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AUDIOBOOK READING *in* AUSTRALIA



A REPORT ON THE AUDIOBOOKS AND DIGITAL BOOK CULTURE SURVEY
PREPARED BY DR MILLICENT WEBER
JUNE 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

This report was prepared on unceded Ngunnawal and Ngambri land. Orality has been the dominant mode of transmission for knowledge and culture on this country for tens of thousands of years. I pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.

Audiobook Reading in Australia: A Report on the Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture Survey

Dr Millicent Weber
June 2026

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Declaration of Interests

The views expressed in this Report are those of the author and do not reflect any official SLLL or ANU position.

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About the *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* project

Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture: Australian Books and Publishing at a Time of Global Disruption is a research project led by Dr Millicent Weber out of the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at the Australian National University and funded by the Australian Research Council (DE240100466). This research explores and enhances public awareness of how audiobooks are revolutionising practices of reading, writing, and publishing. Drawing attention to Australian publishing and its relationship to international trends, it analyses the role of audiobooks in shaping book culture and consumption, and how they are driving major global changes to Anglophone publishing and media industries. This project is supported by collaborations with industry professionals including authors, narrators, publishers and libraries through the APA, ASA, and ALIA; advocacy organisation Vision Australia; AustLit, the national database of biographical, bibliographical, and critical information about Australian writing; and academic researchers at ANU and other institutions. Outcomes of the project will include a comprehensive database of Australian audiobook titles which will be integrated into AustLit, academic outputs such as a book and articles, and reports tailored for industry and community stakeholders.

<https://www.austlit.edu.au/audiobooks>

<https://audiobookresearch.com/>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Australia, as in other Western nations, one of the biggest developments in book culture in the 21st century has been the rise of audiobooks. Audiobooks materially reconfigure established understandings of books, reading and literacy and are hugely popular. Recent industry studies of broader cultural participation by Creative Australia shows that audiobook reading continues to grow even as other forms of digital reading like ebook reading decrease. Meanwhile, studies of reading practices by Australia Reads suggests that audiobooks have a crucial role to play in growing reading habits among non-reading Australians.

Research to date suggests that a third of Australians listen to audiobooks, a rate that is similar to that in other Anglophone markets, and lower than many European markets, including Germany. Despite this significant number, several factors—including a focus on written literacy, a lack of reliable and focused data, and inattention until recently from scholarly researchers—has meant that very little is known about audiobook reading culture.

The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey took a snapshot of Australian audiobook consumption in October 2025, together with a parallel survey that ran in the German market. Completed by respondents who had listened to at least one audiobook in the past twelve months, it explored listening behaviours, preferences, and experiences across the two markets, comparing these with other reading and cultural consumption and demographic characteristics.

Who is listening to audiobooks, and what are they listening to? How does audiobook consumption sit in relation to print and ebook reading, and how does it fit with patterns of cultural consumption more broadly? What are audiobook listeners' perceptions of themselves, and what they're listening to? Do audiobook listeners see themselves as readers, or does this fall into a different conceptual category? And what is the perception among the audiobook reading community of technological interventions, particularly the rise of AI narration?

This report seeks to answer these questions, and through this to give a sense of the shape, size and significance of audiobook reading in Australia, both as a market and as a distinctive, vibrant and multifaceted listening community. A snapshot of the eight main findings follow on the next page, followed by the contents and report in full.

MAIN FINDINGS

Audiobook listeners are regular consumers.

Nearly three-fifths (59.2%) of audiobook readers listen to an audiobook at least once a week. Once people begin consuming audiobooks, they quickly become habitual listeners.

The Australian market is dominated by US accents.

37.6% of respondents' 'most recent listens' had a US-accented narrator, compared to only 22.1% with Australian-accented narrators. The Australian audiobook market is dominated by international platforms, with minimal production and distribution infrastructure available to independent authors and narrators.

Male listeners listen almost exclusively to male narrators, while female listeners listen to both male and female narrators evenly.

81.4% of men and 45.3% of women most recently listened to a book narrated by a male narrator. This asymmetry, with potential implications for casting decisions, may reflect trends in print publishing and reading and genre trends; it may also reflect listener preferences for gender identification with the narrator.

