extremely long waiting lists for popular books are common. In Fairfax County in suburban Washington, D.C., for instance, “officials more than doubled the inventory of e-book copies from 2010 to 2011, to more than 10,000, but demand for the books tripled in that time,” according to *The Washington Post*. “Now the average wait time [for an e-book] is three weeks.” On a typical day in early December 2011, about 80% to 85% of the system's e-books are checked out, Elizabeth Rhodes, the collection services coordinator for the Fairfax library system, was quoted as saying. But after the holidays when the number of e-reader owners and tablet computer owners exploded, 98% of the collections were spoken for.<sup>7</sup>

More change is inevitable. There are several major efforts underway to digitize books, especially older, out-of-print, non-copyright protected books, including at Google, the Internet Archive, and Harvard University. And a recent survey of 411 publishers found that 63% plan to publish a digital book in 2012, and 64% said they were primarily interested in publishing non-fiction and technical digital content—a sign that publishers see a host of business and educational opportunities for the format and devices that can read e-material.<sup>8</sup>

## The strained relationship between libraries and publishers

These changes have brought significant tension to the relationship between libraries and major publishers. Many publishers are worried about the effect that unlimited library lending of e-books will have on sales of digital titles and about piracy of digital material. In an open letter to librarians explaining its switch to limit the number of check-outs a library can offer on an e-book, HarperCollins said that its previous policy of “selling e-books to libraries in perpetuity, if left unchanged, would undermine the emerging e-book eco-system, hurt the growing e-book channel, place additional pressure on physical bookstores, and in the end lead to a decrease in book sales and royalties paid to authors.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Simon & Schuster’s executive vice president and chief digital officer Elinor Hirschhorn says that the company does not make its e-books available to libraries at all because “[w]e’re concerned that authors and publishers are made whole by library e-lending and that they aren’t losing sales that they might have made in another channel.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Davenport, “As demand for e-books soars, libraries struggle to stock their virtual shelves.” *Washington Post*, A20, January 14, 2012. See [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/as-demand-for-e-books-soars-libraries-struggle-to-stock-their-virtual-shelves/2012/01/13/gIQAkiOXzP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/as-demand-for-e-books-soars-libraries-struggle-to-stock-their-virtual-shelves/2012/01/13/gIQAkiOXzP_story.html)

<sup>8</sup> Data Conversion Laboratory (DCL), “Survey Shows That Readers Will Shun Poorly Digitized e-books.” December 27, 2011. [http://www.dclab.com/press/press\\_20111227\\_dcl\\_digital\\_publishing\\_survey.asp](http://www.dclab.com/press/press_20111227_dcl_digital_publishing_survey.asp)

<sup>9</sup> “Open Letter to Librarians,” HarperCollins, Library Love Fest blog, March 3, 2011. [http://harperlibrary.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2011/03/open-letter-to-librarians.html](http://harperlibrary.typepad.com/my_weblog/2011/03/open-letter-to-librarians.html)

<sup>10</sup> Randall Stross, “Publishers vs. Libraries: An E-book Tug of War.” *New York Times*, December 24, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/business/for-libraries-and-publishers-an-e-book-tug-of-war.html>

Meanwhile, libraries and their allies argue that library lending of digital works introduces those works to a wider audience and ultimately increases the demand for them. An August 2011 survey of 2,421<sup>11</sup> adults by *Library Journal* found “that over 50% of all library users report purchasing books by an author they were introduced to in the library,” according to Rebecca Miller, *Library Journal*’s executive editor. Miller maintained that the findings “[debunk] the myth that when a library buys a book the publisher loses future sales. Instead, it confirms that the public library does not only incubate and support literacy, as is well understood in our culture, but it is an active partner with the publishing industry in building the book market, not to mention the burgeoning e-book market.”<sup>12</sup>

### The current state of play between libraries and publishers

At the moment, two of the “big six” publishers, Simon & Schuster and MacMillan, do not sell e-books to libraries at all or allow any digital library lending of their titles. A third and a fourth, Hachette<sup>13</sup> and Penguin,<sup>14</sup> do not generally sell to libraries but are embarking on pilot programs to test models for e-book borrowing. A fifth publisher, HarperCollins, limits library lending to 26 check-outs per e-book, after which libraries may repurchase the title to continue lending it.<sup>15</sup> The firm recently ended its relationship with OverDrive and is testing a new lending system with the 3M company.<sup>16</sup> And the sixth major publisher, Random House, places no restrictions on its digital titles.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Random House recently raised its prices for e-book sales to libraries so that the cost for some titles as much as tripled. For instance, to purchase a newer title that is available in print as a hardcover will now cost a library anywhere from \$65-\$85, while titles available as paperbacks will generally be in the \$25-\$50 range.<sup>18</sup>

In general, publishers’ e-book lending restrictions often attempt to mirror the logistics of print lending—for instance, only allowing an e-book to be lent out to one patron at a time through a “one book, one user” arrangement. According to a November 2010 survey from *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*, “one book/one user” was the standard use license for about four in ten of responding public libraries; about one in ten had unlimited access, and another four in ten had both.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> More about the survey: “The data is being collected with the help of Bowker PubTrack Consumer. The first issue summarizes the findings of an August 2011 survey pinpointing usage patterns of library patrons, with special attention to e-book usage. In all, 3,193 people participated in the initial survey, and that number was screened so that the frequency of ‘library patronage and book buying behaviors were similar to statistically derived norms,’ resulting in a sample of 2,421. Responders were all U.S. residents aged 18 and over.”

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Albanese, “Survey Says Library Users Are Your Best Customers.” *Publishers Weekly*, October 28, 2011. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publishing-and-marketing/article/49316-survey-says-library-users-are-your-best-customers.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/e-content/ebooks-promising-new-conversations>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304898704577479174051216172.html>

<sup>15</sup> This circulation limit “was arrived at after considering a number of factors, including the average lifespan of a print book, and wear and tear on circulating copies.” [http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/889452-264/harpercollins\\_puts\\_26\\_loan\\_cap.html.csp](http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/889452-264/harpercollins_puts_26_loan_cap.html.csp)

<sup>16</sup> Penguin recently ended its relationship with OverDrive, and as such has stopped offering e-books and digital audiobooks to libraries (until it can find a new distributor). <http://paidcontent.org/article/419-penguin-ends-relationship-with-overdrive-no-e-books-in-libraries-at-all/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://paidcontent.org/article/419-random-house-will-keep-all-its-e-books-in-libraries-with-a-price-increa/>

<sup>18</sup> “Librarians Feel Sticker Shock as Price for Random House E-books Rises as Much as 300%.” <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/03/ebooks/librarians-feel-sticker-shock-as-price-for-random-house-ebooks-rise-as-much-as-300-percent/>

<sup>19</sup> According to a survey conducted in August 2010 by *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*, available at <http://www.libraries.wright.edu/noshelfrequired/2011/02/09/library-journal-publishes-library-ebook-survey-results-sample-data-here/>

A central issue in these debates is whether libraries own their e-book titles as they do print titles, or if they merely lease access to them as they would subscription to an external digital database. Jo Budler, the state librarian of Kansas, recently ended her state's libraries' contract with OverDrive over this issue. According to *Library Journal*, Budler refused to renew the libraries' contract with OverDrive when the distribution service attempted not only to significantly raise fees, but also to rewrite the terms of the contract in such a way that would prevent the libraries from ever transferring their holdings to a different provider.<sup>20</sup> The State Library of Kansas then decided to transfer the libraries' existing digital content to a new e-book lending service from technology company 3M, although Budler said that they first had to secure individual publishers' permission to transfer the titles. (The libraries were able to transfer about two-thirds of their content.)<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, the Douglas County Libraries in Colorado have made agreements with publishers "that will allow the library to purchase outright and manage the digital rights for e-books, furthering the library's effort to replicate the traditional print purchasing model for electronic content."<sup>22</sup>

## The rise of Amazon

Prior to 2011, e-book borrowers were able to check out several formats of e-books from their local libraries. The formats available were compatible with devices such as Barnes & Noble's NOOK, the Sony Reader, and the Kobo reader, but not Amazon's Kindle.<sup>23</sup> In April 2011, however, Amazon announced that it was partnering with OverDrive to allow library patrons to check out Kindle books. Kindle Library Lending, which became available September 21, 2011, allows library patrons who own Kindles to borrow Kindle books from over 11,000 public and school libraries in the United States. It also allows borrowers to make notes in their copy of the e-book and to highlight certain passages; these markups are visible only to that user, not other library patrons or Amazon users.<sup>24</sup> The service is only available to libraries, schools, and colleges in the U.S.<sup>25</sup>

With Kindle Library Lending, any title the library owns that is available via OverDrive can now be downloaded by patrons who own Kindles, or who have devices running the Kindle app, such as Android devices; iPads, iPod touches, and iPhones; desktop computers, including Macs and PCs; BlackBerry devices; or Windows Phones. The library patron is technically not downloading the library's copy of that e-book, but a copy directly from Amazon that corresponds to the library's title—although the title will still be "unavailable" to other patrons when it is checked out to a Kindle. This means that libraries do not need to convert any files from ePub or other formats in order to have those titles available via Kindle.

As a result, one controversy surrounding Kindle Library Lending is that library patrons who choose to download a Kindle e-book are redirected to Amazon's website, where they must log in with an Amazon account (as opposed to completing the entire process within their library's system). This has raised

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/891052-264/kansas\\_\\_state\\_librarian\\_argues.html.csp](http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/891052-264/kansas__state_librarian_argues.html.csp) and <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/features/01122012/threats-digital-lending>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.kansan.com/news/2011/nov/01/kansas-libraries-lead-way-e-book-access/> and <http://www.startribune.com/154308815.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2011/10/ebooks/douglas-county-libraries-strikes-new-deals-with-publishers-to-own-ebooks/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/technology/21amazon.html>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110420005787/en/Amazon-Launch-Library-Lending-Kindle-books>

<sup>25</sup> <http://overdriveblogs.com/library/2011/04/20/kindle-library-lending-and-overdrive-what-it-means-for-libraries-and-schools/>

questions of privacy, as Amazon is able to track library patrons' borrowing habits in a way that many librarians are uncomfortable with.<sup>26</sup>

Amazon itself has declined to provide exact figures as to its number of overall customers, number of Amazon Prime members, or number of Kindles sold. A recent press release said only that in December 2011, "customers purchased well over 1 million Kindle devices per week."<sup>27</sup>

## About this research

This report explores the world of e-books and libraries, where libraries fit into these book-consumption patterns of Americans, when people choose to borrow their books and when they choose to buy books. It examines the potential frustrations e-book borrowers can encounter when checking out digital titles, such as long wait lists and compatibility issues. Finally, it looks at non-e-book-borrower interest in various library services, such as preloaded e-readers or instruction on downloading e-books.

To understand the place e-reading, e-books, and libraries have in Americans' evolving reading habits, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has given the Pew Internet Project a grant to study this shifting digital terrain. Libraries have traditionally played a key role in the civic and social life of their communities, and this work is aimed at understanding the way that changes in consumer behavior and library offerings might affect that unique relationship between libraries and communities.

This report is part of the first phase of that Gates Foundation-funded research. Subsequent reports will cover how people in different kinds of communities (urban, suburban, and rural) compare in their reading habits and how teens and young adults are navigating this environment. Further down the line, our research will focus on the changing landscape of library services.

## Quantitative data

The Pew Internet Project conducted several surveys to complete the work reported here. All quantitative findings in this report, including all specific numbers and statistics about various groups, come from a series of nationally-representative phone surveys. The first was a nationally-representative phone survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older between November 16 and December 21, 2011. The sample was conducted 50% on landline phones and 50% on cell phones and in English and in Spanish. In addition, the survey included an oversample of 300 additional tablet computer owners, 317 e-reader owners, and 119 people who own both devices. The overall survey has a margin of error of  $\pm 2$  percentage points.

Beyond our December 2011 telephone survey, we asked a modest number of questions about tablets and e-readers in two telephone surveys conducted in January on an "omnibus" survey. These surveys involved 2,008 adults (age 18+) and were fielded between January 5-8 and January 12-15. Those surveys were conducted on landline and cell phones and were administered in English. We fielded them to determine if the level of ownership of e-readers and tablets had changed during the holiday gift giving season—and in fact it had. We reported that the level of ownership of both devices had nearly doubled in

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<sup>26</sup> <http://blog.libraryjournal.com/ljinsider/2011/04/20/after-kindle-lending-the-deluge/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20111229005169/en/2011-Holiday-Kindle>

a month—from 10% ownership for each device in December to 19% in January.<sup>28</sup> The margin of error for the combined omnibus survey data is  $\pm 2.4$  percentage points.

Finally, we asked questions about book reading and ownership of tablets and e-books in a survey fielded from January 20-February 19, 2012. In all, 2,253 adults (age 18+) were interviewed on landline and cell phone and in English and Spanish. The margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 2$  percentage points.

In general, all data cited in this report are from the November/December survey unless we specifically cite the subsequent surveys.

## Qualitative material

The qualitative material in this report, including the extended quotes from individuals regarding e-books and library use, comes from two sets of online interviews that were conducted in May 2012. The first group of interviews was of library patrons who have borrowed an e-book from the library. Some 6,573 people answered at least some of the questions on the patron canvassing, and 4,396 completed the questionnaire. The second group of interviews was of librarians themselves. Some 2,256 library staff members answered at least some of the questions on the canvassing of librarians, and 1,180 completed the questionnaire. Both sets of online interviews were opt-in canvassings meant to draw out comments from patrons and librarians, and they are not representative of the general population or even library users. As a result, no statistics or specific data points from either online questionnaire are cited in this report.

Throughout this report we quote from individual patrons' answers about their experiences checking out e-books and their reactions to this relatively new service being offered by libraries. The majority of our patron respondents are female, and about half were in their forties or older. Their most common community type was "a small city or suburb," followed by "a large metropolitan area or big city."

Among the library staff who completed questionnaires, a strong majority were female. They were generally ages 25-64. The most common position title was "librarian," followed by "director" or "chief officer." The most common community type for their library was a small city or suburb, followed by a large metropolitan area or big city. About half of the libraries had 50,000 or fewer patrons.

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<sup>28</sup> The results of the omnibus surveys were reported here: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/E-book-readers-and-tablets.aspx>

## Part 2: Where people discover and get their books

As part of our exploration of the new ecosystem of books, we asked respondents in our December 2011 survey about the way they discover books and then obtain them. We found that personal recommendations dominate book recommendations. At the same time, algorithms on websites, bookstore staffers, and librarians are in the picture, too.

In our December 2011 survey, we asked all the respondents if they ever got book recommendations from several sources and they reported:

- 64% of those ages 16 and older said they get **book recommendations from family members, friends, or co-workers**. Those most likely to cite these sources include: women (70%), whites (67%), those under age 65 (66%), college graduates (82%), those in households earning over \$75,000 (81%), parents of minor children (69%), suburban residents (66%), and all types of technology users (tablet owners, e-reader owners, internet users).
- 28% of those ages 16 and older said they get **recommendations from online bookstores or other websites**. Those most likely to get online recommendations include internet users who are: women (38%), those ages 30-64 (38%), college graduates (47%), those in households earning more than \$75,000 (46%), tablet owners (51%), and e-reader owners (64%).
- 23% of those ages 16 and older said they get **recommendations from staffers in bookstores** they visit in person. Those most likely to get recommendations this way include: college graduates (28%), those living in households earning more than \$75,000 (30%), parents of minor children (27%), technology owners and users, urban and suburban residents, and those connected to libraries<sup>29</sup>.
- 19% of those ages 16 and older said they get **recommendations from librarians or library websites**. Those most likely to get recommendations this way include: women (23%), 16- and 17-year-olds (36%), college graduates (26%), owners of e-readers (25%), those who have read a printed book in the past year (23%), and those who have listened to an audiobook (37%).

We did not specifically ask about the role of professional book critics as a source of book discovery because we assumed they would be a source that factored into all these options.

Library users and library fans were more likely to cite all these sources of book recommendations, perhaps because they read more than non-library users. Among those who said the local library was very important to them and their family, 32% said they got book recommendations from librarians. Library card holders also got recommendations from all these sources at greater levels than non-card holders (28% vs. 7%).

Our online patron respondents said they received recommendations from a variety of sources, with the vast majority saying they get recommendations from family and friends, book reviews, and website recommendations.

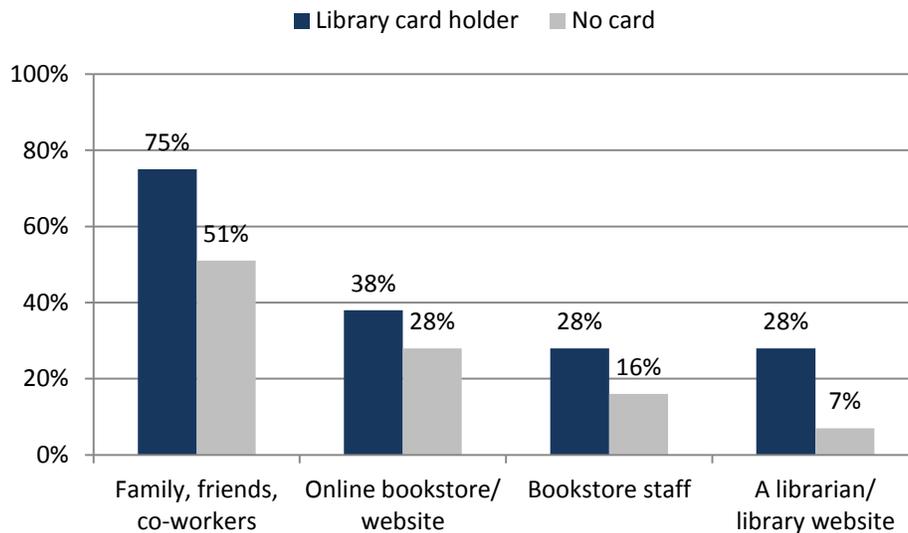
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<sup>29</sup> Such as library users, library card holders, and those who said the local library was very important to them and their family

“If I hit on a genre I like,” one reader on our panel said, “I’ll go to Amazon.com, look up a book I’ve read and enjoyed, and then look to see what other books Amazon thinks is like the book I just looked up. I also use social networking book sites, like Good Reads, to get ideas. I also use recommendations from Facebook friends as a place to start.”

## Where people get book recommendations

*Among Americans ages 16+*



**Source:** Dec. 2011 results are from a survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

In addition to friends and family, our online query respondents frequently mentioned book clubs as the recommendation source of their most recent book. Some also turned to browsing (both a library’s physical stacks and external websites), podcasts, TV and radio reviews, and award lists for more recommendations.

