



Australian Government

**Creative
Australia**

Creating Value

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey

Literature factsheet

Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey is the first survey of its kind to be released by Creative Australia and the fifth survey in the landmark research series from the Australia Council, following iterations in 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2019.

The research series provides a comprehensive overview of Australians' evolving relationships with arts, culture and creativity. By examining our engagement with creativity – both through the lens of self-expression and engagement with arts and creative activities – this series builds the evidence base on participation in the arts in Australia.

The full report includes detailed insights on engagement with specific art forms, including literature.

Key findings about **engagement with literature**, including reading books, attending literature events and writing creatively, are included in this factsheet.

In 2022:

69%

of Australians read books

19%

of Australians attend book or literary events or festivals

14%

of Australians participate in creative writing

Australians

who attend book or literature events attended an average of 12.3 events per year

Yamaji Badimaya and Wajarri poet Dr Charmaine Papertalk Green signing her co-authored book ART (Magabala Books 2022) at the official launch at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Booraloo 2023.
Credit: Cole Baxter Magabala Books.

Introduction

Australia's literature industry is a vibrant, diverse and significant part of our creative landscape and findings from *Creating Value* show the importance of literature to the daily lives of Australians.

Australians love reading. Reading connects us with ideas and stories; it sparks joy, improves wellbeing and enhances our feeling of connectedness with local and global communities. Australians read a wide range of literature including novels, short stories, graphic novels or comics, poetry, and plays. Reading the many and varied stories and perspectives brought to life through literature helps us shape and express Australian identity.

However, Australians are reading for pleasure at lower rates compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, 69% of the population aged 15 and over, read at least one printed book, e-book or listened to an audiobook for pleasure (down from 72% in 2019). Reading for pleasure is now more widespread among younger Australians, with engagement highest among those aged 15–34 (73% compared to 66% of those aged 50 and over).

In 2022, 2.9 million Australians participated in the literary arts by engaging in creative writing. Writing has significant potential to positively impact wellbeing and assist people to process and make sense of events in their lives.¹

Overall, one in five of the population aged 15 and over attended book or literary events or festivals in 2022 (19% down from 22% in 2019). First Nations Australians and Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are highly engaged in literature and have strong attendance at all types of literary events, demonstrating the continued importance of this art form for diverse groups.

Australians are attending literature events less often than before the pandemic. In 2022, monthly or more frequent attendance at book or literary events dropped, and more Australians are attending these events every couple of months. Events include writers' talks, book launches, book club events, poetry and storytelling readings, and writers' festivals.

Read on for more on Australians engagement with literature...

For the full report and online resources see: <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/creating-value/>

Reading books

Australians love reading the varied stories brought to life through literature, however they are reading less than before the pandemic

Australians love reading, with more than two thirds reading for pleasure. However, there appears to be some shifts in behaviour throughout the COVID-19 period. Australians are reading for pleasure at lower rates than before the pandemic. It is not clear whether the impacts of COVID-19 have driven these changes, but this a trend to monitor. With support from Creative Australia, Australia Reads held VOLUME in September 2023, an industry symposium exploring issues affecting reading levels in Australia.

In 2022, 14.3 million Australians, or 69% of the population aged 15 and over, read at least one printed book, e-book, or listened to an audiobook for pleasure. Since 2019, Australians' engagement with reading materials has slightly decreased by three percentage points overall (from 72% in 2019 to 69% in 2022).

¹ Den Elzen K., & Lengelle R. (Eds.). 2023. *Writing for Wellbeing: Theory, Research, and Practice* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Australians read a range of literature including:

- **novels or short stories** (46% consistent with 47% in 2019)
- **instructional non-fiction** (30% slightly down from 32% in 2019)
- **creative non-fiction** (30% consistent with 31% in 2019)
- **graphic novels or comics** (14% consistent with 15% in 2019)
- **poetry** (8% slightly down from 10% in 2019)
- **plays** (6% consistent with 7% in 2019).

What are the reading habits of different age groups?

- Reading for pleasure is more widespread among **younger Australians**, with engagement highest among those aged 15–34 (73% compared to 66% of those aged 50 and over). Reading engagement has remained steady for **those aged 15–24** (74% consistent with 73% in 2019) and those aged 25–49 (70% consistent with 71% in 2019).
- The rise in social media advertising for books could be contributing to the increase in reading for pleasure among younger Australians, particularly as social media accounts dedicated to books and reading have gained traction and popularity, ‘giving rise to the development of a new category of cultural intermediary: bookfluencers’.²
- The proportion of **Australians aged 65 and over** who read for pleasure has dropped significantly (68% down from 77% in 2019). Reading engagement has also slightly decreased for those aged 50–64 (65% down from 67% in 2019).
- However, while younger Australians have strong engagement with reading, **older people read more often**, especially **women**: women aged 65 and over are three times more likely to read daily than people aged 15–24 (27% compared to 9%).
- The proportion of Australians aged 65 and over who read **at least once a week or more has increased** from 21% in 2019 to 24% in 2022. However, the proportion **who do not read at all has also significantly increased** from 19% in 2019 to 26% in 2022.