Most people have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

17.4% have tried an AI-narrated audiobook or other text-to-speech technology at least once. Men are more likely than women to have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

The uptake of AI narration is highest among listeners with vision and hearing impairments.

Accessibility needs to be more prominent in conversations about AI narration.

Listeners who haven't tried AI-narrated audiobooks are neutral or ambivalent rather than definitively opposed.

These made up 57.6% of respondents who haven't tried AI narration.

40% of Australians consider listening to an audiobook to "count" as reading.

40.0% of Australian respondents considered audiobook consumption a form of reading. By comparison, only 21.2% of German respondents considered audiobook consumption a form of reading.

Multitasking continues to dominate audiobook consumption behaviours.

Only 16.9% of Australian audiobook listeners use audiobooks *without* multitasking.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. METHOD	7
3. WHO IS LISTENING?	9
4. AUDIOBOOKS IN A CULTURAL LIFE: AUDIO, PRINT, E, AND OTHER MEDIA	12
5. LISTENING PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOUR	18
6. IS LISTENING READING?	28
7. AI NARRATION	31
8. FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	35
APPENDIX 1, WHO IS LISTENING?: DEMOGRAPHICS TABLES	38
APPENDIX 2, AUDIOBOOKS IN A CULTURAL LIFE: READING FREQUENCY; MULTI-TASKING; OTHER CULTURAL CONSUMPTION	42
APPENDIX 3, LISTENING PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOUR: GENRES, NARRATORS, LISTENING SPEEDS, AND FORMAT AND ACQUISITION CHANNEL	46
APPENDIX 4, IS LISTENING READING?	51
APPENDIX 5, AI NARRATION	53

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey of audiobook consumers ran in October 2025, exploring habits and preferences among audiobook listeners, asking questions about participation in the arts, accessing and buying books, accessing and buying audiobooks, and reading and listening preferences.

This is a report on this survey prepared for the project's stakeholders, which include the APA, ASA, ALIA, Creative Australia, and Vision Australia, with thanks for their input into the survey design and report preparation. If you find this report helpful, please feel free to share it; it is licensed under a CC-BY license (please attribute usage, but otherwise you may do what you like with it).

The survey was completed by 503 Australians who listened to at least one audiobook in the 12 months prior to taking the survey. The body of this report concentrates on key findings from the survey: on patterns of audiobook consumption and preferences that the survey data reveal, including in relation to demographic factors such as age, gender, First Nations and CALD status, and disability. This is followed by discussion of qualitative responses relating to AI narration and the perception of listening as reading, and appendices containing data tables. A further 500 German audiobook listeners took a translated version of the survey at the same time, and where useful or illustrative this report also draws on responses from the German listeners.

The survey is part of a larger project, *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture: Australian Books and Publishing at a Time of Global Disruption*, funded by the Australian Research Council and led by Dr Millicent Weber at the Australian National University. The German component of the survey was conducted in collaboration with Professor Corinna Norrick-Rühl at the University of Münster. The broader *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* project maps and analyses audiobook production and reception in Australia, while Germany offers a comparative study.

2. METHOD

The survey was circulated via Qualtrics panels to 503 Australian respondents (and 500 German respondents). Respondents needed to answer ‘yes’ to the question, ‘Have you listened to at least one audiobook in the last 12 months?’, and quotas were applied to questions about gender and age. The survey is thus designed to enable deep-dive analysis of the reading, listening, and other cultural behaviours of different segments of the population.

Creative Australia’s National Arts Participation Survey¹ shows that 37% of Australians listen to audiobooks at least occasionally, and that nearly half of Australian readers listen to audiobooks. The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey demographic questions, as well as some of the higher level questions about listening frequency, replicate questions asked in the National Arts Participation Survey. This is designed to enable the results in this survey to be compared to more general understanding of the reading and other arts consumption behaviours of the population as a whole. These demographics are overviewed in section 3 (Who is Listening?), while sections 4–7 offer deeper dives into specific listening behaviours.

This survey report focuses on the Australian responses, but introduces comparisons between the datasets where illustrative. Germany has a well established audiobook culture, with a longer tradition of specialised *Hörbuch* publishers. By contrast, the Australian market is relatively young, and its growth has been shaped by digital platforms and the prominence of cultural imports from the US and UK.