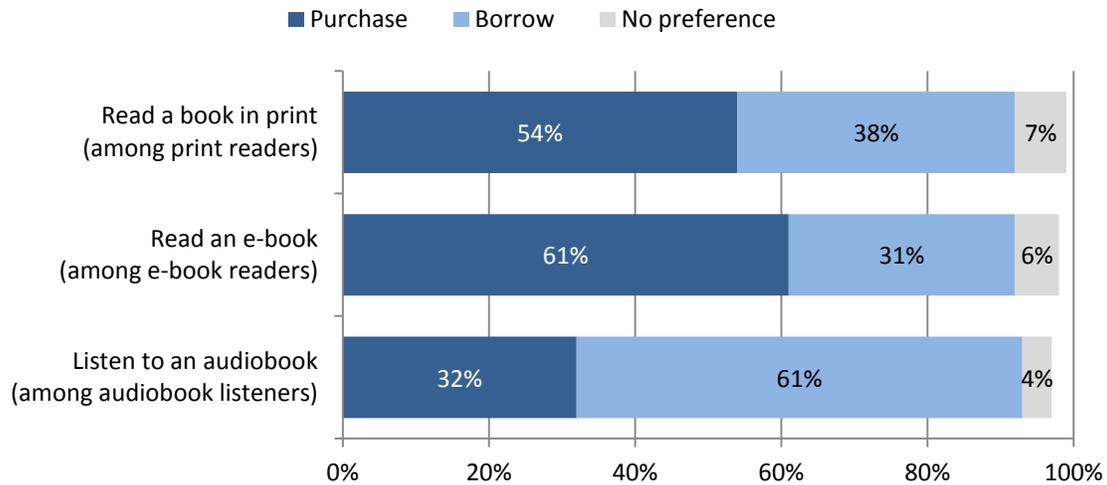
## The way people prefer to get books in general: To buy or to borrow?

In our December 2011 survey, we found that 78% of Americans ages 16 and older read or listened to a book in the past year. We asked those book readers how, in general, they prefer to get their books, and found that a majority of print readers (54%) and readers of e-books (61%) say they prefer to purchase their own copies of these books rather than borrow them from somewhere else. In contrast, most audiobook listeners prefer to borrow their audiobooks; just one in three audiobook listeners (32%) prefer to purchase audiobooks they want to listen to, while 61% prefer to borrow them.

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## When you want to do the following, do you prefer purchasing your own copy, or borrowing it from a library or some other source?

Among Americans ages 16+ who in the past year read print books, e-books, and audiobooks, respectively



**Source:** Dec. 2011 results are from a survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. N for print book readers in the past 12 months= 2,295. N for e-reader owners in the past 12 months=793. N for audiobook listeners in the past 12 months=415. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

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Looking more closely at preferences by format, we find:

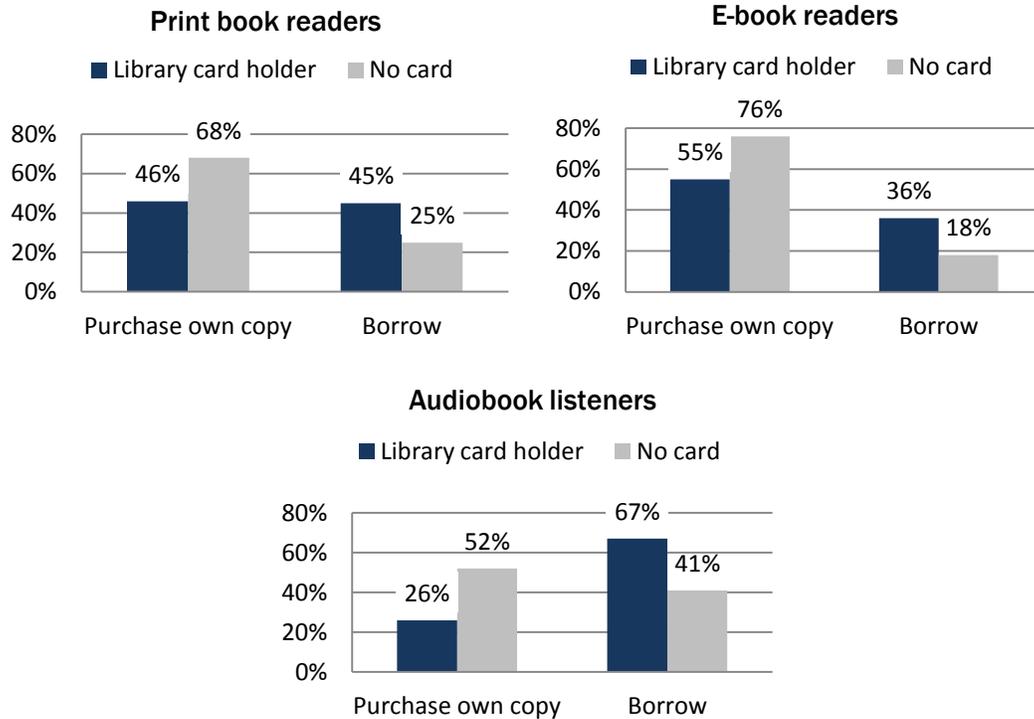
- **Among print readers:** Men are more likely than women to want to purchase their books, and print readers in households making at least \$75,000 per year are more likely to want to purchase their books than those in lower-income households. Those who own tablet computers or e-readers are more likely than non-owners to want to purchase printed books. Conversely, those who do not own such devices are more likely than owners to want to borrow books.
- **Among e-book readers:** Readers of e-books in households making at least \$50,000 per year are more likely to want to purchase their e-books than those in lower-income households. E-reader and tablet owners are considerably more likely than non-owners to say they prefer to buy their e-books.
- **Among audiobook listeners:** There is an interesting division of preferences among audiobooks of different genders, as men are almost equally likely to prefer purchasing their audiobooks (47%) as borrowing them (45%), but women are much more likely to prefer borrowing (74%) to purchasing (19%).

Looking specifically at library card holders, we find they are buyers as well as borrowers of books. At the same time, they are more likely to say they borrow than are the book readers who are non-card holders. Audiobook listeners with library cards are much more likely than others to prefer borrowing their audiobooks, and those without library cards are more likely to prefer buying their own copy.

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## Library card holders are book buyers, too, and are more likely to want to borrow books

Among Americans ages 16+ who read print books, e-books, and audiobooks, respectively, the percentage who said they generally prefer to purchase or borrow that type of book



**Source:** Dec. 2011 results are from a survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. N for print book readers in the past 12 months=2,295. N for e-book readers in the past 12 months=793. N for audiobook listeners in the past 12 months=415. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

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Our online group of e-book borrowers offered some insight into how they decide whether to borrow or buy their books. Generally tech-savvy, our respondents are also particularly heavy readers.<sup>30</sup> When it comes to e-book borrowers, 33% say they generally prefer to buy e-books and 57% say they generally prefer to borrow them.

Many respondents in our online panel said they liked to purchase books they might want to re-read or share with others, especially spiritual and self-help books. Many also preferred to purchase books for reading to children (although others cited their children’s voracious reading appetites as the reason for regular library trips). Graphics-heavy books, reference books, and books that are part of a series were also frequently mentioned as best for purchasing. At least one student mentioned a preference for purchasing used books, “so I can highlight and mark pages at will.”

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, about half of our online questionnaire respondents said they read at least 20 print books per year, and about half read at least 11 e-books in the same time frame. And though audiobooks were not as popular as print or e-books, about half of the respondents had listened to at least one audiobook in that time—also significantly more than the general population we polled in our representative phone surveys.

Finally, some found the permanence of a personal print copy reassuring. “I know that electronic devices can fail,” one respondent said. “If [a device] does fail, what I once thought was permanent... isn't.”

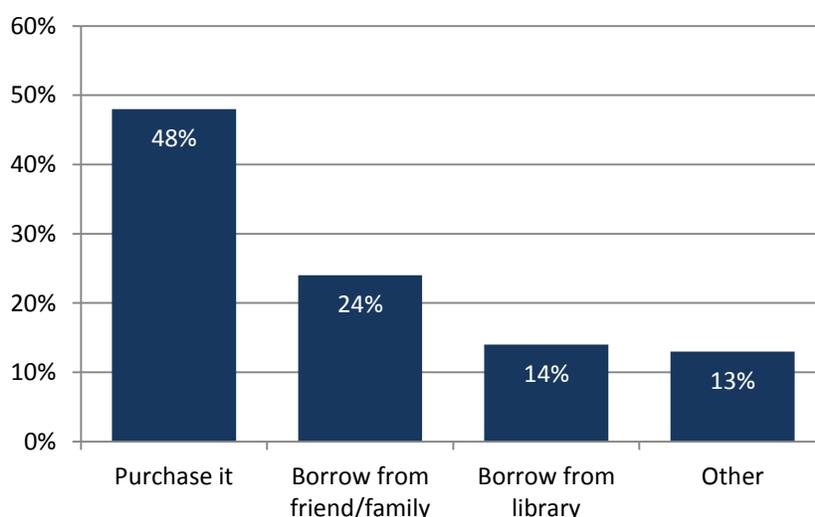
## Where did the most recent book come from?

We asked book readers about the most recent book they read in any format, print, audio, or e-book: How had they obtained it? Almost half (48%) of readers ages 16 and older said they had purchased it. About a quarter (24%) said they had borrowed it from a friend or family member, and 14% said they borrowed it from a library.

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### Thinking about the last book you read, in any format, did you...

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read a book in the past 12 months, the percentage who got their most recent book from each source*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who read a book in any format in the past 12 months=2,474.

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The profile of those in each category varies:

- **48% of book readers had purchased the book.** Whites (49%) were more likely than minorities to have purchased their most recent book. Those living in households earning more than \$75,000 (59%) were more likely than those in lower-income households to have bought their most recent book.
- **24% had borrowed the book from a friend or family member.** Some 30% of African Americans had gotten their most recent book this way, compared with 23% of whites. Those with high school diplomas (29%) were more likely than those with higher education to have borrowed their latest book from family or friends. Those living in households earning less than \$75,000 (26%) were more likely than those in households earning more (18%) to have gotten their latest book this way. Some 31% of non-internet users borrowed their most recent book, compared with 22% of internet users. And those who chose to take our survey in Spanish were

considerably more likely than English speakers to have borrowed their most recent book from a family member or friend.

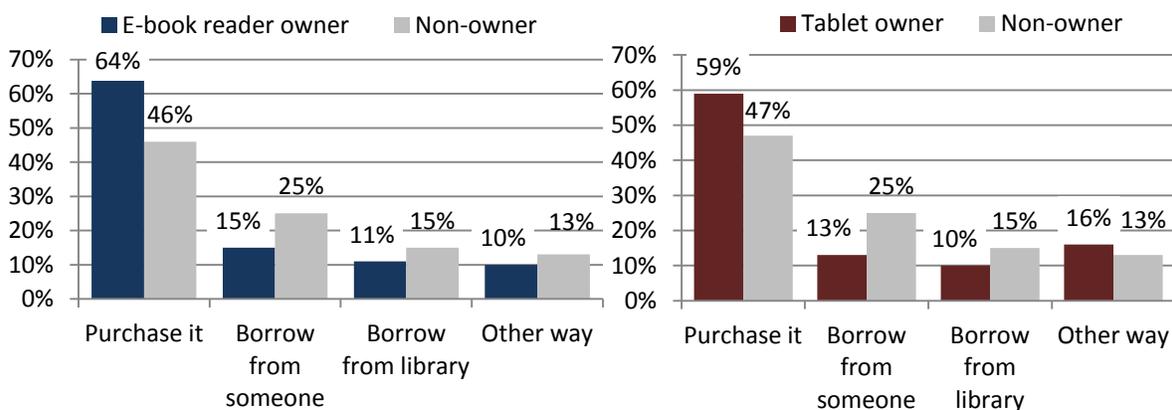
- **14% had borrowed the book from the library.** Fully 37% of the 16- and 17-year-olds in our survey got their most recent book from the library, and 20% of those ages 65 and older followed suit. Those whose most recent book came from the library tended to be those in the least well-off households—those earning \$30,000 or less. Non-tech owners—those who don’t have tablets or e-readers or cell phones or internet access—were more likely than tech owners to have gotten their most recent book from the library.

Those who are audiobook consumers are particularly likely to rely on the library for their recent books: 24% of those who listened to an audiobook in the past year had borrowed a book from the library, compared with 13% of those who didn’t consume audiobooks.

In terms of device ownership, those who own e-readers or tablets are more likely than non-owners to have bought the last book they read—and they are more likely to say they prefer buying books than getting them other ways. Some 64% of e-reader owners purchased their last book, compared with 46% of non-e-reader owners. For tablet owners, 59% purchased their last book, compared with 47% of non-tablet owners.

## Owners of e-readers and tablets have different acquisition behaviors

Among Americans ages 16+ who read a book in the past 12 months, the percentage who got their most recent book from each source



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who read a book in any format in the past 12 months=2,474.

Beyond device ownership, those who had read an e-book (on any device) in the previous year were also more likely than print readers to have bought their most recent book: 55% of e-book readers had bought their most recently read book of any format, compared with 49% of print readers.

### A closer look at libraries

Asked where they got the most recent book they read, library card holders are just as likely as non-card holders to have purchased the book, but much less likely to have gotten it from a family member or

friend and more likely to have obtained it from the library. Overall, some 20% of book readers say their most recently read book came from the library.

Library card holders are also notably more likely than others to be consumers of other kinds of content, especially material in electronic form: 62% of card holders say they regularly read daily news or a daily newspaper (vs. 52% of non-card holders) and most of them say they read such material on a computer or handheld device. Some 55% of library card holders regularly read magazines and journals (vs. 39% of non-card holders) and 35% of those card-holding readers say they read such material on a computer or handheld device.

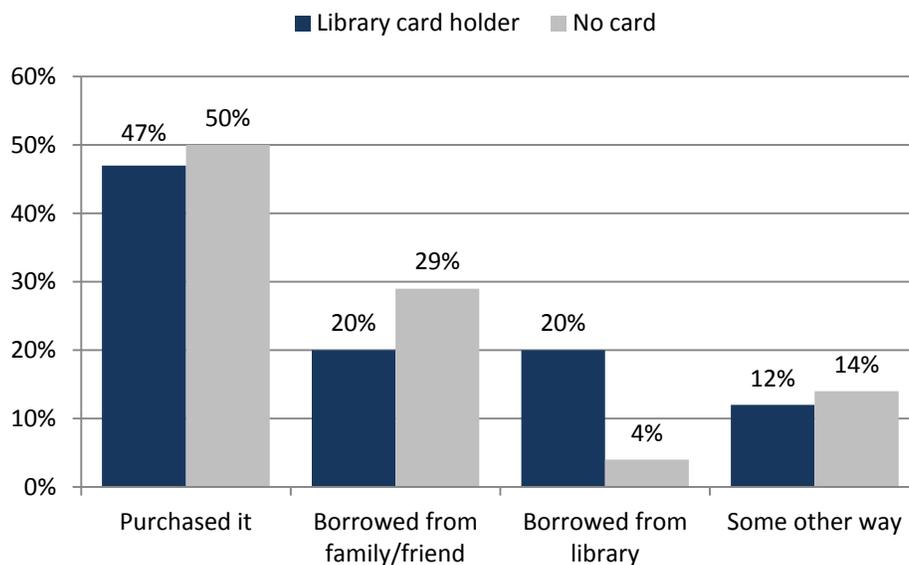
Our online panel respondents outlined the complex paths they often take to find and pursue books that catch their eye. One respondent read the *Hunger Games* series along with her 13 year-old daughter: “We got the books from the library after waiting a long time for reserved copies. We loved them so much that we are going to purchase the whole series tomorrow from the school Scholastic book order form. Also I have all them on my new iPad Kindle app and my son is now able to start reading them.”

Another online panelist wrote that she had found her latest book by chance at the library, which she described as “a complete fluke since I rarely browse physical shelves these days. I have a preschooler and he rarely stays put still long enough for me to find something while we’re in the library.” She added, “Usually, I find books in the catalog, go to Amazon to read reviews about it, request books for pickup at my local branch and then pick them up on our way to the children’s section in the library.”

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### Library card holders have different book-acquiring strategies

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read a book in the past 12 months, the percentage who got their most recent book from each source*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who read a book in any format in the past 12 months=2,474.

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Many of our online respondents described how the library fit into their book discovery process as a way to “try out” new authors and genres before committing to a print purchase. “I like to read new-to-me authors by borrowing from the library,” one said. “If I enjoy the book, I will then purchase it.” Many of our online panelists wrote that even when they preferred to borrow a book, they often purchased books that had long wait lists or were unavailable at their local library, or if they thought the book would be too long to finish in the allotted time.

The library was also an important source for the many respondents who described themselves as voracious readers, as it freed their reading habits from the constraints of budget and storage space. Still, there some who buy the book after having read a borrowed copy. The only time I buy a book to keep is when I have read it and liked it enough to feel like I want to have it forever and read it again and again,” one wrote.

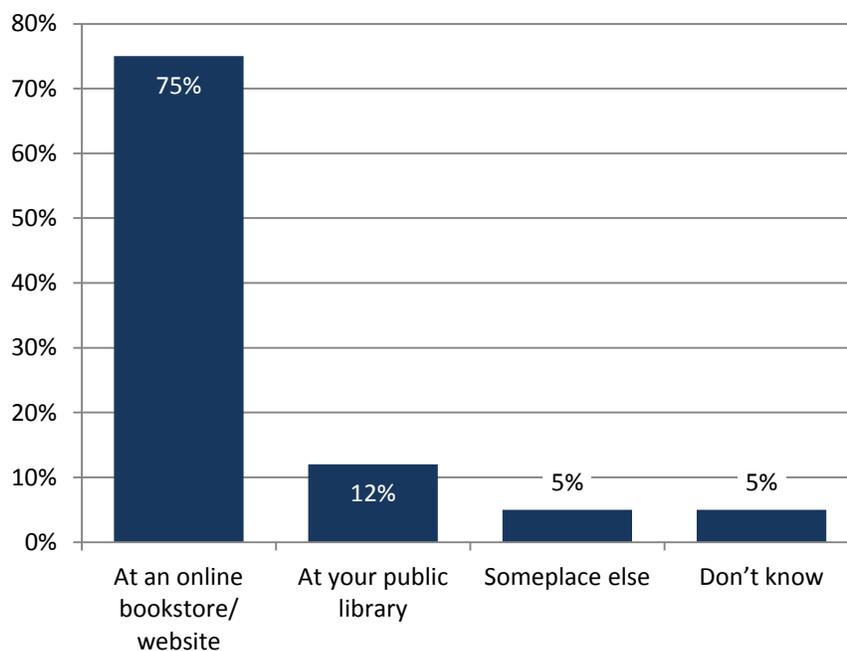
## The e-book ecosystem: Where do e-book readers start their search?

In our December 2011 survey, three-quarters of people who read e-books (75%) said that when they want to read a particular e-book, they usually look for it first at an online bookstore or website, while 12% said they tend to look first at their public library.

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### When you want to read a particular e-book, where do you look first?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read an e-book in the past 12 months*



**Source:** Dec. 2011 results are from a survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16–December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who read an e-book in past 12 months=793.

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Among those who read e-books, men are more likely than women to look first at online booksellers, and whites are more likely to look online than African Americans. E-book readers with at least some college experience are more likely to look at online booksellers first than those with less education, and e-book readers who live in households making at least \$50,000 per year are more likely to look online first than those making less (who are more likely to say that they don't know where they would look first).

One in twenty e-book readers said that they usually first look for e-books someplace other than an online bookseller or their public library. It's possible that among these sources is Amazon's Kindle Owners' Lending Library (KOLL),<sup>31</sup> which allows Amazon Prime members to check out one e-book at a time up to once a month.<sup>32</sup> Outside of the Kindle Lending Library, Amazon has an option that allows Kindle e-books to be lent to another individual once for 14 days, although not all titles have this option enabled.<sup>33</sup>

Even e-book borrowers take their cues from commercial sources. Some 71% of e-book borrowers say they get book recommendations from online bookstores and websites; 39% say they get recommendations from the staff at bookstores they visit; and 42% say they get recommendations from librarians.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.amazon.com/kindleownerslendinglibrary>

<sup>32</sup> "Customers Love Kindle Owners' Lending Library—KDP Authors and Publishers Benefit." Amazon.com press release, Business Wire, 12 Jan 2012. <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20120112005567/en/>

<sup>33</sup> Amazon.com Help: Lending Kindle Books. Last accessed June 14, 2012. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200549320>

## Part 3: Library users

Our December 2011 survey showed that 58% of Americans ages 16 and older said they had a library card.