Who is reading what kinds of literature?

- **Women** are significantly more likely than men to read **novels** and/or **short stories** (55% compared to 37%) and instructional non-fiction texts (35% compared to 26%).
- **Men** are more likely than women to read **graphic novels** or **comics** (17% compared to 11%).
- **Young Australians aged 15–24** are more likely to read **graphic novels** or **comics** (25% of Australians aged 15–24 compared to 16% of those aged 25–49 and 8% of those aged 50 and over).
- **Respondents with an income below \$40,000** are the least likely to have read any of the listed types of reading materials over the past 12 months (61% compared to 73% of those earning \$100,000 or more).

Who uses which types of formats to read?

Those who listen to audiobooks at least once a week are more likely to be **men** (19% compared to 14% of women) and have a **younger age profile**. Almost one in four Australians aged 15–34 years regularly listen to audiobooks (22% compared to 21% of those aged 35–54 years and 6% of those aged 60 and over).

Regular audiobook usage (once a week or more) is also more common among **First Nations respondents** (32% compared to 15% of non-First Nations respondents), **CALD respondents** (22% compared to 14% of non-CALD respondents) and **Australians living in metropolitan areas** (18% compared to 14% of those living in regional or remote areas).

2 Reddan B 2022, ‘Social Reading Cultures on BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok’, Synergy 20:1.

Literature – live attendance

One in five Australians connect through written stories by attending in-person literature events

In 2022, 4 million Australians, or one in five of the population aged 15 and over, attended book or literary events or festivals (19%). This is down three percentage points from 22% in 2019.

Australians are attending literature events less often than before the pandemic

In 2022, monthly or more frequent attendance at book or literary events dropped by eight percentage points (40% compared to 48% in 2019), and more Australians are attending these events every couple of months (22% compared to 15% in 2019). This trend towards attending less frequently is consistent across all artforms.

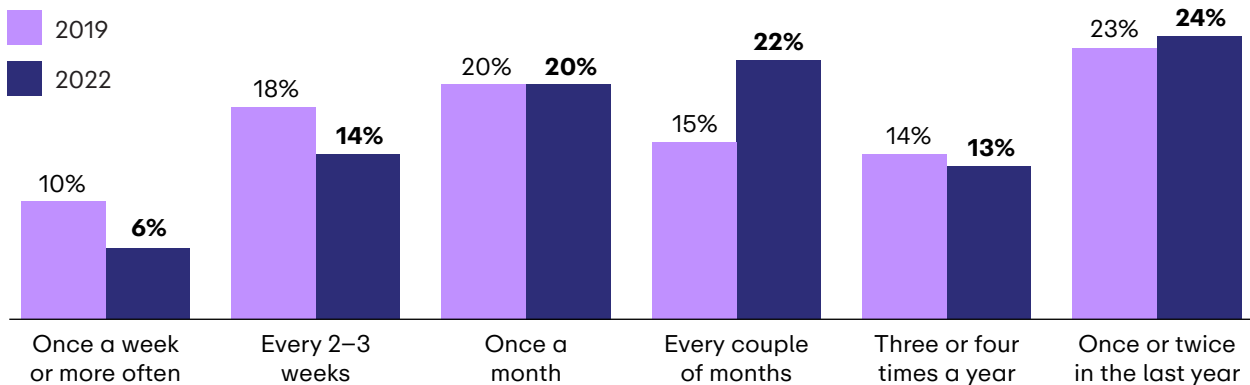
On average, the number of book or literature events Australians attend has decreased. Australians who attended book or literature events attended an average of 12.3 events in 2022, a decrease from an average of 15.6 literature or book events in 2019.

Literature attendees are the second most highly engaged group of arts goers

While the number of Australians who attend book and literature events is lower than other art forms, this group is highly engaged and attend the most on a monthly or more frequent basis.

Two in five literature attendees go to literature events on a monthly or more frequent basis (40% compared to 48% in 2019). On a monthly or more frequent basis, Australians attend more literature events than any other art form (40% for literature events compared to 37% for dance, 26% for music, 21% for theatre and 26% for visual arts and crafts). However, dance attendees attend slightly more on a weekly or 2–3 weeks basis than literature attendees (21% compared to 20%).

Figure 1: Australians' book or literary event attendance frequency



Q2_4. And in the past 12 months, how often did you personally attend these kinds of events (e.g. exhibitions, performances, shows)?
– Book or literary events Base: Those who attended book or literary events (2022: n=1,213 // 2019: n=1,238)

What types of book or literature events do Australians attend?

- 6% of Australians attend **writers' talks or book launches** (down from 8% in 2019).
- 6% of Australians attend **book club events** (consistent with 6% in 2019).
- 5% of Australians attend **readings including poetry and storytelling** (down from 6% in 2019).
- 4% of Australians attend **writers' festivals** (down from 6% in 2019).

Who attends book or literature events and festivals?