The overall aim of the report is to analyse what is distinctive about Australian audiobook reading—both what is distinctive to it as *Australian* and what is distinctive to it as *audiobook reading*.



¹ Creative Australia. 2026. *Creative Transformations: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*. <https://creative.gov.au/research/creative-transformations-results-national-arts-participation-survey>

3. WHO IS LISTENING?

The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey was designed to interoperate with the data from the Creative Australia National Arts Participation Survey, to offer deeper insight into Australians' audiobook reading.

Creative Transformations (the 2026 report on the National Arts Participation Survey) data suggest that audiobook reading is strongest among:

- younger respondents: '69% of those aged 15–24 and 69% of those aged 25–49 compared to 33% of those aged 50 and over' listened to audiobooks;
- men: '27% compared to 21%' of women listened to audiobooks
- CALD respondents: '33% compared to 21%' of non-CALD respondents listened to audiobooks.²

The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey asked Australian respondents whether they identify as First Nations, as from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background (this question specifically asked about Auslan, as well as those who identify with the language, community or cultural practice of heritage that differ from Anglo-Australians), whether they identify as disabled, and their postcode, used to identify whether they live in a metropolitan, regional or remote area.³ These results are summarised in this section to answer the question, *Who Is Listening?*

Appendix 1 contains the demographics tables analysed in this section, which show the full profile of respondents relating to age, gender, location, employment, income, and education, cross-tabulated with First Nations and CALD status and disability.

3.1. First Nations

7% (n=35) of Australian audiobook readers indicated they identified as First Nations. Comparing this to the census estimate that approximately 3.8% of Australians are First Nations,⁴ this suggests that First Nations people listen to audiobooks at a

² *Creative Transformations*, p. 178

³ The language of 'identification' was used in relation to questions about First Nations, CALD, and disability characteristics, acknowledging individuals' right to self-identify, and in line with the terminological and methodological choices made in the National Arts Participation Survey.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2023. 'Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians'. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>

higher rate than the general population, consistent with National Arts Participation Survey results.

3.2. CALD

15.1% (n=76) of Australian audiobook readers identified as CALD. Measures of CALD status are not well defined; for example, 27.6% of the Australian population were born overseas,⁵ but individuals from places such as England or New Zealand might be unlikely to identify as CALD. Indeed, this was seen in the *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* data: of the survey respondents who said they did *not* identify as CALD, n=66 were born overseas.

3.3. Disability

12.5% (n=63) of Australian audiobook readers reported that they have a disability. This is an underrepresentation of Australians overall with a disability, who are estimated to make up 21.4% of the population.⁶ While this may reflect audiobook reading rates, it is also highly likely this can be at least partially accounted for by factors including that older Australians have disproportionate rates of disabilities, and that many Australians with disabilities, especially the 7.9% with ‘profound or severe’ disabilities, may be less likely to be registered users on Qualtrics and may experience barriers to completing a written survey.

3.4. Metropolitan, Regional and Remote

78.1% (n=393) of Australian audiobook readers are from metropolitan areas compared to 72.8% of the population overall, 20.5% (n=103) from regional areas compared to 25.4% of the population overall, and 0.8% (n=4) from remote areas compared to 1.9% overall.⁷ Notably, the rate at which respondents reported living in a regional area is higher for First Nations (31.4%, n=11) than for the sample overall

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2022. ‘Cultural diversity of Australia’.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/cultural-diversity-australia>

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2024. ‘Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings’.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025. ‘Profile of Australia's population’.
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/profile-of-australias-population>

respondents; it is also higher for respondents with a disability (31.7%, n=20) and lower for CALD respondents (11.8%, n=9).

3.5. Education

One of the most striking demographic results from the survey is that around half of Australian audiobook readers have either university or post-graduate degrees (52.3%, n=263). This is almost twice the rate of German audiobook readers, of whom 27% (n=135) have either a university or post-graduate degree. This is higher than average for Australia, where 34% of people have a university or post-graduate degree⁸ (and also for Germany, where 17.6% of the population have a university or post-graduate degree; the rate of vocational qualifications among German audiobook readers at 26% or n=130 however is much lower than the German population overall, at 47.5%).⁹ Only 5.4% (n=27) of Australian audiobook readers did not complete high school (and again, this is a point of significant difference with the German respondents, with 30.2% or n=151 of German audiobook readers not completing high school).