### Library user demographics

*Among each group of Americans ages 16+, the percentage who say they have a library card*

% who have a library card	
<b>All Americans ages 16+</b>	<b>58%</b>
Men	48
Women	67
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	59
Black, Non-Hispanic	56
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	47
<b>Age</b>	
16-17	62
18-29	56
30-49	60
50-64	58
65+	52
<b>Household income</b>	
Less than \$30,000/yr	50
\$30,000-\$49,999	62
\$50,000-\$74,999	60
\$75,000+	65
<b>Educational attainment</b>	
No high school diploma	39
High school grad	50
Some College	64
College +	72
<b>Geographic location</b>	
Urban	59
Suburban	61
Rural	48
<b>Parental status</b>	
Parent of minor child	66
Not a parent	54

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Women, whites, and parents of minor children are more likely to have library cards than other groups, and having a library card is also strongly correlated with educational attainment: 39% of those who have not completed high school have a library card, compared with 72% of those with at least a college degree. Those living in households making less than \$30,000 per year and those living in rural areas are less likely than other groups to have a library card, and seniors ages 65 and older are somewhat less likely to have one as well.

These findings are in line with the results of a January 2011 ALA/Harris Interactive poll, which found that 58% of adults ages 18 and older said they had a library card. (Our survey found 57% of those ages 18 and above had a card.<sup>34</sup>)

Technology users are more likely to have library cards than non-users. For instance, those who use the internet are more likely to have a library card than non-internet users (62% vs. 37%); cell users are more likely to have a library card than non-users (59% vs. 47%); and those who own e-readers (like an original Kindle or NOOK) are more likely to have a library card than non-users (69% vs. 56%). However, tablet owners are no more or less likely to have library cards than non-owners.

## How important are libraries?

Beyond the particulars of library card holding, we asked respondents about the role of the local library in their life. Almost seven in ten Americans (69%) say that public libraries are important to them and their family: 38% of Americans ages 16 and older say that the public library is “very important,” and 31% say it is “somewhat important.” Some 17% say it is “not too important,” while 13% say it is “not important at all.”

Many groups that are *less likely* to have a library card are *also more likely* to say that the public library is not important to their family, including men (compared with women), those who have not completed high school (compared with those with higher levels of education), rural residents (compared with urban and suburban residents), and people without minor children living at home (compared with parents).

At the same time, minorities are generally more likely to say libraries are important than whites and minorities are notably more likely to say libraries are very important: Some 48% of African-Americans say that and 44% of Hispanics say that, compared with 35% of whites. Though the number of Spanish-speaking respondents was relatively small in the sample (89 cases), they were more likely than English-speakers to say the library was very important to them and their families. Fully half (50%) of parents with minor children say that libraries are very important to them and their families, compared with 35% of non-parents who have that view.

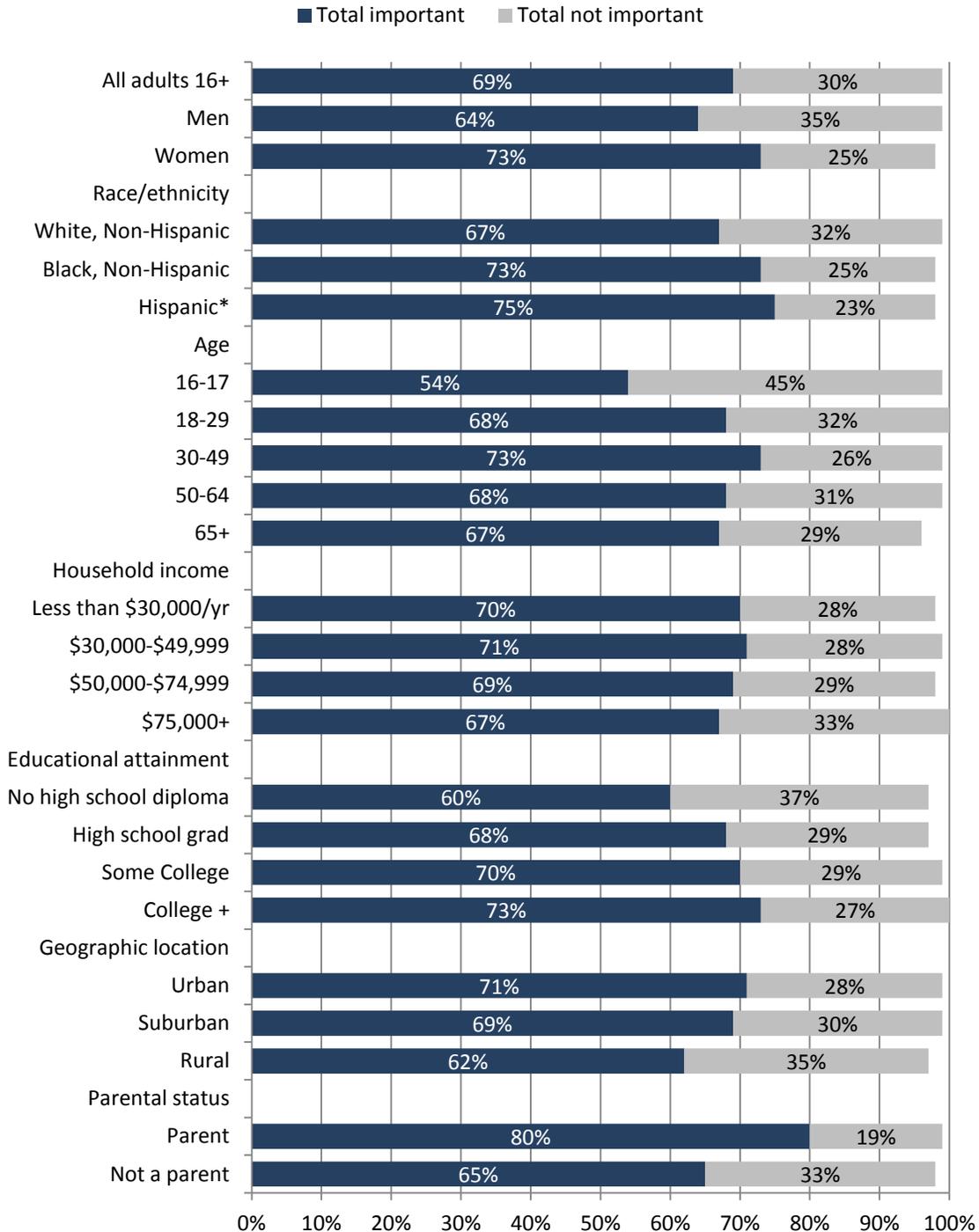
On the other hand, the youngest respondents (those 16-17 years old) were substantially less likely than adults to say that libraries are “very important”—just 13% of this youngest age group say this, compared with over a third (39%) of adults ages 18 and older.

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<sup>34</sup> January 2011 Harris Interactive Poll (PDF) <http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librarystats/2011harrispoll.pdf> and <http://www.ala.org/news/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries/publiclibraries>

## How important is the public library to your family?

Among Americans ages 16+ in each group, the total percentages of those who said the library was important (“very important” or “somewhat important”) and not important (“not too important” or “not important at all”)



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

There are others who are particularly likely to say the library is important to them: Those who have listened to an audiobook in the past year are more likely than others to say libraries are very important (49% vs. 39%). Those who read at least monthly for their own pleasure are also more likely to say libraries are very important (41% vs. 29%). And those who read monthly to keep up with current events are more likely to say libraries are very important (39% vs. 33%).

In our survey we asked if respondents had any physical or health conditions that make reading difficult or challenging for them. Some 17% of respondents said they had an issue like that in their lives and those who have health or physical issues that make reading difficult are more likely than others to say the library is very important to them—44% vs. 37%.

## **Library users are more engaged with all kinds of reading**

Those who have library cards and think well of the library's role in their lives stand out in several ways from others. For starters, they are more likely to say their own quality of life is good or excellent.

When it comes to technology, library card holders are more connected than those who don't have cards. They are more likely than others to be internet users (88% vs. 73%), more likely to own a cell phone (89% vs. 84%), and more likely to have a desktop or laptop computer (81% vs. 67%). And they are more likely than others to say they plan to purchase an e-reader or a tablet computer.

Library card holders read more books than non-holders. In the 12 months before our December survey, library card holders say they read an average (the mean number) of 20 books, compared with 13 books as the mean number of books read by non-card holders. The median (midpoint) figures for books read were 10 by library card holders and 5 by non-holders.

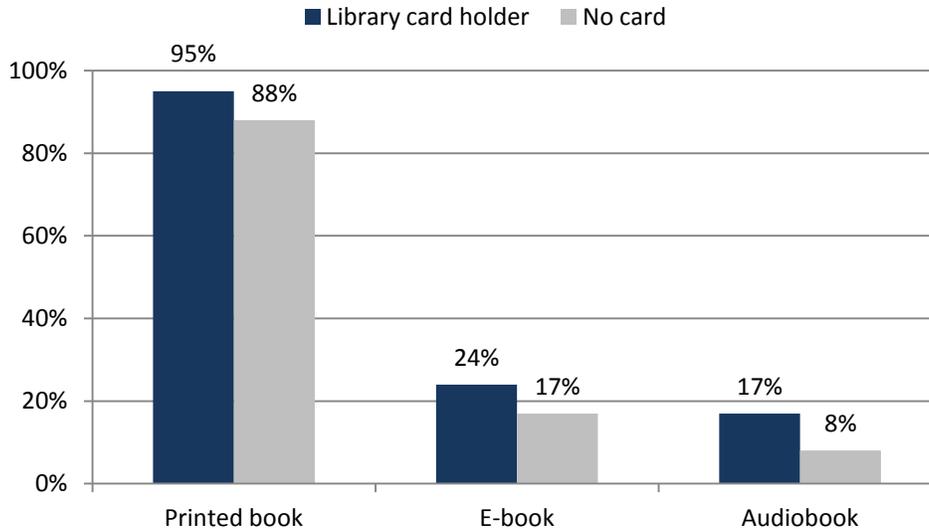
On any given day, those who have library cards are considerably more likely to be reading a book than non-card holders: In our survey, 53% of card holders said they had read a book "yesterday"—or the day before we reached them to take the survey. Some 31% of non-card holders responded yes to that question.

These library card holders are also more likely than non-card holders to have read a book in the past year in every medium, as shown in the following chart.

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## Library card holders are more likely to consume books in every format

Among Americans ages 16+ who have read a book in each format in the previous 12 months, the percentage who read books in the following formats



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. n=2,474 people who read a book in the past 12 months.

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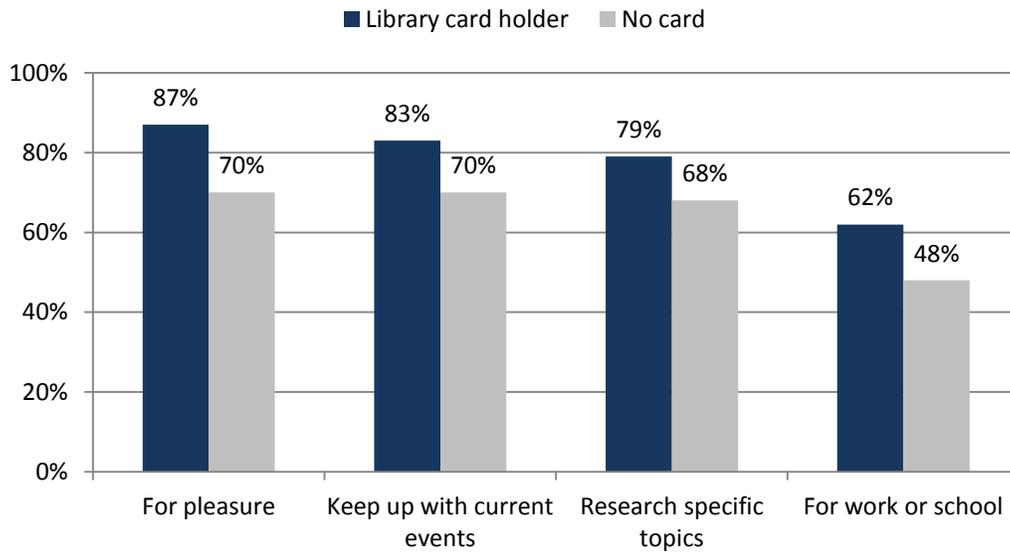
When it comes to people’s different purposes for reading, library card holders are more likely than others to say they read for every reason that we queried in the survey—for pleasure, to keep up with current events, to conduct research on subjects that were personally interesting to them, and for work or school. Card holders are also more likely to read more often for each of those purposes.

When asked what they most like about reading, library card holders are similar to other readers, but they are a somewhat more likely to say they enjoy the escape that reading gives them and chance to use their imaginations.

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## Library card holders read for more reasons

Among Americans ages 16+ in each group, the percentage who say they read for each reason



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

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## Part 4: How people used the library in the past year

We asked respondents if they had used the library in the past year for a variety of purposes, including research, book-borrowing, and periodicals like newspapers and magazines. Some 56% of those ages 16 and older said that they had used a public library at least once in the past year for one of the activities we queried:

- **Borrow printed books:** 35% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. That translates into 48% of all those who read a printed book in the past year. Women who read printed books are more likely than men to borrow them from the library. Even more strikingly, those ages 16-17 are the heaviest print-book borrowing cohort: 64% of the printed-book readers in that cohort borrowed a print book from the library.
- **Access historical documents or archives or genealogical records:** 25% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. African-Americans are more likely than others to have done this: 29% used the library this way, compared with 23% of whites and 19% of Hispanics.
- **Access specialized databases such as legal or public records:** 22% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. African-Americans are notably more likely than others to use the library for this: 33% have done so, compared with 21% of whites and 18% of Hispanics.
- **Get research help from a librarian:** 20% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. Some 29% of African-Americans seek out research assistance from librarians, compared with 18% of whites and 22% of Hispanics.
- **Access or borrow magazines or journals:** 15% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. That translates into 30% of those who regularly read magazines and journals. Fully 37% of the African-Americans who regularly read magazines use the library for this, compared with 27% of whites who regularly read magazines and 29% of Hispanics.
- **Access or borrow newspapers:** 14% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. That translates into 25% of those who regularly read daily news or newspapers. Some 35% of African-Americans who regularly read news accounts use the library to access news material, compared with 23% of news-consuming whites and 21% of news-consuming Hispanics.
- **Borrow audiobooks:** 4% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. That translates into 38% of all those who listened to audiobooks in the past year.
- **Borrow e-books:** 2% of Americans ages 16 and older used their library in the past year to do so. That translates into 12% of all those who read an e-book in the past year.

## Library use in the past year

Among Americans ages 16+ in each group, the percentage who have used the library for the following purposes in the past year

	Total used library in the past year	Total used the library...		
		For research	To borrow books	To borrow newspapers /etc.
<b>All 16+</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Men	52	40	28	22
Women	60	40	42	22
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
White, Non-Hispanic	57	39	37	22
Black, Non-Hispanic	62	50	31	30
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	44	35	24	17
<b>Age</b>				
16-17	72	55	51	20
18-29	57	43	34	24
30-49	58	40	41	21
50-64	56	39	32	24
65+	49	32	28	23
<b>Household income</b>				
Less than \$30,000/yr	53	42	28	22
\$30,000-\$49,999	59	40	37	22
\$50,000-\$74,999	61	39	43	25
\$75,000+	61	39	46	23
<b>Educational attainment</b>				
No high school diploma	45	36	23	15
High school grad	48	34	26	20
Some College	64	46	40	26
College +	67	43	51	26
<b>Geographic location</b>				
Urban	56	40	35	21
Suburban	60	41	39	25
Rural	52	37	30	20
<b>Parental status</b>				
Parent	62	41	45	21
Not a parent	53	38	30	23

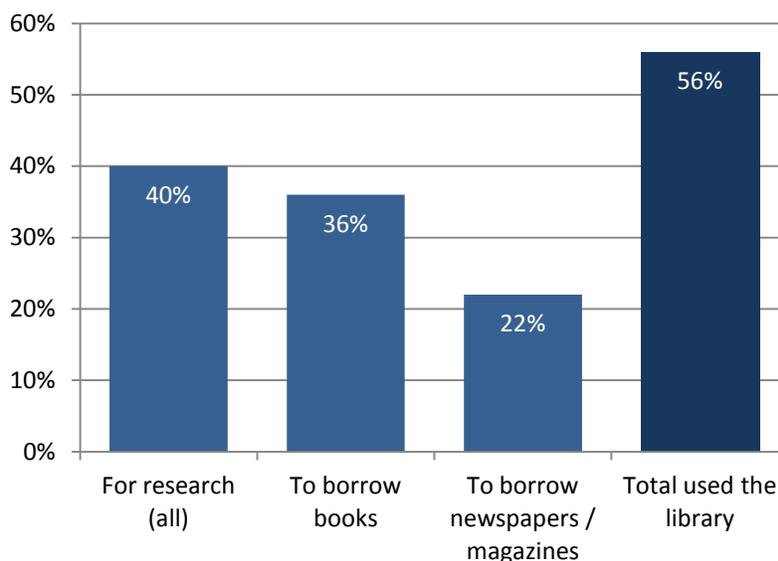
**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Looking at the people who use the library for any purpose in the past year, several trends stood out. Those 65 and older are the least likely to have used a library in the past 12 months, while those ages 16-17, virtually all of whom are still students, are by far the most likely ages group to have visited a library, especially for research purposes. Additionally, 16-17 year-olds (as well as 30-49 year-olds) are more likely than others to have used the library to borrow books in the past year.

Women are more likely than men to have used a library, especially for borrowing books (42% vs. 28%). Hispanics are less likely than whites or African-Americans to have used a library in the previous year, and African-Americans are more likely than others to use a library for research. Those with at least some college experience are more likely than those who had not attended college to use the library for any reason. Those in higher income brackets are generally more likely to have used a library to borrow books, and parents are more likely to borrow books than non-parents. Overall, we find that 40% of those ages 16 and older had used a library in the past year for research, and 36% had used a library to borrow books. Some 22% borrowed periodicals like newspapers and magazines, or journals.

## The basics of library use in the past year

*Among all Americans ages 16+, the percentage who have used the library for the following purposes in the past year*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

These findings are similar to the results to a January 2011 ALA/Harris Interactive poll, in which 65% of respondents said they had visited the library in the past year. The poll also found that women are significantly more likely than men (72% vs. 58%) to have visited a library in the past year, “especially working women, working mothers and women aged 18-54.”<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note that we asked no questions about technology use at libraries because that was outside the scope of this research. Other studies by Pew Internet and others has documented that library patrons are often eager users of computers and internet connections at local libraries.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is

<sup>35</sup> January 2011 Harris Interactive Poll (PDF) <http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librarystats/2011harrispoll.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, “Information Searches that Solve Problems” available at: <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2007/12/30/information-searches-that-solve-problems/> and “Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries” available at: [http://impact.ischool.washington.edu/documents/OPP4ALL\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://impact.ischool.washington.edu/documents/OPP4ALL_FinalReport.pdf) and Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study (2011-2012): <http://www.ala.org/research/initiatives/plftas>

likely that a number of additional Americans use their libraries for access to technology and the overall number of “library users” is greater than 56%. Indeed, we heard repeatedly from librarians who responded to our online canvassing that technology use and technology support is a major aspect of their work with patrons. There is more commentary from librarians on this topic in Part 8 of this report.

