



Reading Canada

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Commissioned by the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS), the Environics / Focus Canada survey of 2,002 Canadians 18 years of age and over assesses Canadians' reading habits. The survey was carried out by telephone from the end of December 2002 to the beginning of January 2003. Results are accurate to within plus or minus 2.2%, 19 times out of 20.

Important: This poll was commissioned in preparation for the national forum *Reading Canada - The public good and private pleasures of reading*, sponsored by the Association for Canadian Studies, the National Library and Archives of Canada and their partners in the fields of reading, publishing, writing and literacy, to be held in Ottawa in November, 2003.

As observed below, when examined on a regional basis it is the Atlantic Provinces that have the lowest percentage of readers, followed by Quebec. Indeed there is a significant East-West gap in the extent to which people report that they read books with Ontario and Western Canada possessing the highest share of readers. Moreover when it comes to 'volume' the most avid readers of books are in Western Canada with some 33 percent reporting that they read over ten books in the last six months followed by Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces each at 28% and Quebec trailing with 23%.

Table 1

In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Canada	Atlantic Provinces	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
None	15	24	21	12	13
1-5	38	35	39	41	36
6-10	18	16	16	19	19
11-50	23	20	20	22	27
51 or more	5	6	3	6	6
DK	-	-			

There is however an important variation in the Western provinces with British Columbians being by far the most avid readers. While 93% of British Columbians have read a book in the past six months in the case of Manitoba just over 80% have read a book over the same period.

Table 2

In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Canada	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
None	15	19	16	16	7
1-5	38	33	37	39	34
6-10	18	16	21	21	18
11-50	23	22	22	19	35
51 or more	5	9	9	5	5
DK	-	1	1	-	-

Montrealers are far less likely to have read a book in the past six months than are Torontonians, and Vancouverites are the most likely to have read a book in the last six months within Canada.

Table 3

In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Montreal	Toronto	Vancouver
None	19	11	6
1-5	37	39	32
6-10	16	22	19
11-50	24	24	39
51 or more	4	5	4
DK	-	-	

There are important socio-economic considerations that help explain the frequency of reading in Canada.

The most important factor in a respondent's degree of reading relates to the level of schooling. In this regard those with lesser degrees of education are considerably less likely to have read books in the past six months than those with the highest degree of schooling as some 93% of persons with some university education have read at least one book in the past six months.

Table 4

In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Less than High School	High School	Comm Coll Vocation	Some University
None	37	22	15	7
1-5	35	42	43	34
6-10	12	14	18	20
11-50	13	18	19	29
51 or more	3	4	4	8
DK	-	-	-	-

Income undoubtedly plays an important role in the degree of reading done by the population. As observed below those at the lowest end of the income spectrum are more likely not to have read a book in the last six months than those at the highest end of the income bracket. There is a fair degree of variation in the middle income groups with respect to the degree of reading.

Table 5

In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Less than 30k	20k to 30k	30k to 40k	40k to 60k	60k to 80k	80k or more
None	23	12	17	19	12	9
1-5	32	40	36	39	43	38
6-10	16	17	19	16	17	23
11-50	20	24	23	23	23	24
51 or more	7	7	4	3	5	5
DK	1	-	-	-	-	-

Gender and age are also relevant factors in the differences in the degree to which Canadians have read books in the last six months. Women are more likely to have read than men, and read to a considerably greater degree, as viewed below. More than one-third of women (35%) read more than ten books, while only one out of five men (20%) have done the same in the past six months.

Table 6
In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Male	Female
None	19	12
1-5	42	35
6-10	19	17
11-50	17	28
51 or more	3	7
DK	-	-

Clearly those persons over the age of 60 read to a much greater extent than those aged 18-29.

Table 7
In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	18-29	30-44	45-59	60 and over
None	12	14	16	21
1-5	42	44	35	30
6-10	21	18	17	17
11-50	21	20	26	25
51 or more	4	4	6	7
DK	-	-	-	-

As to party preference, it is supporters of the NDP who are the most avid readers though not considerably greater than those of the Canadian Alliance and the Conservatives. It is supporters of the Bloc Québécois that are the least avid readers.

Table 8
In the last six months, how many books have you read, if any?

	Liberals	PC	NDP	CA	Bloc
None	16	14	13	14	21
1-5	39	36	37	40	38
6-10	21	18	18	12	15
11-50	19	26	24	28	25
51 or more	5	5	8	6	1
DK	-	-	-	-	-

How do Canadians go about choosing the books that they read? For the most part it is by browsing in a bookstore or in a library and this is particularly the case in the Atlantic Provinces. In Quebec an equally popular influence in book selection is a recommendation from someone that you know. Where Quebecers seem far less influenced in their reading choices compared with other Canadians is that they are least

inclined to stay with an author whose works they like. Nearly one out of four Canadians outside of Quebec choose their books on the basis of a preferred author whereas this is the case for only one out of eight Quebecers.

Table 9

Which one of the following is the main way you generally select the books you read?

	Canada	Atlantic Provinces	Quebec	Ontario	Western Canada
Browsing in a bookstore or library	33	42	33	32	33
A recommendation from someone you know	28	22	33	26	27
Choosing an author whose books you like	22	25	13	24	24
Book reviews that you have read	11	7	11	12	9
An advertisement you have seen	4	5	6	3	3
Mandatory reading school/work	1	-	3	1	1
An internet site	-	-	1	-	-
DK/NA	2	1	1	2	1

Those that read most are persons that frequent libraries and bookstores. Although they are not a particularly large group some 43% that reported reading more than 51 books in the past six months tended to make their choices by browsing in a bookstore or library. Those reading the least more often choose a book on the basis of a recommendation from someone that they know.

Table 10

Which one of the following is the main way you generally select the books you read?

	Canada	1-5 bks (last 6 mo.)	6-10	11-50	51 or more
Browsing in a bookstore or library	33	28	33	39	43
A recommendation from someone you know	28	33	30	21	13
Choosing an author whose books you like	22	21	21	22	28

Book reviews that you have read	11	10	10	12	12
An advertisement you have seen	4	6	2	2	-
Mandatory reading school/work	1	2	1	2	-
An internet site	-	-	-	-	-
DK/NA	2	1	3	1	3

According to Statistics Canada there are some 12, 405 librarians in Canada. The province that has the lowest percentage of librarians relative to its share of the country's population is Quebec with just over sixteen percent of all librarians.

Table 11

Number and percentage of Librarians in Canada by region and province for the year 2001

	Percentage of the Canadian population	Percentage of Librarians
Atlantic Provinces	7.5	8.9
Quebec	23.7	16.4
Ontario	38.4	41.3
Manitoba	3.7	3.3
Saskatchewan	3.2	5.1
Alberta	9.9	11.2
British Columbia	13.2	13.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001