⁸ Measure is for people aged 15-74 who have a Bachelor's degree or above. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2025. 'Education and Work, Australia'.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release>

⁹ Statistisches Bundesamt. 2019. 'Educational level'. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Education-Research-Culture/Educational-Level/_node.html

4. AUDIOBOOKS IN A CULTURAL LIFE: AUDIO, PRINT, E, AND OTHER MEDIA

This section explores the frequency at which different readers use audiobooks, and the kinds of multi-tasking activities that readers combine with their audiobook usage. It then compares audiobook usage with other kinds of reading—print and ebook—as well as engagement with other media. See Appendix 2 for the data tables analysed in this section.

4.1. Frequency

Creative Transformations explains that, while the number of Australians reading audiobooks is increasing, the majority only use them infrequently, although frequent usage is increasing over time:



Significantly more audiobook readers are engaging with audiobooks *once a week or more often* (24% significantly up from 17% in 2022), with slightly more readers listening to audiobooks on a *daily basis* (6% up from 4% in 2022).¹⁰

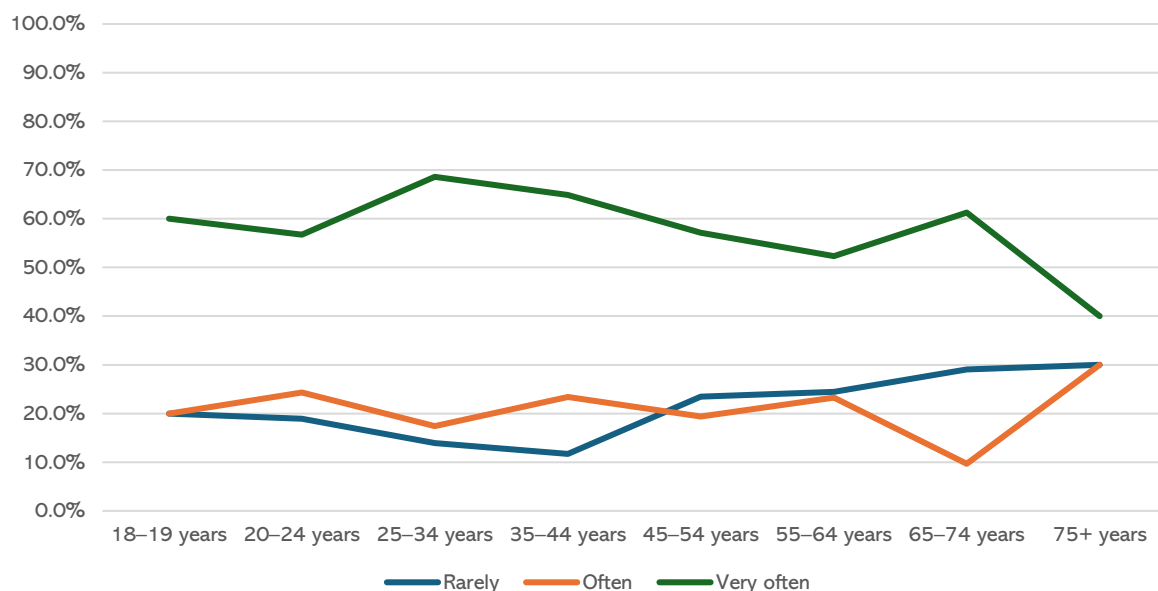
The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey results show a different trend: **a significant majority of respondents listen frequently**. 59.2% (n=298) of Australian audiobook listeners are listening to an audiobook at least once per week, with 20.3% (n=102) listening at least once per month and 20.5% (n=103) listening less than once per month. This is consistent with the survey's German data, with 59.4% (n=297) of German audiobook listeners listening to an audiobook at least once per week, 23.6% (n=118) at least once per month, and 17.0% (n=85) less than once per month. This suggests that, across both markets, occasional listeners are fluidly converted to frequent listeners.