## Book-borrowing patterns

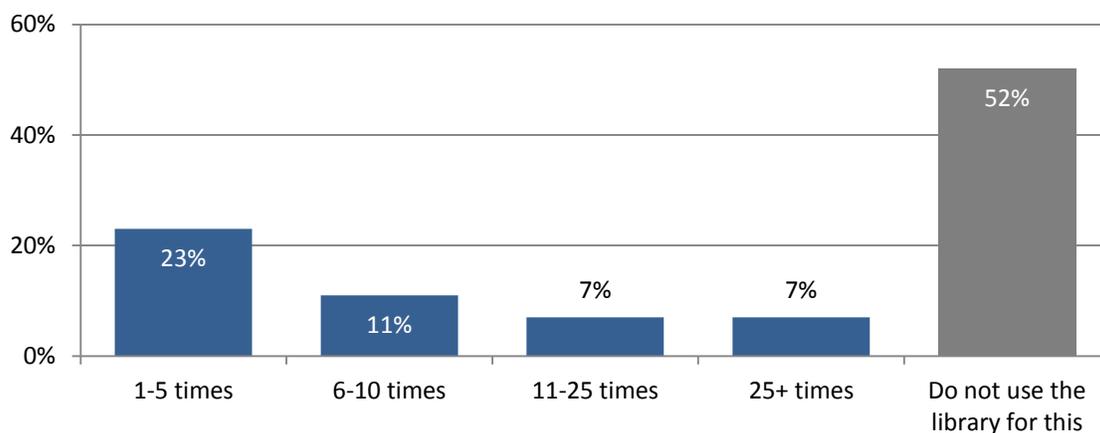
### Print books

Of all the readers we surveyed in December 2011, print readers were the most likely to have borrowed that format of book from the library: Among those who had read a print book in the past year, almost half (48%) borrowed a print book from the library in the same timeframe. This works out to 34% of all those ages 16 and older.

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### How many times in the past 12 months have you borrowed print books from the library?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read a print book in the past 12 months, the percentage who borrowed print books from the library in that time period*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for the number people who read a print book in the past 12 months=2,295.

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Overall, women who read print books were significantly more likely to have borrowed a printed book from a library than men who read print books (54% vs. 41%). Those ages 16-17 who had read a printed book in the past year were the most likely to have borrowed a print book from their public library in that time, with 65% having done so. Adults ages 30-49 are the next likely group to check out print books (53% had done so). However, those older readers are somewhat more likely to be frequent borrowers, while 16-17 year olds are more likely to have borrowed print books five times or less. Parents are also more likely to check out print books than non-parents. The print book readers who have college degrees or live in households earning more than \$75,000 were also more likely than others to have borrowed a

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printed book from a library and they went to the library more times than other book readers to borrow a book.

When it comes to technology, print book readers who use technology are more likely than others to have borrowed a print book from the library. Fully 50% of the internet users who read a print book in the past year borrowed a printed book in the same period, compared with 32% of non-internet users. Also, those who own e-readers were also more likely than non-owners to have borrowed a printed book from the library in the past year.

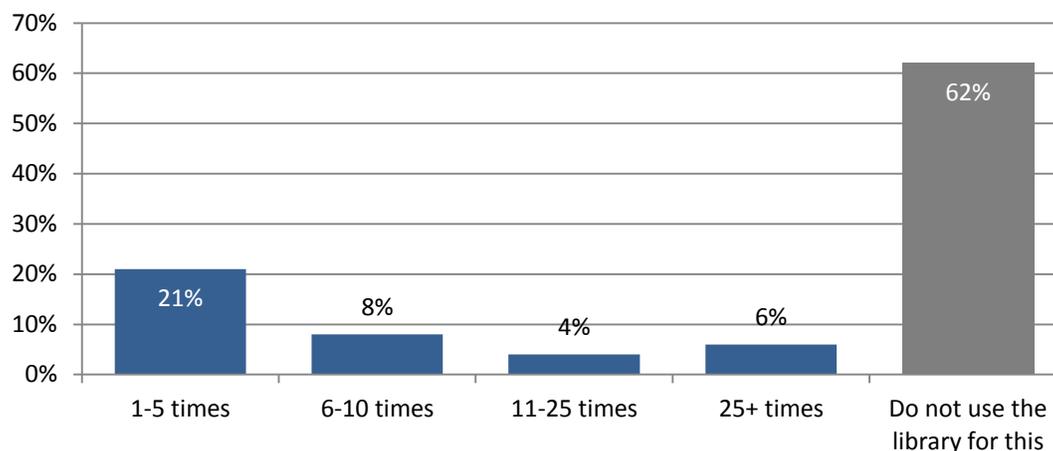
### Audiobook borrowers

Among those who had listened to an audiobook in the year prior to the survey, 38% used a public library to borrow audiobooks. This works out to 4% of all those 16 and older. About half of these audiobook borrowers had done so five or fewer times.

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### How many times in the past 12 months have you borrowed audiobooks from the library?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who listened to an audiobook in the past 12 months, the percentage who borrowed audiobooks from the library in that time period*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for the number people who listened to an audiobook in the past 12 months=415.

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Though the sample size for audiobook borrowers from libraries is too small to do detailed statistical analysis of subgroups, such borrowers are more likely to be female than male and most likely to be white, college educated, and over the ages 30 or older. They are also more likely to be heavier readers.

### E-book borrowers

E-book readers were the least likely to have borrowed that format from the library. As of December 2011, 12% of those who read e-books had borrowed or downloaded one from a public library in the year prior to the survey. This works out to 2% of all those 16 and older. About half of these e-book borrowers had borrowed an e-book five or fewer times in the past 12 months.

The sample size for e-book borrowers from libraries is too small to do detailed statistical analysis of subgroups, although our available data suggests some trends. For instance, borrowers of e-books from libraries at the moment seem to be relatively equally diverse in their demographic profile. Those with college degrees who generally read e-books are a bit more likely than others to have borrowed an e-book from a library.

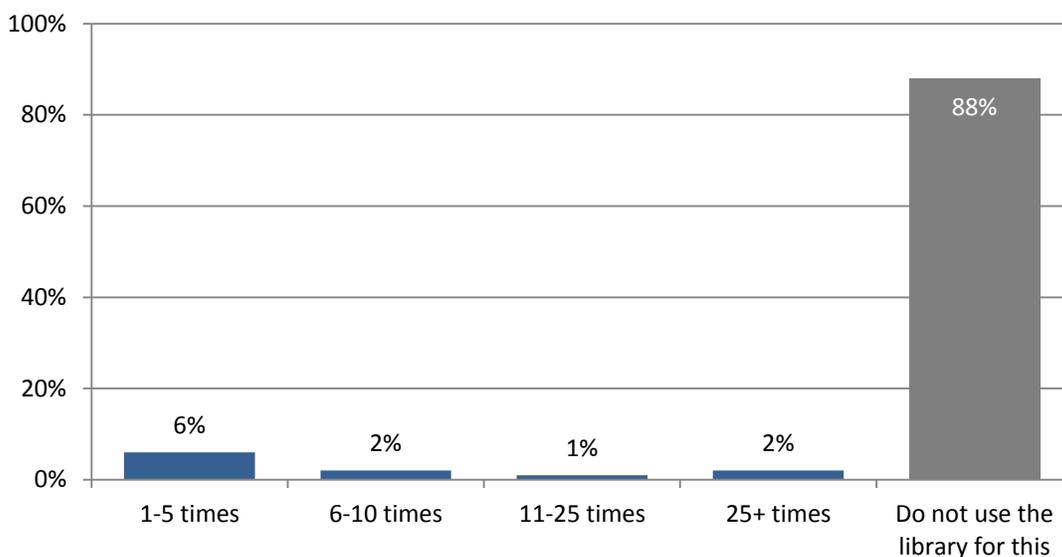
E-book borrowers are also quite attached to their libraries, saying they are very important to them and their families and especially likely to say that they look first for e-books at their library. They also skew toward those who generally read heavily. E-book borrowers say they read an average (the mean number) of 29 books in the past year, compared with 23 books for readers who do not borrow e-books from a library. Perhaps more striking, the median (midpoint) figures for books reportedly read are 20 in the past year by e-book borrowers and 12 by non-borrowers.

(Note: You can read more about e-book readers who do not check out e-books from the public library in Part 7 of this report.)

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## How many times in the past 12 months have you borrowed e-books from the library?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read an e-book in the past 12 months, the percentage who borrowed e-books from the library in that time period*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for the number of those who read an e-book in the past 12 months = 793.

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## Using the library for research

### Research resources and periodicals

We also asked about whether respondents used various library resources, such as specialized databases or periodicals. Notable numbers of library patrons were performing these research activities. At the

same time, very little of the research was accessed or used on e-readers or tablet computers. Some of the main findings include:

- Among those 16 and older who regularly read magazines or journals, three in ten (30%) accessed **magazines or journals** at a public library. One percent did this with a tablet or e-reader.
- One in four respondents (25%) accessed **historical documents or genealogy records**. One percent did this with a tablet or e-reader.
- Among those 16 and older who regularly read daily news or newspapers, about one in four (25%) used a library to access or borrow **newspapers or news articles**. One percent did this with a tablet or e-reader.
- Overall, about one in five those 16 and older (22%) accessed **specialized databases, such as legal or public records** in the year prior to the survey. Less than 1% of those 16 and older did this with a tablet or e-reader.

African-Americans are generally more likely than other ethnic groups to make use of these services at libraries, especially accessing newspapers or news articles and accessing specialized databases such as legal or public records. Those with at least some college experience are also generally more likely to use these services than those with lower levels of education, and those with the lowest household incomes are generally more likely to use these services than those with the highest household incomes. The main exception to this trend was accessing or borrowing magazines or journals, which was more popular with African-Americans than with whites and more popular with 18-29 year-olds than those ages 30-49 and 50-64.

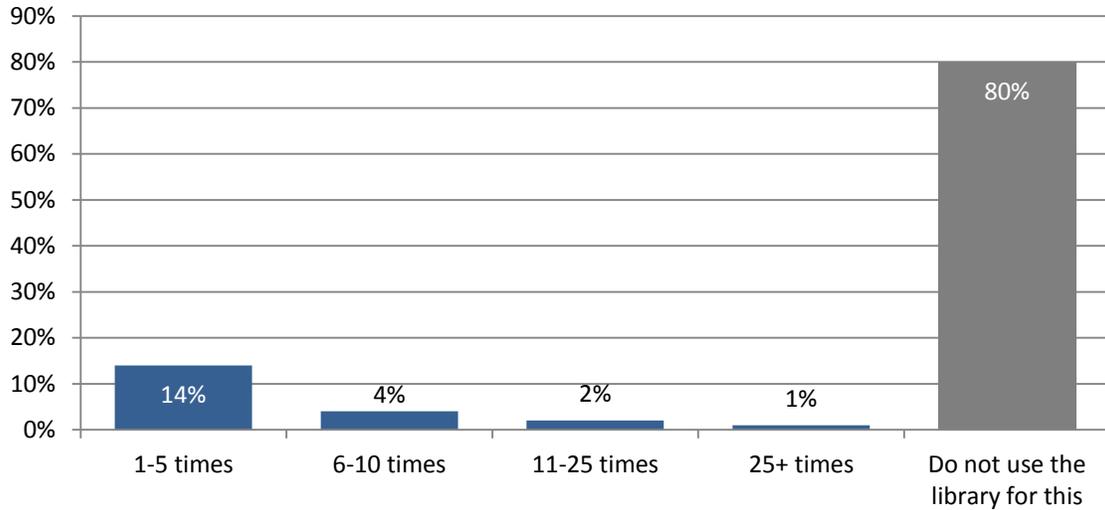
### Get research help from a librarian

One in five people ages 16 and older (20%) has used a public library to get research assistance from a librarian in the past twelve months. Easily the most active group was 16-17 year-olds, 43% of whom have gotten research help from a librarian in the past year—significantly more than any other age group. Although the sample size of teen library users is too small for detailed analysis, in general the 16-17 year olds who went to the library for research assistance in the past year tended to do so five times or less. (Adults ages 65 and older are also less likely than other age groups to get research help at a library.)

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## How many times in the past 12 months have you gotten research help from a librarian?

Among Americans ages 16+, the percentage who have gotten research help from a librarian in the past year



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

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African-Americans are also more likely than whites or Hispanics to go to the library for research assistance from a librarian. Finally, those with at least some college and those in households making less than \$30,000 per year are also relatively more likely than other groups to use libraries’ research services.

It is also worth noting that internet users are more likely than non-users to have gone to the library in the past year and gotten help from a librarian: 22% of internet users have done that, compared with 12% of non-users. And, as a rule, the more intense a person was as a book reader, the more likely it was that she had sought reference help from a librarian. On the other hand, those who asked to take our survey in Spanish were considerably less likely than others to have been to have gotten help from a librarian.

## One in five Americans ages 16 and older has obtained research help from a librarian in the past year

*Among all Americans ages 16+, the percentage who have gotten research help from a librarian in the past 12 months*

% who got research help from a librarian	
<b>All those 16+</b>	<b>20%</b>
Men	20
Women	21
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	18
Black, Non-Hispanic	29
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	20
<b>Age</b>	
16-17	43
18-29	24
30-49	19
50-64	21
65+	11
<b>Household income</b>	
Less than \$30,000/yr	24
\$30,000-\$49,999	17
\$50,000-\$74,999	18
\$75,000+	21
<b>Educational attainment</b>	
No high school diploma	20
High school grad	16
Some College	25
College +	22
<b>Geographic location</b>	
Urban	21
Suburban	21
Rural	18
<b>Parental status</b>	
Parent	22
Not a parent	18

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Many librarians from our online panel report seeing a dramatic decrease in use of traditional reference services. “Short answer reference questions have been replaced by Google,” one library director told us. Another librarian said, “The main thing that's changed in the last decade or two is how patrons access research materials. Instead of print indexes or even online databases, many people just Google everything and if they find something ‘good enough,’ they don't come to or contact the library for help.”

These responses echo the findings of OCLC’s 2010 report, which found that 28% of library users asked for research assistance at the library in 2010, down from 39% in 2005.<sup>37</sup> While half of the respondents in that survey said that the top purpose of the library was to “provide information,” the report found that search engines are the starting point of information queries for 84% of respondents and none started at a library website. However, the report also found that among Americans who have used a librarian in a research query, 83% agree librarians add value to the search process.

While many librarians reported a decrease in traditional reference services, they said that patrons are requesting information in other ways. They might see an uptick in use of IM reference, or steady use of a specialized resource (such as having a medical librarian on staff). “When asked, reference queries tend to require more in-depth research skills (e.g., knowledge of USPTO patent searching, Census databases, etc.),” one librarian said.

A common theme was the increasing “self-reliance” of patrons. “Even in the last couple years, patrons are more willing to use databases to find articles and are better able to understand that ProQuest or other databases with journals are different than the open web,” a librarian respondent wrote. “Combine that with the uptick in genealogy users, and we are using our databases much more.”

These thoughts might tie to the transition librarians are seeing as patrons request more technology help and less help finding books. Perhaps, some suggested, this shift might indicate change in knowledge acquisition strategies – less built on books and more built on technologically-enabled access to digital content.

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<sup>37</sup> While libraries are considered more trustworthy than search engines in general, respondents have a high level of confidence in themselves to use search engines to find trustworthy information.  
<http://www.oclc.org/reports/2010perceptions.htm>

# Part 5: Libraries in transition

## How patrons' book-borrowing habits are changing

The findings reported in this chapter come entirely from the online canvassings of patrons and librarians. The patron respondents in our opt-in sample were frequent visitors of both their library's physical branch and website. They use their library's website regularly to reserve books and download e-books, while physical branches were for print check-outs and the occasional research query. One patron's description of her library habits was representative of many in our online panel: "I go to the library branch much less often and I use the library website several times per week. Before I got my e-book reader, I visited my library at least weekly and almost never used the website, except to reserve books."

Many librarians echoed this. "Our customers are still using the library but in different ways. They browse our catalog online, place reserves on the items they want, then pick them up at their location of choice. Many fewer browse the collection in person," one library department head told us. Another librarian observed, "We have so many people who only call us to update their library card so they can borrow e-books online." A patron respondent had a similar story: "Fifteen years ago, I regularly visited the library twice a week. Now I go about once a month and often that is just to drop off books that are due or pick up books that I have reserved. I would prefer to do ALL of my library business online and have many more materials available in e-book format."

Many patrons who were already using their library's website to reserve books and then picking the books up; e-books allow them to do the same thing entirely online:

- "Before I got my NOOK I would borrow 3-4 books a week from the library. I would always reserve it on the website and have it ready for me when I got there. Now I don't go near as often. Maybe once every couple of months for myself, but I take my kids there often."
- "In the past, I had to stop in the library to pick up print books I had reserved. Now that I can also download e-books, I go to the building less often, but my total check outs are increased."
- Patrons with limited access to their library's physical branch, including adults living with disability and those who live in very rural areas, mentioned how e-books helped them read more. "A few months ago I was housebound due to a nasty illness," one told us, and "thanks to the digital download system I was able to check out books and was able to keep on reading. That was an immense help since I live by myself and there was no one who could go get books for me."

Librarians likewise said that the rising interest in e-books was one of the most striking changes to patrons' habits. One library director described the sharp increase in demand for e-books in the last few years: "I graduated from library school in 2008 and there was little or no demand for e-books, mainly because the Kindle wasn't compatible with the e-book lending services until very recently and the NOOK didn't come out until 2010. Once the NOOK came out and the Kindle had become popular the demand for e-books increased significantly." Another respondent told us, "People are asking for digital content. Anything digital. They are hungry for it."

Some patrons said that all that has changed is that they use the website for e-books more, but still visit the library's physical location as much as they did before. Others said that their physical visits have

increased: “I go to the library more because in searching for e-books, I’ll often find a book I want to read that is not available electronically, so I reserve it in print, and go to the library to pick it up. While I’m there, my children browse, and we take home more books.”

Yet even as some adults shifted to e-books, they wrote that they still returned to the library for print books for children and young adults. “The biggest change is that I download e-books more frequently,” one parent wrote. “However, with five kids, we are at the library a lot. It is our home away from home. We love our local library and truly can’t imagine life without it.”

Many librarians said that patrons were now interested in a wider variety types of digital and multi-media holdings—encompassing not only e-books and audiobooks, but also video games and DVDs. Yet many library staff members said that digital media are not necessarily replacing traditional materials. “Patrons increasingly request e-book content, but this seems to be in addition to their already-established library habits, and has not replaced any existing hardcopy media,” one library staff member told us. Similarly, patrons often wrote that e-book borrowing often complemented their established reading habits. “I don’t feel that my e-book reader has changed any of my patterns involving the local library. I still visit it frequently, and I still check out books in print. However, I feel that I do read more often with my e-book reader because there are just that many more things available to read (and I can acquire them almost instantly),” one e-book borrower said.

As one librarian pointed out, the prevalence of online systems for checking out e-books, reserving print books, and paying fines means while that patrons may have less “routine” interaction with library staff, they require more “specialized help” in the form of tech support. Many others echoed this. “It seems that most people who actually contact a librarian are looking for help navigating the site and downloading e-books,” one librarian told us. Another wrote, “We spend a significant part of our day explaining how to get library books onto e-book readers.”