- **Australians under 50** are more likely to attend live book or literature events and festivals (29% of those aged 15–34 and 23% of those aged 35–49 compared to 10% of Australians aged 50 and over).
- **Respondents with disability** are more likely to attend writers' talks or book launches (8% compared to 6% of those without disability).
- **CALD respondents** are twice as likely than non-CALD respondents to attend a book or literature event and festivals (33% compared to 16%) and are over-represented in all types of literary events.
- More than two in five **First Nations respondents** attend book or literature events (44% down from 53% in 2019).
- While First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents are highly engaged in literature events and festivals, a high proportion report feeling that **cultural and creative experiences are not really for them**. Two in five First Nations respondents and one in three CALD respondents report that **cultural and creative experiences are not really for people like me** (39% of First Nations respondents compared to 27% of non-First Nations respondents; and 31% of CALD respondents compared to 27% of non-CALD respondents).
- These seemingly contradictory results, also seen in previous iterations of the survey for some groups, suggest an ongoing disconnection between active participation and engagement, and perceptions of the arts as expensive, hard to access and narrowly defined. They also resonate with observations of the under-representation of non-dominant cultures and groups in audiences for certain forms of publicly funded arts and culture, adding important context to the body of research that seeks to understand who has access to arts and culture and why.³

3 Deakin University 2023, Changing Organisations to Diversity Arts Audiences: Summary of findings from national survey.

Case study

Readings Night.
Credit: Centre
for Stories.

Writing Change, Writing Inclusion

Centre for Stories (CFS) is an inclusive cultural organisation based in Perth that uses the collection, cultivation and curation of stories to promote social cohesion and improve understanding of Western Australia's diverse communities.

Most recently, CFS has implemented *Writing Change, Writing Inclusion*, a two-year program designed to increase the access and representation of culturally and linguistically diverse authors in Australia.

The program includes mentorships, hot desk and writing fellowships, opportunities to publish and training for future mentors. It encompasses both the craft of writing, the business of publishing,



and offers an environment for writers to explore their individual voice and network with key people in the creative industries.

Emerging writers and storytellers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continue to be under-represented in the Western Australian writing and publishing sector. The program therefore addresses some of the barriers, such as access to appropriate workshops and networking opportunities.

Creative writing – creative participation

2.9 million Australians are creative writers

In 2022, 2.9 million Australians, or 14% of the population aged 15 years or over, produced creative writing. This includes those who write creatively to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community, and is down from 16% in 2019.

5% of Australians produced creative writing to engage with cultural background in 2022. This is a slight decrease from 6% in 2019.

Excluding those who produced creative writing to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community, 2.5 million Australians, or 12% of the population aged 15 years or over, produced creative writing in 2022. This has slightly decreased by two percentage points from 14% in 2019.

Who is producing creative writing?

Of the 14% of the population aged 15 years or over who produced creative writing, including to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community:

- More than two in five **gender diverse** respondents produce creative writing (44% compared to 14% of men and 13% of women).⁴
- One in five **respondents with disability** produce creative writing (19% compared to 13% of those without disability).
- One in four **First Nations respondents** produce creative writing (25% compared to 13% of non-First Nations respondents).
- A quarter of **CALD respondents** produced creative writing (24% compared to 11% of non-CALD respondents).
- **Young Australians** are more likely than their older counterparts to have produced creative writing (29% of Australians aged 15–24 compared to 16% of those aged 25–49 and 6% of Australians aged 50 and over).

What types of creative writing are Australians producing?

In 2022, 2.5 million Australians, or 12% of the population aged 15 years or over, produced creative writing, excluding to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community. Of these:

- 6% of Australians write **novels or short stories** (consistent with 6% in 2019).
- 4% of Australians write **poetry** (a slight decrease from 5% in 2019).
- 3% of Australians write **creative non-fiction such as biography or history** (consistent with 4% in 2019).
- 2% of Australians write **instructional non-fiction such as guidebooks or cookbooks** (consistent with 3% in 2019).
- 2% of Australians write **graphic novels or comics** (consistent with 2% 2019).
- 2% of Australians write **plays** (consistent with 2% 2019).

⁴ It is important to note that the sample size of gender diverse respondents is much lower than the sample size of women and men respondents (n=41 gender diverse, compared to n=4435 men and n=4901 women. Of the n=41 gender diverse sample, n=18 aged 15–24, n=17 aged 25–49, n=6 aged 50 and over).

Research approach

The 2022 National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in September – October 2022 and the results are based on a nationally representative sample of 9,396 people. The previous National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in 2019, prior to the disruptions of COVID-19 and provided a benchmark of Australians' arts engagement before the pandemic. The 2022 survey results, in comparison, provide an update on arts engagement in the wake of COVID-19.

The 2022 survey results provide critical insights into how Australians' arts engagement might be changing following the disruptions felt by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to the role of the arts for our individual and collective wellbeing. The 2022 survey closely examined Australians' relationship with the arts throughout lockdown periods, providing insights into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing. It asked participants to reflect on their digital arts engagement throughout this time and to share their own perceptions of how their engagement might have changed.