Audiobook readers who are women listen slightly less often than audiobook readers who are men: 22.4% (n=61) of women listen less than once per month compared to 17.9% (n=41) of men. This aligns with the expectation, from *Creative Transformations*, that men listen more often than women, however it is worth reiterating that an extremely large proportion of both listen at least once per week (58.8% or n=160 of women and 59.8% or n=137 of men) or once per month (18.8% or n=51 of women and 22.3% or n=51 of men).

¹⁰ *Creative Transformations*, p. 177

Reading frequency peaks among Australian audiobook readers aged 25-34, but does not drop off substantially as readers age: it stays high until readers reach age 75+. 68.6% (n=59) of audiobook readers aged 25-34 read at least once per week. This is a higher rate than younger readers (57.4% or n=27) of audiobook readers aged 18-24 read at least weekly). It is also a higher rate than older readers: 64.9% (n=61) of audiobook readers aged 35-44 read at least weekly, as do 57.1% (n=56) of audiobook readers aged 45-54, 52.3% (n=45) of audiobook readers aged 55-64, and 61.3% (n=38) of audiobook readers aged 65-74. By contrast, of audiobook readers aged 75 and over, 40.0% (n=12) read at least once per week, 30.0% (n=9) read once per month, and 30.0% (n=9) read less than once per month.

How often do you read an audiobook?



While the number of audiobook readers with a disability in the survey sample is small, these readers demonstrate interesting results in relation to reading frequency. Overall, reading frequency of the n=63 respondents who have a disability was similar to that of the general population: 58.7% (n=37) read at least one audiobook per week, 19.0% (n=12) read at least one audiobook per month, and 22.2% (n=14) read less often. Readers with vision impairment or print disabilities (2.4% of the overall sample, n=12) read audiobooks at much higher rates (75.0% at least once per week, 16.7% at least once per month, and only 8.3% less often).¹¹ Readers with

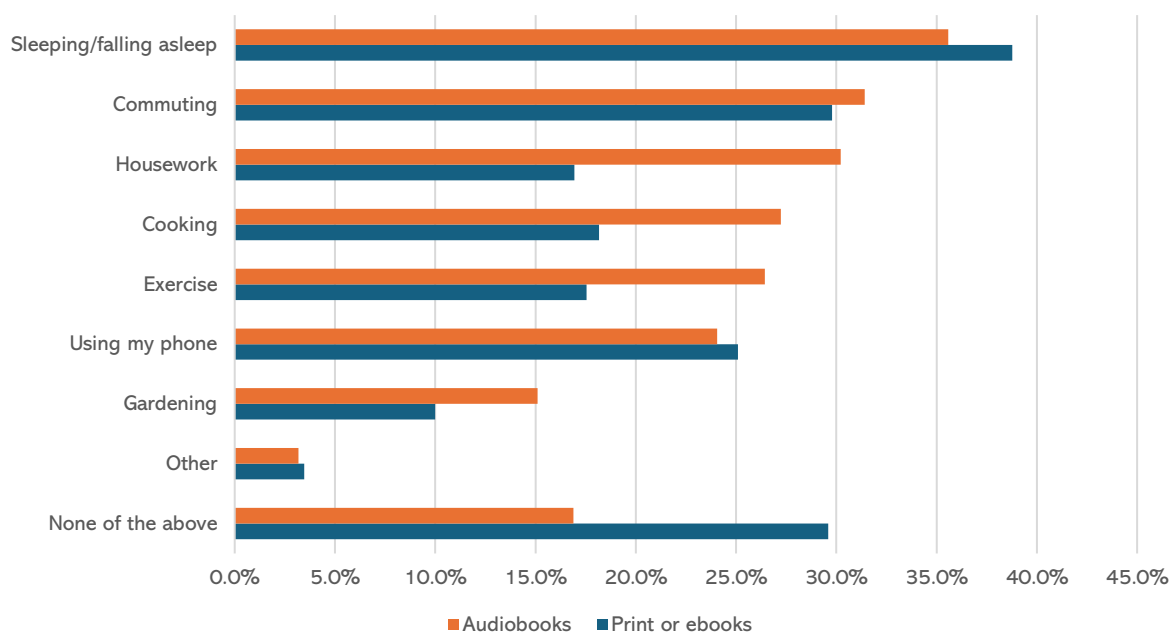
¹¹ The survey was designed with accessibility principles in mind; it followed Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, and was designed not to use questions such as Likert scales which are incompatible with screen readers. Despite this, it is likely that other barriers will have lowered participation rates among audiobook readers with a print disability; for example it generally takes longer to complete a survey using a screen reader.

hearing impairments (n=15, representing 3.0% of the sample overall)—an often overlooked user group for audiobooks—also read audiobooks slightly more frequently than non-disabled readers (66.7% at least once a week, 20.0% at least once a month, and 13.3% less often).