The issue is even more pronounced with patrons who have not had much experience with technology in the past. One librarian detailed how the increased popularity of e-book reading devices has resulted in library staff spending more time on the basic tech support: “Many of our older patrons received electronic devices as gifts over the past two years. This group of library users asks for lots of help with their devices, from plugging them in to turning them on to trying to make them interface with the e-book portion of the library website.” (For more about this topic, please see Part 8: Future Thoughts.)

It should be noted that even among our panel of librarians whose libraries lend out e-books, not all face a huge demand for their electronic titles. “My library serves an economically challenged area so we have not had the demand for e-books that other libraries are experiencing,” one director wrote. “Large numbers of our patrons have not been able to invest in e-book readers or tablets.” However, she added that the library had also seen “an increase in people using their mobile phones to access library services.”

## Librarians: Changes in library holdings

As noted in the first section of this report, the scope and popularity of most libraries’ digital holdings have increased and increasing levels of usage are driving the change. Our online panels reflected this trend, with most of the library staff who responded to our online questionnaire reporting that e-book circulation at their library had more than doubled in the past year (compared with the previous year).

In our online questionnaire, library staff described how they are attempting to fund e-book collections in response to rising patron demand. One common strategy mentioned by these librarians was to shift some funds allocated from printed collections to digital collections. Others mentioned cutting increasingly obsolete resources, like collections of cassettes or VHS tapes, as well as databases that are rarely used:

- “We have increased our budget for digital content by 500% in the past three years. We have cut the budget for CD audiobooks and print materials to free up funds for downloadable content.”
- “We have no budget for digital content. We will need to cut somewhere in the future to free up funds for e-book purchases.”
- “We initially started with grant money to fund e-books and downloadable audio. Last year the amount was increased using funding from the co-op. This year each library has had to add additional funds (ours was from the materials budget) to try and keep up with the demand, but with the increase in prices we have not been able to keep the same hold to book ratio as we do with print materials.”
- “There has been a decrease in the collection budget for reference materials and serials to meet the need for digital content.”

Among the library staff who responded to our questionnaire, about half said that their library pays for patron access to e-books out of a collection budget. The next most common response was that the library participates in a consortium that pays and provides access to all consortium members, as public libraries in Wisconsin have recently done. In this collective agreement, Wisconsin libraries will “pool their resources and create a \$1 million fund to lease new e-content in 2012.”

According to *Library Journal's* 2012 Book Buying Survey, print books account for on average 61% of libraries' spending on materials, compared with 20% for media and 4% for e-books. The survey found that libraries' book budgets declined 2% over the past year, even as most libraries increased their spending on e-books.<sup>38</sup> And, according to the ALA's 2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 57% of libraries report flat or decreased operating budgets in FY2012.<sup>39</sup>

## The changing roles of librarians

Over half of the librarians among our online respondents said that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has had a good impact on their role as a librarian:

- “I think it's had a good impact. I think patrons are excited when we help them navigate the world of e-books and they actually get an e-book onto their reader for the first time. Not only are they able to read the book at no cost, but it gives them a sense of technological accomplishment. Using e-books motivates them to power through all of the roadblocks—they might have given up otherwise, but the incentive here is great enough that they keep going.”
- “Since e-versions of books and information do not require physical space, handling, can't be lost or easily destroyed; can be controlled in terms of check-out, [they] eliminate a whole range of

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<sup>38</sup> <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2012/02/library-services/book-buying-survey-2012-book-circ-takes-a-hit/>

<sup>39</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

customer service problems that present themselves in a physical environment—no late fees for an e-book because the check out period can be completely controlled. For those reasons, it is extremely efficient and effective way to provide service. It preserves information in a new way and allows access in a manner most convenient to the end user—all good. Only access to the technology poses a problem.”

Others were more ambivalent:

- “Patrons are rediscovering the librarian as a helper and knowledge-bank. This is good. But we, as librarians, are more tech gurus than librarians to patrons with e-book readers and other mobile devices. This is not as good. But the library as an institution is changing, so changes in our role is to be expected. Younger librarians and an ever-growing group of tech-savvy patrons will create new relationships.”
- “I think it has challenged me a bit to keep up with all of the politics/trends/information that is out there. I also feel that it has made my job to select titles with my community in mind less important.”

Most library staff respondents said that they feel the availability of e-books brings new patrons into the system, although they generally did not feel that the advent of e-books necessarily brought younger readers into contact with the library more often. One librarian said that while she was happy that e-books brought in “21st century readers,” she felt that libraries did not have enough control over the terms of this new format. “There is not much out there in workshops dedicated to e-books because of the wariness in approaching this new form that doesn't seem to be too library friendly,” she wrote. “But more and more people are buying books in digital format because of ease and use. This trickles down to the library and its traditional role of lending, which makes for more patron usage.”

One of the biggest frustrations that many librarians mentioned was their new role as tech support for their community. “Customers expect the librarians to be proficient on all mobile devices,” one branch manager wrote, adding that “[m]ore and more the librarian’s role has evolved to that of a teacher.”

Another librarian, however, did not see the emphasis on technology as new to the role. “Showing patrons how to use digital content and e-book readers is not much different than showing people how to use the micro-film machine or our public computers except it might take a little more time,” she said. (For more about this topic, please see Part 8: Future Thoughts.)

## The move to e-books

### Staff training

With so many patrons relying on library staff to troubleshoot their e-reading devices, the issue of training staff members themselves on those devices is an important one, according to some of the respondents. However, the training experiences of the respondents to our librarian questionnaire were mixed.

The library staff members that had the most positive training experiences often mentioned having extensive hands-on instruction with the devices, especially when the library or individual staff members were given devices on which to practice at home. Enthusiastic staff members who shared what they learned with each other, as well as flexible training programs, were also frequently cited as part of a

productive training environment. Many also mentioned their personal experiences reading on these devices as useful in helping answer patrons' questions:

- “We had a series of online assignment for staff. We also have ‘technology training kits’ that hold a variety of current e-book readers, and staff can ‘play’ with them so they become familiar with them.”
- “The staff, bless them, are up to the challenge of managing this moving target. We mostly learn new devices as we encounter them—there is no way we can see them all in advance. We looked at how to download from OverDrive in a staff training session and that was helpful for the process on the web site but mostly useless for getting to individual devices. Most of our staff are personal users of e-books and e-audio so they are happy to learn how to do it.”
- “We provided staff training in preparation for staff providing patron training. Well-received. We also provided \$75 reimbursements for staff to purchase their own e-book reader or tablet, and that was very well received and provided much hands-on learning.”
- “Many of us learned by trial and error along with our patrons. Those of us that had our own e-reading devices were glad to show our co-workers how they worked, and those that we savvier with the downloading process tended to receive many of the patrons asking questions. We would often look over each others' shoulders when someone would demonstrate downloading on a device we were unfamiliar with. Because we lacked a concrete plan for training, the process was difficult and we were very late in offering instruction to our patrons, thus compounding the problems we faced.”

Meanwhile, the hallmarks of poor training experiences were clearly spelled out by respondents. They included disorganized training programs, out-of-date materials, and “theoretical” training that did not include staff members using the devices in question. A common theme was the difficulty of keeping up with the pace of technological change. “Keeping up with procedures, formats, and devices, especially when the landscape changes daily is difficult,” one library staff member told us. “Tutorials and handouts do not stay up to date.”

Another library staff respondent described the process as “very difficult and ongoing”:

“There is no past tense for a system that is constantly evolving. Some staff take ownership to learn themselves, and others want to but do not grasp the fundamentals. In our library there is one person I can confidently say can answer all e-book questions, and maybe one third of our staff can manage everyday e-book questions. This is the state after multiple staff trainings and a lending program where staff were asked to take e-book readers home and practice.”

Others had similarly frustrating experiences:

- “It is difficult. We have an older than average workforce, many of whom do not understand concepts like DRM, formats, software issues, hardware issues. We bought two sets of e-book readers and iPads to engage in staff training, one set is in constant rotation to the branches so they can do their own staff training and patron demos. Some of the branch staff are so scared of breaking them or doing something wrong that they just lock up the case until it's time to send it on.”

- “Training was difficult because staff could not gain hands-on experience. Most of us knew theoretically how to use each device, but it did not become clear until we were able to work with patrons' devices.”
- “Getting staff to attend the classes was like pulling teeth. We purchased various readers for staff to checkout and train themselves. For the most part, they weren't interested in helping patrons with them. They just wanted to refer all questions to our Digital Resources Manager. It finally took Administrative staff to assign certain staff to a committee and made them learn it. Then they went out and trained others in the branches. With the advent of OverDrive making Kindle downloads available last September staff seem to be more willing to be involved in the process.”

Many respondents said that their training experiences fell somewhere in the middle. One staff member told us that the training process in her library system was “very gradual”:

“A few early adopters learned to use OverDrive when we first subscribed and became the go-to people at their branches. Other staff learned from shadowing them and asking questions. We had a device or two at our library branch to learn the technology at our own pace. Some staff members were daunted by the technology—some are still shy to help patrons with download questions but many others bought e-book readers this year and became confident users and instructors.”

## Patron training

Among the librarians who answered our online questionnaire, the vast majority of respondents said their library offered at least some form of instruction on e-readers and e-books for patrons. In-person classes and printed tutorials or FAQs were the most frequently cited forms of instruction on e-readers and the digital check-out process. Some also offered online tutorials, although these were not as popular. “We have classes monthly and an overwhelmingly successful eight-hour drop-in day soon after Christmas, which brought 120 e-book reader users to the library,” one department head wrote.

For libraries that offered patrons training on how to use their e-reading devices, the shifting technology landscape could be overwhelming for the instructors. One librarian said that while her library initially offered classes to patrons, “there were too many different devices and everyone wanted individual instruction on not just OverDrive, but their [specific] device.”

Most of our online patron panel said they taught themselves how to use their e-reader and download books from their library. A majority said that their library did offer classes on how to use e-readers and check out e-books, but for those whose library did not offer such classes, most said they would not be interested in attending such classes even if their library did offer them. A few others turned to YouTube tutorials, in-store help from Barnes & Noble store staff, Amazon tutorials, and various online instructions.

# Part 6: A closer look at e-book borrowing

## Overview of responses in our online panel

Our online panel, unsurprisingly, was a relatively tech savvy group. The vast majority of library patron respondents owned a desktop or laptop computer, as well as a cell phone. Over half owned an e-reader, and about half owned a tablet computer—far higher than the 19% of the general population who own such devices.

A large number of the respondents discussed how technology is used in many parts of their lives. “I live on the internet. My devices keep me connected to friends and family. I also do a lot of traveling so the ability to take service with me (instead of relying on wireless connections) has been really key.”

Many of the more tech-savvy patrons said that they like gadgets, but usually wait for price to go down (and bugs to be worked out) before purchasing. “I like for things to be on the market a while before I buy. I do a lot of research and listen to other people’s experiences before I jump in. Once I’m in, I love it,” one e-book borrower told us. Another described herself as a “gadget lover on a budget. I usually get last year’s model.”

Many also mentioned that since they use computers all day for work, they enjoy using e-readers and tablets in the evenings as a change of pace. “I work in technology, and tend to not want it in my personal life,” one said.

Among the online respondents who did not see themselves as very technically inclined, many mentioned that while they are not usually an early adopter, they now love their e-reader. As one put it, “I am very techno-challenged!! But I love my Kindle, don’t know how I would live without it ... I am a bit intimidated with technology but definitely see the need for it. I just need to take my time to learn new things.”

Another patron wrote, “I’m not a Luddite, but I tend to cringe when new technologies are introduced. Thank goodness for our rural library staff who assist me in downloading e-books. I feel like I am a bit behind the curve of technology, but am aware of what is ‘out there.’ I use my smartphone for everything from surfing the web to social networking to emailing, playing games, and research. The free apps I’ve been able to download help me identify prescriptions I have been prescribed, identify possible illnesses by listing symptoms,” as well as “figuring out how much of a tip to leave at a restaurant, reading QR codes, calculating, taking notes and keeping lists, mapping a trip, shopping online auctions and much more. Gee, maybe I am ‘with it!’”

Many mentioned having a spouse, child, or friend who is more tech-savvy than them and serves as an inspiration or teacher:

- “My husband is a techno-geek; I follow his lead.”
- “I’m naturally a slow adopter of new technologies, but I’ve been pulled along by my faster technology adapting friends. I only got my first laptop a few years ago, but now suddenly I have a laptop, iPhone, and NOOK. And I love them.”
- “I spend most of my work day on a computer and hate having to learn new things/programs. I depend on my college age child to help me with keeping up and cleaning up my devices. I LOVE

my e-book reader (constant companion and my preferred way to read books) and I use my iPod almost exclusively for listening to audio books.”

## Checking out e-books

### How they find out about the process

The patrons who responded to our online questionnaire generally learned about e-book lending at their library either at their library’s physical branch or through direct online communication from the library. One patron learned about e-book lending from signage inside the library, but added, “Our library director uses the Facebook page to communicate, which works really well for me.” (About seven in ten libraries use social networking tools such as Facebook, according to the ALA.<sup>40</sup>) Additionally, many patrons heard about e-book lending from their library’s newsletters (both print and email).

Some patrons saw announcements on their library’s websites—especially patrons who were already using the library’s website regularly to reserve books. Still others simply noticed the option for e-books in online catalogues by chance. “I heard libraries starting to lend e-books in the general media, so I went to my library website to see if they offered that service. The library doesn’t communicate with me very well, except for overdue/pickup notices,” one e-book borrower in our online panel told us, adding that she wished the library would make use of social media. “I want to feel more connected to what is happening there, but don’t find out about anything until I visit the branch and see posters on the walls.”

Others learned of the program through word-of-mouth or local newspaper ads. “A friend told me,” one patron told us. “In a small town word of mouth is always the most effective way to communicate.”

Finally, many had been unaware of whether or not their library offered e-books, but started seeking out information on e-book borrowing once they had purchased an e-reader (or were thinking of getting one).

Many librarians told us that they wanted to increase their advertising efforts. “I’d like to partner more with local business to get the word out and do some more in-house advertising,” one said.

Another librarian pointed out that while the local library system publicized its e-book collection on the library’s website and social media accounts, these methods were best at reaching patrons who were already “plugged in” to the library’s services:

“We publicize on the library website, the library’s Facebook and Twitter accounts, and in house. The trouble is that libraries don’t tend to have money available for marketing. We’d love to spread the word in places where we might catch the attention of people who don’t regularly use the library; we just can’t afford to.”

Another respondent described the struggle to reach new audiences:

“I think by now most patrons realize that we offer e-books. However, my greater concern is all the people in town who aren’t patrons and don’t come to the library. We have a low rate of card holdership in our working-class, immigrant-heavy small city, especially compared to the

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<sup>40</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

surrounding libraries in our mostly-wealthy county. I think if more people here knew we offered e-books we could drive up our card-holder and usage stats. We need more marketing and outreach outside the building, but we're seriously short-staffed at the moment and certainly don't have any [money] to spend on advertising.”

For some e-book borrowers, however, system labels and nomenclature was not necessarily intuitive. One patron wrote, “I was with a friend at the branch who told me. I then picked up a card with the URL. The name of the program is OverDrive which makes no sense. I would have had no idea of what it was if the person I was with had not given me the hint.” A librarian also mentioned that awareness was not everything. “I think most patrons know about the services, but some are not quite sure how to go about actually downloading titles,” he said.

Finally, though many library staff members said that they could do more to raise patrons’ awareness of e-book lending, some said that there was no need to bring in more e-book borrowers until their e-book holdings could handle them. “I am concerned that demand so far outstrips the availability in our community that I will create too many dissatisfied users with more publicity and no more funds or availability of titles,” one director told us. Another respondent added, “At this point we are almost able to keep up with demand for titles with no special promotion. There is no plan for a special promotion until collection is larger.”

## The checkout process

Among the librarians who took our online questionnaire, the most common platform for e-book lending mentioned was OverDrive, although many said they used services such as TumbleBooks, NetLibrary, and Project Gutenberg.<sup>41</sup>

Some patrons gave an overview of the sometimes complicated process and their reactions:

- “The e-book has to be ‘checked out’ from the library website, downloaded to my computer, opened with Adobe Digital editions, and transferred to my NOOK.”
- “Borrowing e-books in Kindle format is incredibly easy. Most are downloaded through wireless connection, while a few publishers have restricted downloading on their e-books and that must be done through downloading to a PC and then transferring to Kindle. But even then is easy and quick.”
- “I download the books on my home computer. I ‘borrow’ them from the library’s website, which then sends me to my Amazon account, where I can download the book. Because my Kindle is an older version with only 3G and not wi-fi (the Kindle 2), I need to download the book to my computer and transfer it via cable, which is perfectly fine with me.”
- “In one word: UGH. I download at home, and have to transfer them to a device. With audio, I browse and checkout on the computer and then download directly on my iPhone.”
- “Painful! It's hard to find out what books are available as e-print, it's hard to know if they are available for check out, and the actual check out process involves multiple steps. Borrowing an e-book from the library is very convoluted as opposed to one-click purchasing from Amazon or Apple.”

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<sup>41</sup> Note: This was not an exhaustive list, and respondents could choose multiple answers. And though our opt-in online questionnaire focused on public libraries, staff from many types of libraries participated.

Most respondents said their e-books could be checked out for two or three weeks on average, and many could choose how long they wanted that period to be (one, two, or three weeks). In general, our e-book borrowers said that 21 days was usually enough time to read a book, but many wished for the ability to renew. Many also mentioned that they can't or don't know how to return e-books before the check-out period is up, which could contribute to longer wait lists for other patrons.

"Most books [can be checked out for] two weeks, which is plenty of time," one patron told us. "I don't work and can devote many hours a day to reading if I want to. Most books, of average length, I can finish in a few hours of reading time. Some of the very popular books are one week, which is enough for me."

Some respondent were ambivalent about the two-week check-out period at their library. "Depending on the book, that can be somewhat short," one e-book borrower wrote, "Especially if one has to share the iPad with a spouse who's always Angry Birding or something when you'd like to use it to read something." Another added, "[Two weeks is] not long enough because there are so few e-book copies available that I almost always have to place a hold first and then inevitably, 2-4 come available at the same time and between work, school and family, I can't get through them all in that time."

As one patron said, "you are constantly watching the calendar, because if the checkout period expires while you are reading it, it could be months before you are able to check it out again."

## Borrowing e-books: The good, the bad, and OverDrive

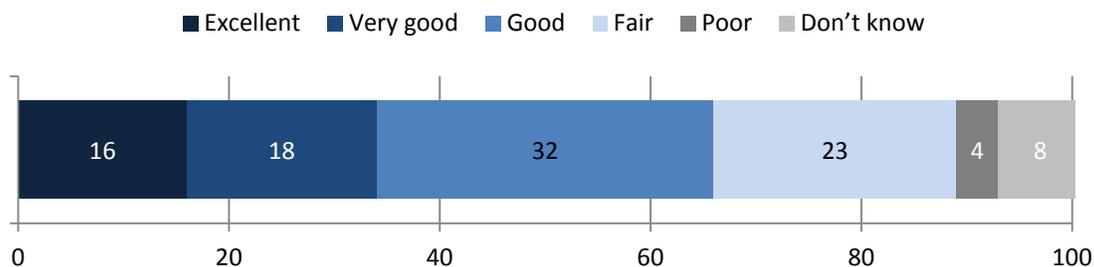
### Selection of e-books in libraries

In our nationally-representative phone survey, the 12% of e-book readers who borrow e-books from libraries are generally positive about the selection they are offered. Among those who borrowed e-books from a public library in 2011, almost two-thirds say the selection at their library is "good" (32%), "very good" (18%), or "excellent" (16%). Some 23% say the selection is only "fair," and 4% say it is "poor."