4.2. Multitasking

The ability to listen to an audiobook while simultaneously doing something else has played a large part in their growing popularity. The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey asked listeners whether they do any of the following while listening to audiobooks: commuting, cooking, housework, exercise, using a mobile device, gardening, falling asleep or sleeping, and also included the option to give a write-in ‘other’ response or ‘none of the above’. A large majority of audiobook listeners do another task when they’re using audiobooks, although 16.9% of Australian audiobook listeners (n=85) use audiobooks *without* multitasking. (There was a slightly higher likelihood that German audiobook listeners use audiobooks *without* multitasking: this was true of 20.6% of German respondents, n=103).

Do you listen to audiobooks or read print or ebooks while doing any of the following?



4.2.1. Multitasking across different formats

The survey also asked about multitasking while reading print books or ebooks. **Almost all (n=490, 97.4%) audiobook readers read either print or ebooks at least occasionally**, and more than two-thirds of these respondents (n=345, or 70.4% of people who read print or ebooks at least occasionally) *also* multi-task at least some of the time when reading print or ebooks.

Multitasking proportions were similar between audiobook and print and ebook for some behaviours, like commuting, falling asleep, and simultaneous mobile device usage. A smaller but not insignificant proportion combine housework, exercise, cooking and gardening with print or ebook reading than with audiobook reading. It is likely that this is not indicative of broader, population-level patterns of multitasking while reading print or ebooks, but rather indicative that influences leading readers to multitask while reading audiobooks *also* lead readers to multitask while doing other activities, including while reading in other formats.

4.2.2. Age and multitasking

Looking at the two most common forms of multi-tasking across the different age groups shows that behaviours slowly shift as users age. Readers under 35 are most likely to combine their listening with cooking or housework (39.1% of readers under 35 listen to audiobooks while cooking and 45.1%—close to half—of readers under 35 do housework while listening), and housework continues to be one of the more common activities combined with audiobook listening until listeners reach the 55-64 age group. At 45-54 sleeping/falling asleep becomes the most prevalent activity that readers combine with listening, with 37.8% (n=37) of readers in this age group listening while falling asleep or while sleeping, and remains so for older demographics. After 65-74 it becomes more common to listen without doing another activity or task, which corresponds with the retirement age (67).



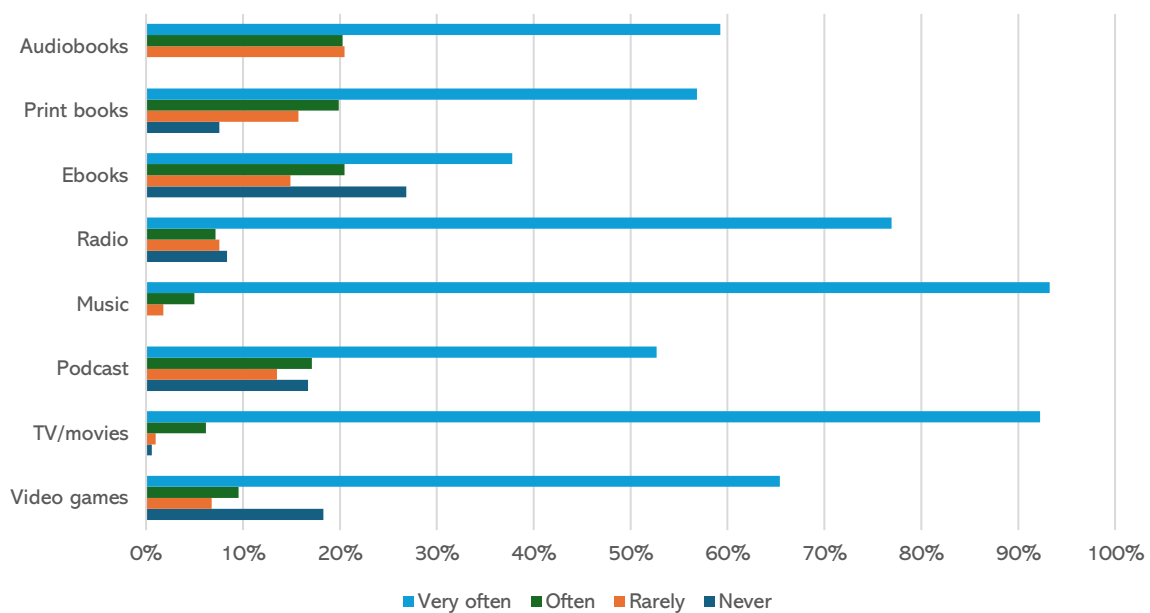
4.3. Audiobook listening compared with other cultural participation

In addition to reading print or ebooks, likewise many audiobook listeners engage with other media: the *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey asked about people's rate of engagement with radio; music; podcasting; film and television; and video games.

Most Australian audiobook listeners are engaging with most other media. At the most general level, 92.4% (n=465) of audiobook readers read print books at least occasionally; 73.2% (n=368) read ebooks; 91.7% (n=461) listen to the radio; *all* respondents listen to music; 83.3% (n=419) listen to podcasts; 99.4% (n=500) watch tv or movies; and 81.7% (n=411) play videogames.

The frequency at which audiobook listeners use other media varies. Music and tv or film saw high rates of very frequent engagement, small rates of frequent engagement, very small rates of infrequent engagement, and a negligible number of respondents reporting no engagement. 18.3% (n=92) of audiobook readers never play videogames and 16.7% (n=84) never listen to podcasts; of the audiobook readers who *do* play videogames, many do it very often however, whereas podcast listeners are more likely to listen infrequently. Ebook reading is perhaps the most variable: about a third of audiobook readers never read ebooks, a third read them very often, and a third read them less frequently.

How often do you engage with different media?



Are more engaged audiobook readers—those who listen often, or very often—engaging with other media at a higher or lower rate? The *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey found that respondents who ‘very often’ listen to audiobooks read print at a far higher rate too: readers who are voracious (and/or who have plenty of resources and leisure time) to read in one format also enjoy other formats. This is supported by similar patterns in regard to ebooks, proportional to the fact that ebook reading is not as common or frequently participated in by respondents as print overall.

There is a strong correlation between audiobook and podcast listening. ‘Very often’ listening to audiobooks corresponds with ‘very often’ listening to podcasts, and ‘rarely’ listening to audiobooks corresponds with ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ listening to podcasts. Looking at audiobook listening in relation to videogame playing, there is a similar pattern as with podcasts but to a lesser degree. Respondents who listen to audiobooks ‘very often’ are slightly more likely to ‘very often’ play videogames, and those listen to audiobooks ‘rarely’ are slightly more likely to ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ play videogames.

There was weaker correlation between audiobook listening frequency and frequency of engagement with more established (and popular) audiovisual media (radio, music, and film/television).

5. LISTENING PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOUR

This section takes a deep dive into listeners' preferences and behaviours while listening. It considers: genre preferences; narrator preferences, including preferences for single or multi-narrated content; and the prevalence of behaviours such as speeding up and skipping content; and format and acquisition channels.

5.1. Genre preferences

When asked to indicate all genres in which they read, on average, Australian respondents said that they listen to audiobooks across 2.39 genre categories. Overall, the genres listened to by the most readers are fiction, of any type; and in order they are popular/genre fiction, literary fiction, and short stories. This is the case when respondents are asked about their audiobook listening, and also when respondents who also read in print or ebook formats are asked about their reading habits in those formats.

Drilling down into the national profiles, **Australian respondents reported the following rates of fiction in their audiobook listening**: 56.3% of Australian audiobook listeners listen to genre or popular fiction, 26.0% to short stories, and 23.9% to literary fiction. (For comparison, the rates of fiction reading were even higher for German audiobook listeners: 63.6% of whom listen to genre or popular fiction, 32.2% to short stories, and 38.4% to literary fiction).