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### How is the selection of e-books at your local public library?

*The percentage among Americans ages 16+ who borrowed an e-book from their local public library in the past 12 months*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who borrowed an e-book from the library in the past 12 months=111.

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Though the samples of subpopulations were usually too small to do detailed analysis, the people who were most tied to their libraries and felt most strongly about the library were more satisfied with the selection of e-books that was available to them.

All this evaluation by patrons comes amidst growing demand for e-book lending by libraries. According to the “2011 E-book Penetration & Use in U.S. Libraries Survey” by *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*, 66% of public libraries “reported a steep increase in e-book requests” in the previous year; they generally expect e-book circulation to double in the coming year.<sup>42</sup>

### Issues patrons have encountered

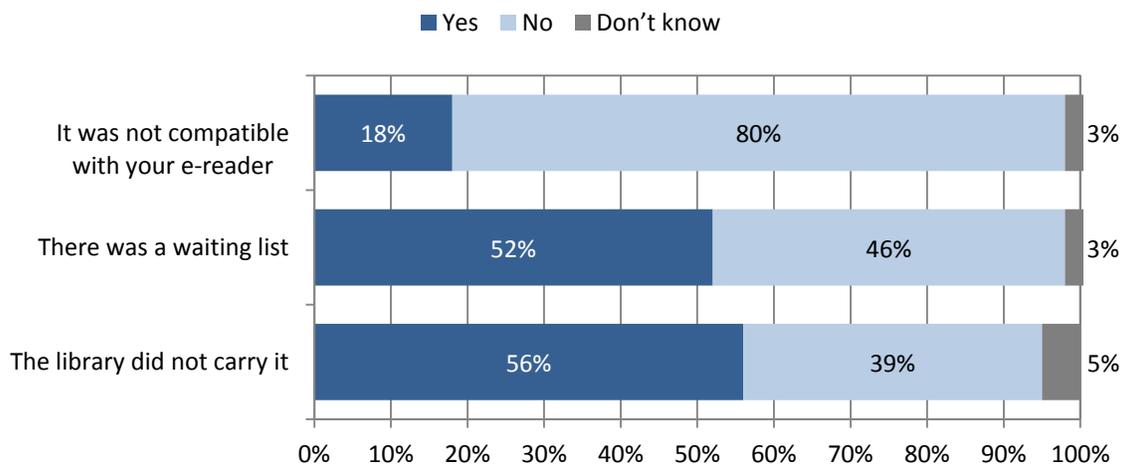
We asked those who borrowed e-books whether they had experienced several of the difficulties that could be associated with such borrowing and found that:

- 56% of e-book borrowers said that at one point or another they had tried to borrow a particular book and found that the library did not carry it.
- 52% of e-book borrowers said that at one point or another they discovered there was a waiting list to borrow the book.
- 18% of e-book borrowers said that at one point or another they found that the e-book they were interested in was not compatible with the e-reading device they were using.

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### Have you ever wanted to borrow a particular e-book from the public library and found that...

Among Americans ages 16+ who borrowed an e-book from their local public library in the past 12 months



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones N for people who borrowed an e-book from the library in the past 12 months=111.

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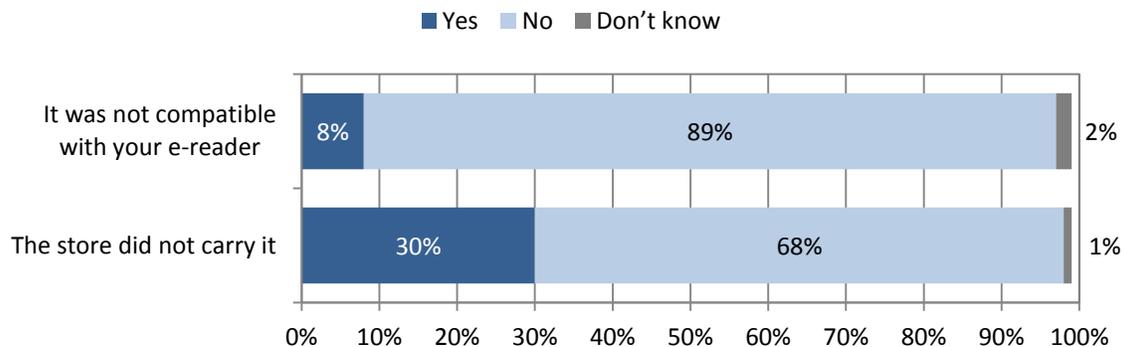
<sup>42</sup> <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2011/10/ebooks/dramatic-growth-ljs-second-annual-ebook-survey/>

For the sake of comparison, we asked in our December 2011 survey if those who had read an e-book in the past year had experienced several e-book problems at bookstores or online retailers and found that 30% of e-book readers found the store or website did not carry the e-book they wanted and 8% found that the store/website version was not compatible with their digital-reading device.

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### Have you ever wanted to download or purchase a particular e-book from an online store and found that...

Among Americans ages 16+ who read an e-book in the past 12 months



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=793 people who read an e-book in the past 12 months.

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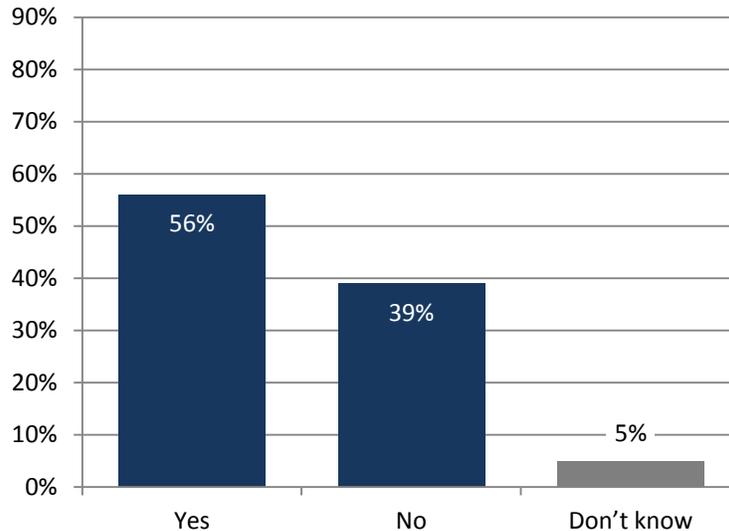
#### Availability

The most common complaint among those who checked out e-books from their public library was lack of availability, with 56% of e-book borrowers saying that a book they wanted to borrow was not carried by their public library.

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## Have you ever wanted to borrow a particular e-book from the public library and found that the library did not carry it?

Among Americans ages 16+ who borrowed an e-book from their local public library in the past 12 months



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who borrowed an e-book from the library in the past 12 months=111.

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Our online patron focus groups frequently spoke of wanting more e-books available at their libraries, especially for bestsellers—"More copies of books, more books available, longer checkout times," one suggested. However, despite patrons' frustrations, they were often aware of the constraints (budgetary and otherwise) their libraries faced. One respondent wrote, "The collection could be improved, but I trust the collection will grow as the technology becomes more ingrained into society."

The average public library has 4,350 e-books available for check-out.<sup>43</sup> As OverDrive spokesman David Burleigh told the *Washington Post*, it is possible that the relative scarcity of digital titles may be unavoidable due to the rate of technological change. "Libraries have had decades to build their physical catalogues," he said, while the demand for e-books is a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> For instance, at the Chicago Public Library, Computer World reported in January that "there are currently 6,443 e-book titles for borrowing, comprising about 3% of the total collection."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "2011 E-book Penetration & Use in U.S. Libraries Survey" from *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2011/10/ebooks/dramatic-growth-ljs-second-annual-ebook-survey/>

<sup>44</sup> Christian Davenport, "As demand for e-books soars, libraries struggle to stock their virtual shelves." *Washington Post*, A20, January 14, 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/as-demand-for-e-books-soars-libraries-struggle-to-stock-their-virtual-shelves/2012/01/13/gIQAkIOXzP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/as-demand-for-e-books-soars-libraries-struggle-to-stock-their-virtual-shelves/2012/01/13/gIQAkIOXzP_story.html)

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9223535/E\\_book\\_library\\_borrowing\\_hits\\_record\\_pace](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9223535/E_book_library_borrowing_hits_record_pace)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, availability was a less of a problem for e-book purchasers. Among all e-book readers, 30% had found that an online store did not carry a particular e-book they wanted to purchase.

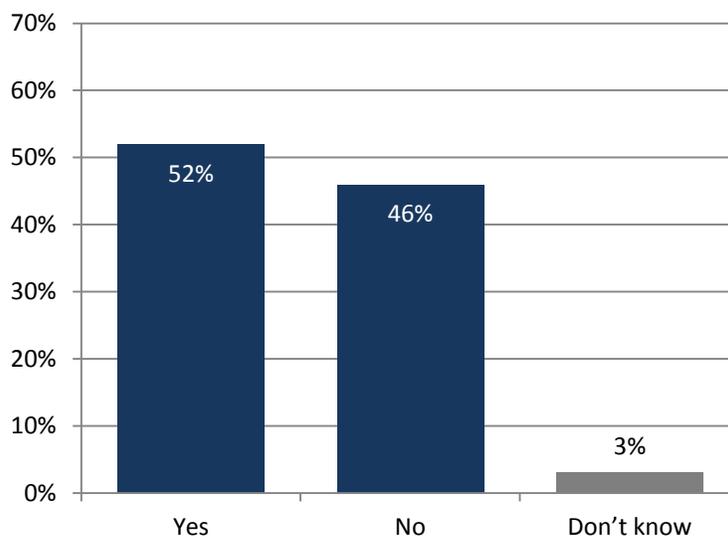
### Waiting lists

Even when a library has a digital title in its holdings, the e-book may still be unavailable for quite some time due to long wait lists. In our survey, 52% of e-book borrowers in 2011 had found that there was a waiting list for an e-book they wished to borrow from the public library. Of course, it is often the case that popular titles in printed books are also subject to wait lists.

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### Have you ever wanted to borrow a particular e-book from the public library and found that there was a waiting list?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who borrowed an e-book from their local public library in the past 12 months*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who borrowed an e-book from the library in the past 12 months=111.

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Among the library staff who responded to our online questionnaire, a majority said that on average the waiting lists for the most popular books were a few weeks, although many also said that waiting lists were often several months for the most popular titles.

The DC metro area offers one example of how the high demand for e-books is creating extremely long waiting lists. In Fairfax County, for instance, "officials more than doubled the inventory of e-book copies from 2010 to 2011, to more than 10,000, but demand for the books tripled in that time," according to the *Washington Post*, resulting in an average wait time of about three weeks. The article cited Elizabeth Rhodes, collection services coordinator for the Fairfax library system, who said that while up to 85% of the system's e-books are checked out on a typical day, this percentage grew to 98% after the holiday

gift-giving season—a time period when tablet and e-reader ownership nearly doubled among American adults.<sup>46</sup>

The patrons in our online panel had encountered many wait lists for popular titles. “I don't think I've ever found a single book I wanted to check out without a waiting list, and my tastes are pretty broad,” one told us. The waits were not necessarily very long for some titles—“a week or two generally”—but they make it that much harder to find something available *now*. Some patrons said they often put holds on a number of books with long wait lists, only to find that many of the books become available simultaneously: “Wait times are long for popular titles, no way to stagger requests (if waiting on 5 titles and all become available at once, it's use it or lose it), and the selection isn't real great.”

Many patrons found the specific restrictions on digital content counterintuitive. One mused that it “seems absurd that there is only ONE copy of an e-book in demand and that only one person can use it at a time. That makes sense for a print copy, but not for an e-book.”

### **Compatibility**

With the wide variety of e-book reading devices and e-book formats available, compatibility between devices is a major concern for libraries with digital collections.

One way this issue is managed is by partnering with an e-book distributor such as OverDrive, which manages an array of digital content for 18,000 libraries and schools in 21 countries, including 15,000 in the United States.<sup>47</sup> OverDrive generally charges public libraries a set fee for use of their checkout system, as well as a fee per title for patrons to borrow.<sup>48</sup> The OverDrive catalog for libraries now includes 700,000 copyrighted e-book, audiobook, music, and video titles in 52 languages. Some 35 million digital titles were checked out via OverDrive in 2011.<sup>49</sup>

Prior to 2011, e-book borrowers were able to check out several formats of e-books from their local libraries—including ePub, the free, “universal” e-book standard set by the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) since 2007, used by Kobo, Barnes & Noble, Sony, and Google Books.<sup>50</sup> However, e-book borrowers could not check out books on Amazon's Kindle, the predominant e-reader at the time.<sup>51</sup> In 2011, however, Amazon partnered with OverDrive, and in September 2011 library patrons who own Kindles were able to borrow Kindle books from public and school libraries in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

At the end of 2011, compatibility with the patron's e-reader was not the most prominent problem among those who borrowed e-books from a public library in the past 12 months; about one in five e-

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<sup>46</sup> <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/E-book-readers-and-tablets.aspx>

<sup>47</sup> <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2012/01/industry-news/adding-kindle-compatibility-expanded-overdrives-u-s-library-network-by-36-percent/>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705394575/SL-library-pays-more-for-e-books-than-for-print.html>

<sup>49</sup> OverDrive Press Release, “e-book Discovery and Sampling Skyrocketing at Public Libraries,” January 19, 2012. Accessed January 19, 2012. <http://www.overdrive.com/News/e-book-Discovery-and-Sampling-Skyrocketing-at-Public-Libraries>

<sup>50</sup> <http://idpf.org/epub>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/technology/21amazon.html>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110420005787/en/Amazon-Launch-Library-Lending-Kindle-books-Kindles-still-cannot-read-ePub,although-there-are-several-programs-available-to-convert-ePub-files-to-a-Kindle-readable-format>

book borrowers (18%) said they had wanted to borrow a particular e-book from their public library and found that it was not compatible with their e-book reading device.

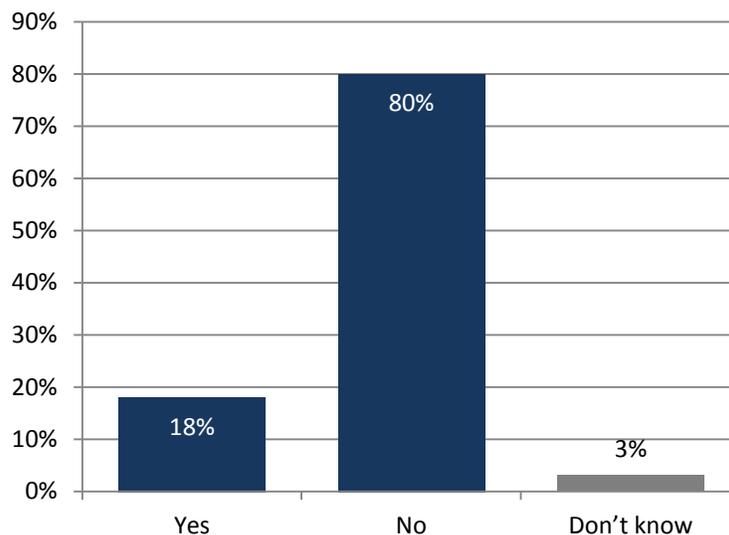
For many in our online respondent pool of e-book borrowers, tracking down the right file format was an occasional but persistent headache. “The muddling of different formats can be a pain,” one wrote, “Especially if a book you want is available, but not in your preferred format. I always have to set my searches to leave out audiobooks, since I rarely am interested in those.” Others found it difficult to locate the correct copy. “On numerous occasions I was not paying attention and checked out the wrong format for my reader,” another respondent said.

The library staff we interviewed said they often found themselves helping patrons find the right format, particularly patrons with limited technical experience. One librarian said he encountered issues with “[t]he concept of DRM, differences in formats (ePub, PDF, AZW) and trying to explain the one-copy at a time, one patron lending model,” adding that for most of the library’s patrons, “digital means copy freely.”

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### Have you ever wanted to borrow a particular e-book from the public library and found that it was not compatible with your e-book reader?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who borrowed an e-book from their local public library in the past 12 months*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N for people who borrowed an e-book from the library in the past 12 months=111.

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Similarly, e-book compatibility was not a major frustration for e-book purchasers: Among all e-book readers, only 8% had found that compatibility was an issue when they wanted to download or purchase an e-book from an online store.

## Other issues

Many patron respondents said that the e-book check-out process is relatively easy. They appreciated features like wishlists and lists of recommended e-books, the instant access, and the lack of overdue fines, as well as not having to physically return to the library when a book was due. Said one: “The site can be used with minimal learning, which is good for someone like me who is not tech savvy. It is a very quick process, which is good when I want to get a book to read right away.” Similarly, librarians often cited the ease of lending, the lack of overdue fines, and the ability of patrons to check out e-books from home as major pluses. “There is also 24 hour access to the e-books, so patron do not have to wait for the library to be open to check out a book,” one director pointed out.

However, the difficulty of browsing e-titles was a major issue for many in our online panel.<sup>53</sup> A common thread in the responses was a frustration with library websites’ search and browsing capabilities. One librarian told us that “patrons often have a hard time finding titles and then downloading them to their particular device. It is a cumbersome, nonsensical, multi-part process in which we lose too many people along the way.” Many of the patrons in our panel had hit upon a workaround in commercial interfaces, which often include reviews, recommendations, and other ways of discovering new titles: “I will sometimes go to Amazon to find titles I might like, then search them in OverDrive, since Amazon’s interface is so much more reader friendly (tells you what else you might like, etc.)”

The process for checking out an e-book, which usually involved multiple services and log-in screens, was also unpopular. (As one patron put it, “It requires a lot of clicks and a lot of waiting.”) A librarian noted that, “with ePUB format the patrons need a PC in addition to their e-book reader; they also have to create an Adobe Digital editions account and download the software; with Kindle they are transferred to their Amazon account”—and for a library with multiple e-book vendors, patrons may have to go to even more sites to find their e-book. As a result, many respondents (both patrons and librarians) longed for e-book titles to be integrated into the main library catalog in order to streamline the process.

One thread that ran throughout the responses to our library staff questionnaire was the ever-growing incidence of being asked to help patrons learn how to use their own devices. Issues ranged from patrons’ inexperience with technology (such as setting up and remembering their email address) to the shifting gadget landscape, which made it even harder for librarians to stay up to speed themselves. “It takes a long time to explain and walk patrons through the downloading process—about half an hour from start to finish most times—and we often feel rushed at the public assistance desk because there are often other demands on our time,” one staff member told us. Another wrote, “Many people who purchase or receive e-book readers as gifts have never turned them on before coming to the library to check out e-books. ... Getting these patrons up to speed can be overwhelming.” (For more on this topic, please see Part 8: Final thoughts.)

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<sup>53</sup> Similar issues have also been discussed in *Library Journal*’s recent report, “Library Websites and Virtual Services.” <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/06/digital-libraries/how-do-power-patrons-use-your-website-and-virtual-services-patron-profiles/>

## The main questions librarians hear

We asked the librarians in our online focus group about the most common questions they received from patrons about e-books. Some involved patron confusion over the availability of e-books and unhappiness with the borrowing terms of e-books. One respondent's summary of patrons' queries: "Why aren't all titles available? Why are there a limited amount of copies? Why don't you have an entire series by the same author? Why do you have a digital audiobook but not an e-book?"

Another librarian explained the wide range of questions she regularly receives:

"Sometimes [patrons] do not understand the different formats available (Kindle, Adobe ePub, Adobe PDF, WMA or MP3) and they don't understand which is appropriate for their device. They wish that they could download directly to the device (especially NOOK users) instead of having to go through the computer. iPad users wish they could download WMA audiobooks. They will often ask us whether NOOK or Kindle is 'better.' They want to know how to return/delete items. They wonder why we have a limited number of copies of digital books- they don't understand licensing and DRM. It can be difficult for users to download Adobe software and create an Adobe ID."

Added another, "[Patrons] can't figure out where they've downloaded something, how to get it onto their reading device, have forgotten their passwords, downloaded the wrong format, can't figure out how to delete something or return it early."

## How to improve the process for the future

Many patrons mentioned wanting more titles and more copies available to decrease wait lists for popular books, as well as longer lending periods for the e-books they did check out. Some wanted more input into the selection process for new titles, while others wanted to help out directly. "It would be great if people could donate specific e-books to the library," wrote one. "I have a couple favorites that I would love to see added to the collection."

Some patrons also disliked having to go through external sites such as OverDrive and Amazon. Most cited problems with the inefficiency of the process. Others raised privacy-related reasons. They also mentioned wanting more ways to discover content, especially improved search and browsing of e-book catalogs, including mobile browsing. (Some 15% of library websites are optimized for mobile devices, according to the ALA's 2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, while 7% of libraries have developed smartphone apps for access to library services.<sup>54</sup>) Many patrons also said that they would like to have more staff members available to answer questions about e-books, similar to Apple's "Genius Bar." Overall, however, the patrons in our focus groups were not frustrated at the libraries themselves for issues related to licensing or lack of funds. "They're doing all they can," said one.

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<sup>54</sup> "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012," the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

We also asked patrons what their vision of e-book lending at their library would be. “Fast, easy, plentiful,” was one common response. Patrons’ answers usually mentioned increased availability, unlimited access, access to all formats, and a more streamlined discovery and check-out process:

- “That the libraries would be able to loan e-book readers to patrons, that the children's section would have greater technology resources that introduces them to e-reading at an early age.”
- “That every book ever published would be available, both as audio books and as lavishly and colorfully illustrated e-book versions.”
- “To have all books that are available in hard copy be available as e-books.”
- “All books would be available at all times. The process would be easy. I'd like to see the library focus on media and less on ‘books’ only. I like that they have videos and music too.”
- “Expand access to specialized and expensive research books that are super expensive on Amazon and not available in most libraries, and make easy access to great collections of books and manuscripts at places like the British Museum, Yale, etc.”
- “The ability to check out tablet readers (all models) to test, and having training sessions for all models.”

The library staff members in our focus groups had similar dreams for e-book lending. They wrote of a world of “no holds,” integrated catalogs, unlimited tech support, even an “e-book reader petting zoo” for patrons to experiment with devices.

One librarian said that her ideal vision of e-book lending would be “books and e-book readers/e-books living in harmony.” She added, “Books are essential, because the power can go out. They are our special collections and cultural heritage. Digital access to books is incredibly important. Libraries must adapt to technological development and welcome e-lending as microlocal demand changes.”

However, many library staff respondents identified larger concerns related to the rise of e-content, and noted that some of these issues went beyond budgetary concerns:

- “Money is not the major obstacle for us; the major obstacle is the lack of publishers and titles in OverDrive. We are purchasing NOOK devices and loading them with bestsellers to add to our OverDrive titles.”
- “The obstacle right now is our confusing and unclear copyright and intellectual property laws, which can't be fixed with money alone.”
- “Overall, periodical databases and e-book licensings mean that the library no longer owns the copies. Once we cease a subscription the material is gone. Until publishers and the library community are able to work out fair deals that also benefit patrons, e-book lending will be a problem.”

## Librarians and publishers

Echoing the comments from our online patron panel, librarians' frustrations with the e-book lending process frequently revolved around cost and availability of titles. These issues are often related to the terms for lending set by publishers—terms that most of the librarians in our online focus groups found painfully restrictive. Most librarians said that they do not have direct contact with publishers themselves, but were very frustrated by the current terms under which they could purchase and lend e-books—especially regarding the confusion that the patrons felt:

- “We are beginning to see more and more issues with publishers pop up. We boycott HarperCollins due to their use limitations (books must be repurchased after 26 checkouts). We can only purchase one copy per title from Penguin (resulting in extremely long hold lists and disgruntled patrons). Random House has upped their prices to around \$100 per copy, so we are only purchasing the top ten bestsellers from this publisher. I fear what will happen in the next year.”
- “Our library does not deal directly with publishers, since we use OverDrive to lend e-books. However, there's a lot of animosity between major publishers and OverDrive, which really prevents us from providing the best service we can. ... I'm really upset that many of the biggest publishers don't want to do business with libraries or OverDrive, because patrons see our failure to acquire a specific title as a failure of the library and the services we provide when we are given absolutely no legal way to procure many of the titles they ask for, since the publishers refuse to let libraries access them. Their stubbornness is damaging to both the library's reputation and the publisher's, frankly, because many of the people that want to borrow an e-book are unlikely to purchase it anyway and may in fact believe that the title is not available as an e-book because the library does not have it.”
- “It is impossible to provide many of the e-book titles patrons request, and it can be difficult to explain all the hoop-jumping to patrons.”
- “We have chosen not to purchase from some of the publishers because we disagree with the stipulations or the pricing of the items. It's frustrating because our clients don't understand why we can't get some of the titles that they want. There has to be a way to make the technology easier to use for the average person and be fair to publishers and authors as well. Libraries are used to sharing with each other, which is especially important for smaller libraries in rural areas that can't afford to buy multiple copies or a collection of e-books. I think the inability to do that with e-books inhibits what we do and those in rural areas are penalized again for where they live. We have areas that do not have access or affordable access to high speed Internet.”
- “We abide by the DRM standards, we expose their authors to thousands of readers and we pay for the books and e-books, so why can't they make more of an effort to work with libraries instead of restricting library users on their options to read digitally?”
- “Our consortium is so large and demand is so high for e-books that most of them are checked out, and patrons are very frustrated that they have to place holds on the items they want. Also, because many of the Big Six publishers are refusing to sell licenses to libraries, many patrons feel that our selection of e-books is small and see it as a fault of the library—unless we tell them that most publishers will not lend to us, they feel that the library is not doing its job and allocating its resources properly when the truth is that it's beyond our control.”

- “Publishers and vendors alike have made the process for getting an e-book much more difficult than it should be, especially given the interest in e-book collections among older users. These folks are often less comfortable with the technology, and frequently have trouble even getting started with the process. Another frustration for us is the licensing model for e-books. Rather than owning titles, as in the print world, or e-book collections are ephemeral, and if we leave OverDrive, our substantial investment in titles disappears. The loss of first-sale rights is another area of great concern for us. We would like to be able to own our e-book content and deal with it in a way that is similar to how we work with print materials. Users are bombarded with ads about how easy e-books are and how they should have a NOOK, Kindle, or iPad, but in reality using these tools is only easy when you are buying titles, not trying to borrow them from the library.”
- “Over the years, libraries have been valuable customers to publishers. We purchase not only their bestsellers, but their midlist and backlist titles. We introduce readers to their authors. Now some of the publishers have publicly stated that they need to add "difficulty" to the process of borrowing e-books from libraries, either with restrictions on the loan period, or limits on circulations.”
- “Without ownership we risk losing a significant part of our history. Publishers are not in business to preserve content for historical purposes, and as a commercial entity, I'd argue a potential conflict of interest. Yet, no one else is allowed to own the material—where will it go?”

One respondent, echoing the thoughts of many from our panel, said that her dream would be for her library “to have the ability to purchase, own and offer any book we chose in an electronic format with cross-device compatibility, setting our own lending parameters and integrating seamlessly an e-book collection with the rest of the library collection.”

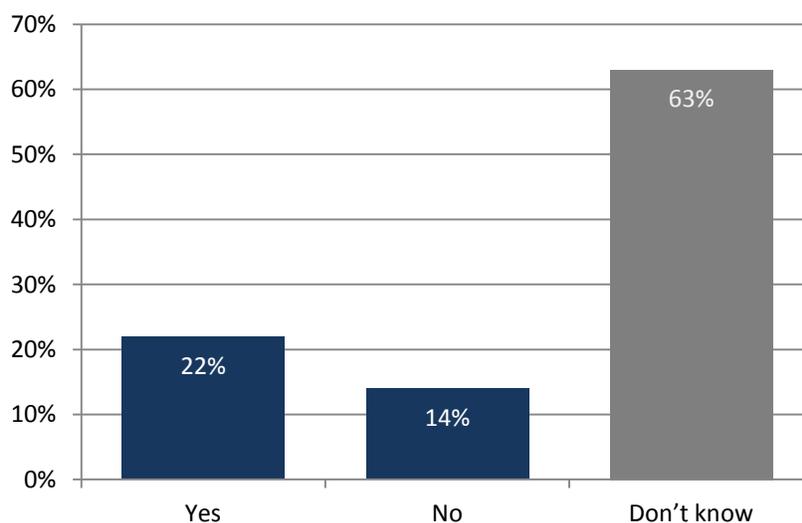
## Part 7: Non-e-book borrowers

Fully 76% of libraries lend e-books to patrons, according to the ALA.<sup>55</sup> Yet, most citizens, even those who are library patrons, are unsure of whether their local library offers this service. Asked if their public library lent e-books to patrons, 63% of those ages 16 and older who do not already read or borrow e-books from libraries are unable to say if the library does or does not lend them. Some 22% say that their library does lend out e-books, and 14% say that it does not.

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### As far as you know, does your public library loan out e-books?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who do not read e-books, as well as e-book readers who do not get e-books at the public library*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=2,874 for people who did not read an e-book in the past 12 months and people who read an e-book in the past 12 months but don't check out e-books from the library.

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Even among library fans and patrons, many are relatively in the dark about whether their local library offers e-book lending in the first place:

- 58% of all library card holders say they do not know if their library provides e-book lending services.
- 55% of all those who say the library is “very important” to them say they do not know if their library lends e-books.
- 53% of all tablet computer owners say they do not know if their library lends e-books.

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<sup>55</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

- 48% of all owners of e-readers such as original Kindles and NOOKs say they do not know if their library lends e-books.
- 47% of all those who read an e-book in the past year say they do not know if their library lends e-books.

Among the 22% of non-borrowers who said their libraries *did* offer e-book borrowing, those who were most likely to say their library lent out e-books included: those ages 50 and older, those with at least some college experience or a college degree, those living in households earning \$50,000 or more. The non-e-book borrowers who were most likely to say their local library did not facilitate e-book borrowing included: African-Americans, Hispanics, and those under age 30 (especially those ages 16-17).

Many librarians say that despite their increasing use of technology, libraries are still seen as collections of print books and the occasional microfiche machine. “People still think of libraries as old dusty books on shelves, and it’s a perception we’re always trying to fight,” the director of information technology at the Boston Public Library told the *New York Times* in 2009.<sup>56</sup> This impression has still been slow to change. In fact, the OCLC’s recent report, “Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community,” found that if anything, the association of libraries with books has become stronger in recent years. “As new consumer devices and online services have captured the information consumer’s time and mindshare, his perception of libraries as books has solidified,” the report said, with 75% of survey respondents saying that “books” is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the library—up from 69% in 2005.<sup>57</sup>

For more about how libraries communicate with patrons about services, please see the section titled “Checking out e-books” in Part 6 of this report.

## Why not borrow e-books?

In the December 2011 national phone survey, we asked the 88% of e-book readers who did not borrow e-books from libraries in the past 12 months whether they had tried do so: Only 4% reported that they had attempted this, and 96% had not. Looking specifically at e-book readers, we find that 84% of those who read an e-book in the previous year did not try to borrow one from their local library.

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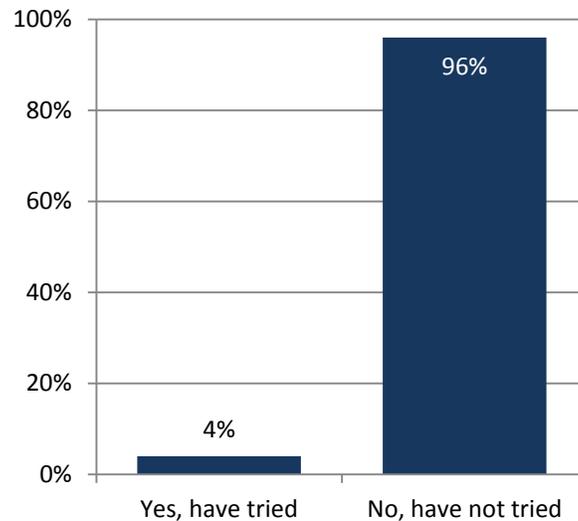
<sup>56</sup> Motoko Rich, “Libraries and Readers Wade Into Digital Lending.” *New York Times*, October 14, 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/15/books/15libraries.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/15/books/15libraries.html?_r=1)

<sup>57</sup> “Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community.” OCLC. Available online at <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2010perceptions.htm>

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## Have you ever tried to borrow or download an e-book from a public library?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read e-books but do not get e-books at the public library*



**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=2,874 for people who did not read an e-book in the past 12 months and people who read an e-book in the past 12 months but don't check out e-books from the library.

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There was no one dominant reason as to why e-book readers who do not borrow books from their public library do not do so. About one in five (22%) cited issues of convenience, often saying it was easier to obtain e-books another way. A similar number (19%) said that they didn't know their library offered e-books in the first place. The full list of reasons is shown in the following table.

## What would you say is the main reason you do not borrow e-books from your public library?

*Among Americans ages 16+ who read e-books but do not get e-books at the public library*

Reason	% of e-book readers who do not get e-books at the public library
Inconvenient/easier to get another way/easier to download	22%
Didn't know I could/didn't know library offered e-books	19
Don't use library/no library nearby	8
No interest/no real need	7
Just found out about it/haven't had a chance to try it yet	6
E-books still new to me/no time to learn	5
Just never thought to	5
Don't read a lot/don't use e-reader much	4
Prefer to own my own copy	4
My library doesn't offer e-books	4
Prefer print books	3
Poor e-book selection at library	2
Do not have format I need	2
Cumbersome process/wait list/short borrowing period	2
Other	6

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=2,874 for people who did not read an e-book in the past 12 months and people who read an e-book in the past 12 months but don't check out e-books from the library.

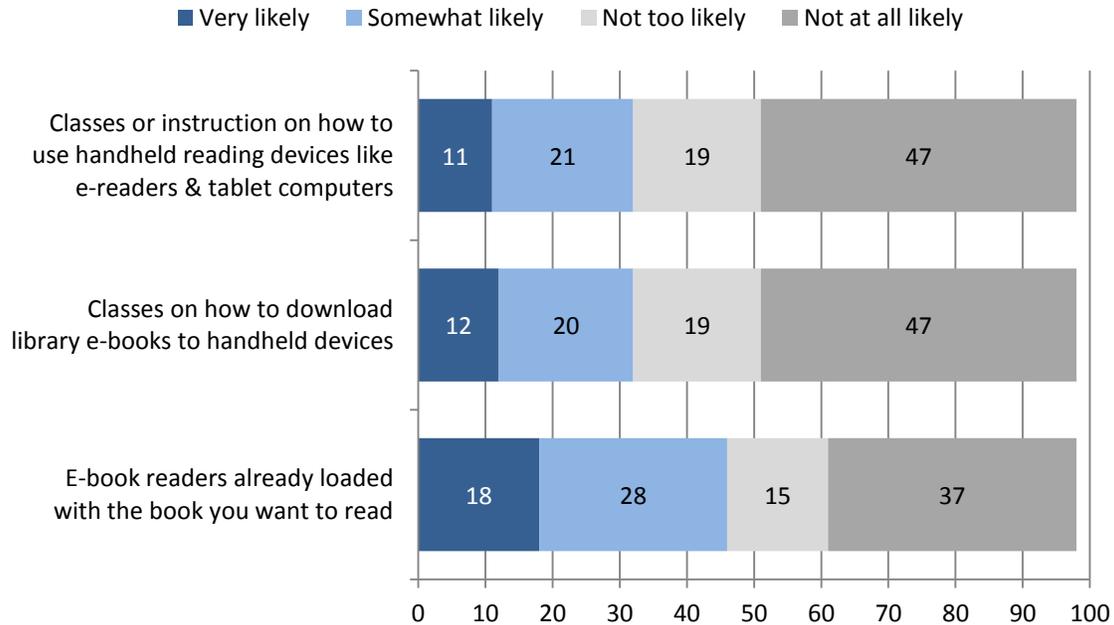
## Help and training from librarians

We also asked those who do not already borrow e-books at the public library how likely they would be to take advantage of certain resources if their library were to offer it. The results:

- 46% of those who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to borrow an e-reading device that came loaded with a book the wanted to read.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a library class on how to download e-books onto handheld devices.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a course at a library in how to use an e-reader or tablet computer.

## How likely non-e-book-borrowers would be to use the following resources if offered by their local public library

Among Americans ages 16+ who do not read e-books, as well as e-book readers who do not get e-books at the public library, the % of those who say they would use the following resources



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=2,874 for people who did not read an e-book in the past 12 months and people who read an e-book in the past 12 months but don’t check out e-books from the library.

While about three in ten people ages 16 and older are interested in taking classes on e-readers or downloading e-books, the most popular idea was pre-loaded e-readers: almost half (46%) said that they would check out e-readers already loaded with the book they wanted to read. Currently, this practice is not particularly widespread at public libraries; some 15% of public libraries circulate preloaded e-reading devices (up from 5% the previous year), and 26% expect to in the future, according to the 2011 survey from *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, according to the ALA’s 2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 39% of libraries offer e-readers to patrons for check-out.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> “2011 E-book Penetration & Use in U.S. Libraries Survey” from *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2011/10/ebooks/dramatic-growth-ljs-second-annual-ebook-survey/>

<sup>59</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012)

## How likely non-e-book-borrowers would be to use the following resources if offered by their local public library

Among Americans ages 16+ who do not read e-books, or those who read e-book but do not borrow e-books from the library, the % of those who say they would use the following resources

	Classes on how to use handheld reading devices (e-readers/tablets)	Classes on how to download library e-books to handheld devices	E-readers already loaded with the book you want to read
<b>All 16+</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>46%</b>
Men	29	30	44
Women	34	34	48
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>			
White, Non-Hispanic	25	25	40
Black, Non-Hispanic	46	50	63
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	49	52	61
<b>Age</b>			
16-17	36	37	60
18-29	30	31	57
30-49	31	35	50
50-64	39	38	46
65+	19	17	25
<b>Household income</b>			
Less than \$30,000/yr	40	41	56
\$30,000-\$49,999	33	32	46
\$50,000-\$74,999	30	29	44
\$75,000+	24	27	44
<b>Educational attainment</b>			
No high school diploma	40	41	52
High school grad	32	31	43
Some College	31	32	50
College +	26	28	44
<b>Geographic location</b>			
Urban	34	34	53
Suburban	31	32	45
Rural	27	30	38
<b>Parental status</b>			
Parent	38	40	57
Not a parent	28	29	41

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Reading Habits Survey of 2,986 people ages 16 and older conducted November 16-December 21, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. N=2,874 for people who did not read an e-book in the past 12 months and people who read an e-book in the past 12 months but don't check out e-books from the library.

All three possibilities are most popular with minorities, those under age 65, those in households making less than \$30,000 per year, those who had not completed high school, and parents of minor children. Among the other significant findings:

- Women who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries are more interested than men in taking classes on how to use handheld reading devices such as e-readers or tablets.
- While adults ages 65 and older are the age group least likely to be interested in any of the ideas, adults ages 50-64 are more interested in taking classes on using e-readers or downloading e-books than any other age group.
- Urban users are more interested than suburban or rural users in pre-loaded e-readers, while rural users are the least interested geographic group. Urban users are also somewhat more likely than users in other areas to be interested in classes on using handheld reading devices.

## Part 8: Final thoughts

### How patron’s reading habits have changed since reading and borrowing e-books.

While some of the respondents to our online queries of patrons said that their reading habits had not changed, many said that they are indeed doing more “impulse” reading since the advent of e-books due to the ease of obtaining and reading books wherever they are. They are also catching up on the classics (due to free, legal public domain copies online), and checking out titles they would not have noticed otherwise. “I am reading a lot of self-published books now since they are often offered for free. I am also downloading a lot of classics, for the same reason,” one online respondent told us. Others were even branching out into new genres due to availability. “I was never a huge mystery fan but now read a lot of those because when I was searching for free or low-priced e-books, a lot of the ones I found were mystery,” another respondent wrote. “Now I am really into the mystery genre!”

Many patron respondents echoed [our recent e-reading report’s findings](#) about attitudes toward e-books and the ease of “on the go” reading.<sup>60</sup> As one frequent traveler put it, “my suitcase is so much lighter!” Other respondents mentioned similar benefits:

- “I am reading more because it is easy and accessible. A book I have on my tablet at home is ... also on my phone so I can read it on my lunch break. I can read at night without bothering my husband with a light. I do not have to do all of that irritating ‘leaving the house’ business to get a new and interesting book to read.”
- “My Kindle fits in my purse, so I can carry my Kindle places I wouldn't carry a book. I find myself taking it almost everywhere I go so if I find myself with a free couple of minutes, I can read a couple of pages.”
- “I have always been a reader, but I'm reading more books now that I have an e-book reader, and I'm getting through them more quickly. ... I find that my family members and I also spend more time discussing the books that we are reading because my brother, my mom, my cousins and my aunts all have Kindles and can share books with each other more easily.”
- “I read a lot more with e-books. I've ventured out into new genres and authors that I would never have found in the print world—my local library doesn't have them and neither does our local book store.”
- “I read multiple books all the time. An audiobook for my car and commute. An e-book for ‘whenever’ and print books for relaxing at home. I'm an impulse reader with my Kindle, not so much with print books.”

### Larger changes in library services

Many of the library staff members who responded to our online questionnaire wrote that they not only provide access to technology, but also must help patrons learn tech fundamentals. Their patrons often

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<sup>60</sup> See Part 5: Where and how readers get their books. Available online at <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/04/04/part-5-where-and-how-readers-get-their-books/>

need help with many basic tasks, from setting up an email account and filling out online forms, to finding and navigating necessary websites. As one library staff member explained, “The greatest change has been the need not only for computer access, but computer assistance. Since people are required to apply for jobs and government services online, and many people in our area lack the skills to do so, we have seen a substantial rise in the need for computers, computer classes, and especially one-on-one assistance.”

According to the ALA’s 2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study:

- 90% of libraries offer formal or informal technology assistance to library users, and 35% offer one-on-one technology training by appointment.
- 36% of libraries report increased use of library technology training over the previous year.
- 62% of libraries report that they are the only source of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities.
- 91% of public libraries provide free Wi-Fi, and 74% of libraries report use of Wi-Fi increased in 2011.<sup>61</sup>

One library department head framed it another way. “Many of the needs are the same, but access has changed. Patrons still need help with resumes, but now they use computer templates. They still need to apply for jobs, but now they do it online and MUST have email accounts. They still need encyclopedias, but they want electronic access to them. They still have to prep for tests, but the test prep is available through a database or website.”

One librarian added that, after the holidays, “Many ‘grandmother’ types called for help with the e-book-reader they got for Christmas. They do not have a home computer so registering the items and downloading from their non-existent home computer is difficult, to say the least.” The process is especially difficult when staff members are not up to speed on all the devices. “Many of the staff do not understand the process—so how can they show the patrons how to do it?” one librarian wondered.

Even communities that have not seen a strong demand for e-books are still facing more patron demand for technological services. One library staff respondent described the habits of her library’s community, which serves a relatively older population with many retirees:

“Unlike our sister library systems in larger, metropolitan cities, we have not yet seen a strong shift to digital technologies, but there are signs that it’s coming. ... Because 60% of our population is 65 or older, we have also seen an increased demand for technology courses to be taught in the libraries: getting started with computers, basic computer maintenance, getting started with web browsing, learning Word formatting, and the occasional ‘hot topic’ such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.”

One library director in our online panel summarized the technology demands a modern library can face:

“You need enough computers to meet demand for users of all ages. You need enough tutor rooms available for small group study. You need to know how to download an e-book and

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<sup>61</sup> “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012,” the American Library Association and the Information Policy & Access Center (University of Maryland), June 19, 2012. [http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011\\_2012](http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012) And a broader examination by the ALA into the future of libraries is available at: <http://www.ala.org/offices/oitp/publications/policybriefs>

audiobook. You need to know what is better - the Kindle, the NOOK or the iPad? You need to have enough e-books to meet demand. You need to know what URL accesses the state's unemployment and food stamp sites. You need to have enough electrical plugs for laptop or cell phone chargers. You need to provide service of some kind seven days/week (i.e. website, mobile app, etc.) You need to have a good media collection.”

Beyond technology, respondents also reported a shift in the library’s role to that of a community gathering space. “The library has become a community center and meeting space as much as a place to do research and borrow books,” one library director told us. Library staff mentioned increased interest in activities such as craft classes and children’s storytime.

## The future of libraries

### Patrons

We asked our patron focus group about the future of libraries in a digital world. Among our respondents, most said that it was “very important” that libraries continue to provide physical copies of books. “I really like books in print,” one told us. “I don't think my e-book reader will ever replace that.” Added another, “I really like e-books, but there will always be the joy of holding a hard copy of a book, curled up on the couch in a blanket, drinking a warm beverage while the snow falls outside and a cat sitting on your feet.”

Others mused on the future of reading, and libraries:

- “I believe that the library of the future is going to look very different. I don't think it is going to be any less important to a community, but I do think it will be very different from what it is now. I don't think it will have as many physical books and I think it will be more of a meeting place, a place where meetings are held or study sessions. I think that librarians will find their jobs changing much like people in the media have had to adjust to new technology. But I hope that libraries will still be there in the future because I can't imagine a world without them.”
- “The biggest drawback of e-books for me is that I miss the feel and smell of the paper. I even miss the little signs of previous readers—margin notes, cookie crumbs, forgotten bookmarks, etc. E-books are always very ‘sterile.’ I also very much dislike the fact that, unlike paper books, the e-book publishers can (and do) limit the number of times, or even completely prevent me from sharing the e-books I purchase. And as far as I am aware, there is no such thing as a ‘used’ e-book market. Once the file has been downloaded to my device, I can read it or delete it, but I am unaware of any method by which I can give or sell it to someone else when removing it from my device.”
- “Our library is a critical link in our community. It provides access to books, computers, knowledge, and is a critical social center.”
- “E-books are amazing. As an adult I find it easier to attain a book digitally. However I still like print books for my children especially since they are not computer savvy yet. I still like the luxury of knowing my children can access a book without me being around. They just have to pull it off the shelf. Print books are not obsolete. I hope my library continues to expand their digital media & still have children's print books.”

- “Libraries are more than collections of books—no matter what format. Libraries are community centers, the gateway to childhood literacy, the poor man's university, centers for lifelong learning, provide support for economic development, develop job skills, offer training, education, and enrichment, bridge the information gap, and are vital to the quality of living and infrastructure of each community a library serves. The importance of libraries and their impact on their users cannot be overstated.”
- “There's a long way to go with the devices. So far, these things all seem to have been designed by people who love computers. A lot of us don't love computers, and use them because they help us accomplish things. That doesn't mean we enjoy thinking about file types and file names and frozen screens and little bitty buttons that aren't labeled and aren't intuitive.”
- “I think our libraries are valuable resources for so many reasons. Maintaining the physical printed book is as important to me as a growing library selection of e-books and audiobooks. People are so used to going online and having instant gratification—I don't think that this is something that can or should be ignored. Having available e-books is also invaluable to keep our youth interested in reading. They are growing up accustomed to this, and if we want to keep them reading throughout their lives, we must provide books in the formats that they will use.”
- “The frustration is incredible—different platforms, different cords, needing power source, twisting cords. I really wish e-books had never been invented. This is technology that has taken a very simple process and made it so incredibly complicated that it takes the joy out of reading. I LOVE the Internet and technology, so for me to say this is serious. It has made my job so complicated, and my pay is staying the same. One of my biggest worries about e-book readers is the conversations about reading that will never occur—if you cannot see what another person is reading, how can you start a conversation? You can always hide a book cover but if you are reading an e-book reader, people are much less likely to approach you and say ‘great book’ or ‘are you enjoying that book?’ Also—a HUGE worry of mine is the amount of energy and resources being devoted to the ‘cloud.’ No one talks about that because no one wants to give up their gadgets. Another worry is the compensation of authors, the loss of a true publishing house and editors. Ownership of the book—do you really own it? The worry that the book may not be the exact version the author wants you to read. I do think that more people will read because it is so easy.”
- “My sister is disabled and losing her eye sight and nearly home bound. I bought her a NOOK Color to help with reading in a larger print. Large print books are too heavy for her to hold up for very long and the print is still too small. She depends on her library and used OverDrive daily for audio books. I'm trying to teach her how to use the new systems for her NOOK. She and many, many more would suffer if they didn't have access to the library and the programs they provide for us for no fees.”

## Librarians

Overall, most librarians from our online panel thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for libraries, and all but a few thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for reading in general. “I love the ecological benefit of not having the waste of needing to buy a lot of copies and then having to discard half of them two years later,” one library department head told us. “I love that we don't have to hassle patrons to bring e-materials back. I love that there are no damages, no worn out items, no sticky stains.”

However, most are unsure what sort of roles libraries will take on in the future:

- “It all feels pretty murky. Some clarity and good advice would be nice. It's OK for libraries with big budgets to plunge into e-book readers. As a small library with limited collection funds, we have to be more careful.”
- “I have observed that Barnes and Noble and Amazon have really pushed the e-media phenomenon, and it was only around the time that Barnes and Noble made e-books their most-advertised product through the layout of their stores, etc., that library patrons started to ask about them often. Therefore, this is a corporate-driven phenomenon, and libraries should be wary of diverting funding, services, and collections to something that is designed primarily as a consumer product for the profit of the distributing companies. It is good for libraries to offer things that patrons are asking for, but at the same time, it would be dangerous for libraries to make e-media a significant focus or majority of their offerings because e-media requires patrons to possess (and therefore purchase outside of the library) a desktop computer, an internet connection, and in most cases an e-book reader. This amounts to thousands of dollars. Where does that leave those who are often the bulk of our users—patrons who are economically downtrodden?”
- “I am interested in seeing where this goes and how this will affect library service in the long term. I see a great many benefits and I do not see us giving up physical books or closing down libraries. Much like when we started providing computers with internet access and recognized that there was a significant need for librarian assistance and user instruction, I think that if e-books pick up at the same rate as the internet, we will have a lot of job security not less!”

# Methodology

## Reading Habits Survey

Prepared by Princeton Survey Research Associates International for the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

December 2011

## Summary

The Reading Habits Survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,986 people ages 16 and older living in the United States. Interviews were conducted via landline ( $n_{LL}=1,526$ ) and cell phone ( $n_C=1,460$ , including 677 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The interviews were administered in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source from November 16 to December 21, 2011. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for results based on the complete set of weighted data is  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points. Results based on the 2,571 internet users have a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 2.3$  percentage points.

Details on the design, execution and analysis of the survey are discussed below.

## Design and Data Collection Procedures

### Sample Design

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications.

Numbers for the landline sample were drawn with equal probabilities from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

### Contact Procedures

Interviews were conducted from November 16 to December 21, 2011. As many as seven attempts were made to contact every sampled telephone number. Sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Interviewing was spread as evenly as possible across the days in field. Each telephone number was called at least one time during the day in an attempt to complete an interview.

For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender when combined with cell interviewing.

For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular respondents were offered a post-paid cash reimbursement for their participation. Calls were made to the landline and cell samples until 1,125 interviews were completed in each. Once those targets were hit, screening for e-book and tablet owners was implemented. During the screening, anyone who did not respond with having an e-book or tablet device was screened-out as ineligible. All others continued the survey until approximately 700 e-reader/tablet owners were interviewed overall.

## Weighting and analysis

The first stage of weighting corrected for the oversampling of tablet and e-reader users via screening from the landline and cell sample frames. The second stage of weighting corrected for different probabilities of selection associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent's telephone usage patterns.<sup>62</sup> This weighting also adjusts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.

This first-stage weight for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  case can be expressed as:

$$WT_i = \frac{1}{\left(\frac{S_{LL}}{S_{CP}} \times \frac{1}{AD_i}\right)} \text{ if respondent has no cell phone}$$

$$WT_i = \frac{1}{\left(\frac{S_{LL}}{S_{CP}} \times \frac{1}{AD_i}\right) + R} \text{ if respondent has both kinds of phones}$$

$$WT_i = \frac{1}{R} \text{ if respondent has no land line phone}$$

Where  $S_{LL}$  = size of the landline sample

$S_{CP}$  = size of the cell phone sample

$AD_i$  = Number of adults in the household

$R$  = Estimated ratio of the land line sample frame to the cell phone sample frame

The equations can be simplified by plugging in the values for  $S_{LL} = 1,526$  and  $S_{CP} = 1,460$ . Additionally, we will estimate of the ratio of the size of landline sample frame to the cell phone sample frame  $R = 1.03$ .

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<sup>62</sup> i.e., whether respondents have only a landline telephone, only a cell phone, or both kinds of telephone.

The final stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The Hispanic origin was split out based on nativity; U.S. born and non-U.S. born. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau’s 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2010 National Health Interview Survey.<sup>6364</sup>

Weighting was accomplished using Sample Balancing, a special iterative sample weighting program that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using a statistical technique called the *Deming Algorithm*. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the national population. Table 1 compares weighted and unweighted sample distributions to population parameters.

**Table 1: Sample Demographics**

Parameter (16+)		Unweighted	Weighted
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	48.6	47.2	48.9
Female	51.4	52.8	51.1
<u>Age</u>			
16-24	16.0	15.0	14.2
25-34	17.3	14.0	15.1
35-44	17.0	14.9	17.3
45-54	18.7	17.6	18.7
55-64	14.8	17.3	18.5
65+	16.2	21.2	16.2
<u>Education</u>			
Less than HS Graduate	16.8	11.5	15.5
HS Graduate	33.8	26.7	33.3
Some College	23.1	23.3	23.9
College Graduate	26.3	38.5	27.3
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
White/not Hispanic	68.0	73.1	67.7
Black/not Hispanic	11.7	10.8	11.9
Hispanic - US born	6.4	6.5	6.8
Hispanic - born outside	7.5	4.3	7.3
Other/not Hispanic	6.2	5.3	6.2

<sup>63</sup> Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, July-December, 2010. National Center for Health Statistics. June 2011.

<sup>64</sup> The phone use parameter used for this 16+ sample is the same as the parameter we use for all 18+ surveys. In other words, no adjustment was made to account for the fact that the target population for this survey is slightly different than a standard 18+ general population survey.

<u>Region</u>			
Northeast	18.5	15.8	18.2
Midwest	22.0	24.1	22.7
South	36.9	37.3	37.0
West	22.6	22.7	22.1
<u>County Pop. Density</u>			
1 - Lowest	20.1	23.6	20.3
2	20.0	21.2	20.1
3	20.1	22.3	20.4
4	20.2	17.6	20.2
5 - Highest	19.6	15.2	18.9
<u>Household Phone Use</u>			
LLO	9.3	5.0	8.3
Dual/few, some cell	41.7	51.7	42.3
Dual/most cell	18.5	20.6	19.0
CPO	30.5	22.7	30.5

## Effects of Sample Design on Statistical Inference

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. PSRAI calculates the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from systematic non-response. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.46.

PSRAI calculates the composite design effect for a sample of size  $n$ , with each case having a weight,  $w_i$  as:

$$deff = \frac{n \sum_{i=1}^n w_i^2}{\left( \sum_{i=1}^n w_i \right)^2} \quad \text{formula 1}$$

In a wide range of situations, the adjusted *standard error* of a statistic should be calculated by multiplying the usual formula by the square root of the design effect (*vdeff*). Thus, the formula for computing the 95% confidence interval around a percentage is:

$$\hat{p} \pm \left( \sqrt{deff} \times 1.96 \sqrt{\frac{\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}} \right) \quad \text{formula 2}$$

where  $\hat{p}$  is the sample estimate and  $n$  is the unweighted number of sample cases in the group being considered.

The survey's *margin of error* is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample—the one around 50%. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points. This means that in 95 out every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 2.2 percentage points away from their true values in the population. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error of greater or lesser magnitude.

## Response Rate

Table 2 reports the disposition of all sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:<sup>65</sup>

- Contact rate—the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made<sup>66</sup>
- Cooperation rate—the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- Completion rate—the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 14 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11 percent.

**Table 2: Sample Disposition**

Landline	Cell	
66,518	60,997	Total Numbers Dialed
2,876	919	Non-residential
3,004	142	Computer/Fax
16	---	Cell phone
32,283	22,623	Other not working
3,844	887	Additional projected not working
24,495	36,426	Working numbers
36.8%	59.7%	Working Rate
1,281	296	No Answer / Busy
7,092	13,997	Voice Mail
118	27	Other Non-Contact

<sup>65</sup> PSRAI's disposition codes and reporting are consistent with the American Association for Public Opinion Research standards.

<sup>66</sup> PSRAI assumes that 75 percent of cases that result in a constant disposition of "No answer" or "Busy" are actually not working numbers.

16,004	22,106	Contacted numbers
65.3%	60.7%	Contact Rate
902	3,485	Callback
11,408	14,644	Refusal
3,694	3,977	Cooperating numbers
23.1%	18.0%	Cooperation Rate
104	129	Language Barrier
1,960	2,362	Child's cell phone / Oversample Screenout
1,630	1,486	Eligible numbers
44.1%	37.4%	Eligibility Rate
104	26	Break-off
1,526	1,460	Completes
93.6%	98.3%	Completion Rate
14.1%	10.7%	Response Rate

## Qualitative material

The qualitative material in this report, including the extended quotes from individuals regarding e-books and library use, comes from two sets of online interviews that were conducted in May 2012. The first group of interviews was of library patrons who have borrowed an e-book from the library. Some 6,573 people answered at least some of the questions on the patron canvassing, and 4,396 completed the questionnaire. The second group of interviews was of librarians themselves. Some 2,256 library staff members answered at least some of the questions on the canvassing of librarians, and 1,180 completed the questionnaire. Both sets of online interviews were opt-in canvassings meant to draw out comments from patrons and librarians, and they are not representative of the general population or even library users. As a result, no statistics or specific data points from either online questionnaire are cited in this report.