This can be compared to the genre breakdown for print in *Creative Transformations*:



Australians are consistently reading various forms of literature [...]:

- Almost half of Australians read a novel or short story (46% consistent with 46% in 2022 and 47% in 2019).
- Three in ten Australians read instructional non-fiction, for example, a guidebook or cookbook (29% consistent with 30% in 2022, and down from 32% in 2019).
- Three in ten Australians read creative non-fiction (29% consistent with 30% in 2022, and down from 31% in 2019).
- One in seven read a graphic novel or comic (13% consistent with 14% in 2022, and slightly down from 15% in 2019).
- Almost one in ten read poetry (9% consistent with 8% in 2022, slightly down from 10% in 2019).
- 6% read a play (6% consistent with 6% in 2022, slightly down from 7% in 2019).¹²

¹² *Creative Transformations*, p. 173

Looking at audiobook listening habits in relation to other genres, the *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture* survey found that:

- Australians listen to high rates of memoir (29.0% of Australian respondents indicated memoir is one of the genres that they listen to, compared to only 16.6% of Germans).
- Australians listen to high rates of adapted comics or graphic novels (15.1% of Australians reported listening to these) and to YA fiction or non-fiction (19.1%).
- Australians also listen to non-fiction other than memoir and autobiography, although at a slightly lower rate than German respondents. 23.3% of Australians listen to creative non-fiction such as history or biography (compared to 27.8% of German respondents), and 18.1% listen to instructional non-fiction such as guide or cookbooks (compared to 25.2% of German respondents).

5.2. Narrator preferences

This section asks: ‘To whose voices are people listening?’ It considers in turn, the number of narrators, the gender of the narrator, and the narrator’s accent.

5.2.1. Number of narrators

Do listeners prefer a ‘straight read’ or a more dramatic performance? The survey data answer this question by looking at the number of narrators of the titles each respondent most recently read. 79.9% (n=402) of Australian audiobook readers most recently listened to an audiobook with only one narrator. (By comparison, a significantly smaller number of German respondents—only 66.2% (n=331)—listened to an audiobook with a sole narrator). 15.3% of Australian respondents (n=77) listened to an audiobook with two narrators, and only 4.8% (n=24) of Australian respondents listened to an audiobook with more than two narrators. While ‘the audiobook industry has shifted towards high-production audiobooks, moving beyond a single-narrator to immersive experiences featuring hundreds of actors,

original music and sound effects',¹³ this accounts for only a very small fraction of Australians' audiobook listening practices.

While there are histories of very popular radio dramas in both Australia and Germany, *Hörspiele*—as a category distinct from *Hörbücher*—have remained prominent in the German cultural landscape into the present day, seen for example the continued success of series such as *Die drei ???* (with this mystery series identified by 9 of the German respondents as their most recently read audiobook). This is reflected in **the much stronger preference from German audiobook listeners than from Australians for full-cast audiobooks**, with more than double the number of German audiobook listeners—11.8% (n=59) of German respondents—most recently listening to an audiobook with more than two narrators.

There is minimal differentiation in preferences for the number of narrators between the age groups in Australia, although the lowest rates of full-cast audiobook reading reported between the ages of 45-74. In fact, not a single Australian listener in the 65-74 age group (n=86 participants in total), most recently listened to an audiobook with *more than 2* narrators—despite 16.9% of German listeners in this age group, out of a total of 65, having listened to a full-cast audiobook most recently. Among German listeners, younger and older respondents were more likely to prefer books with *more than 2* narrators—i.e. a full-cast audiobook—with these being least popular among German listeners aged between 25 and 44.

There was a small difference between male and female readers in Australia in relation to the number of narrators, with female audiobook readers more likely than male audiobook readers to have most recently listened to a single-narrator title (82.0%, n=223 of female Australian respondents vs. 77.3%, n=177 of male Australian respondents).

Narrator preferences can be compared to the genre of the title most recently read, too. The genre with the highest prevalence of full-cast narration—i.e. more than 2 narrators—was fantasy, including both children's and adult's fantasy. The genres with the highest prevalence of texts with exactly two narrators were romance, as well as children's fantasy (but *not* adult fantasy); there were also a significant proportion of literary fiction texts with two narrators.

There has been anecdotal evidence to suggest that an increased interest in certain kinds of activities, such as for example videogame playing, might translate into a

¹³ *Creative Transformations*, p. 176

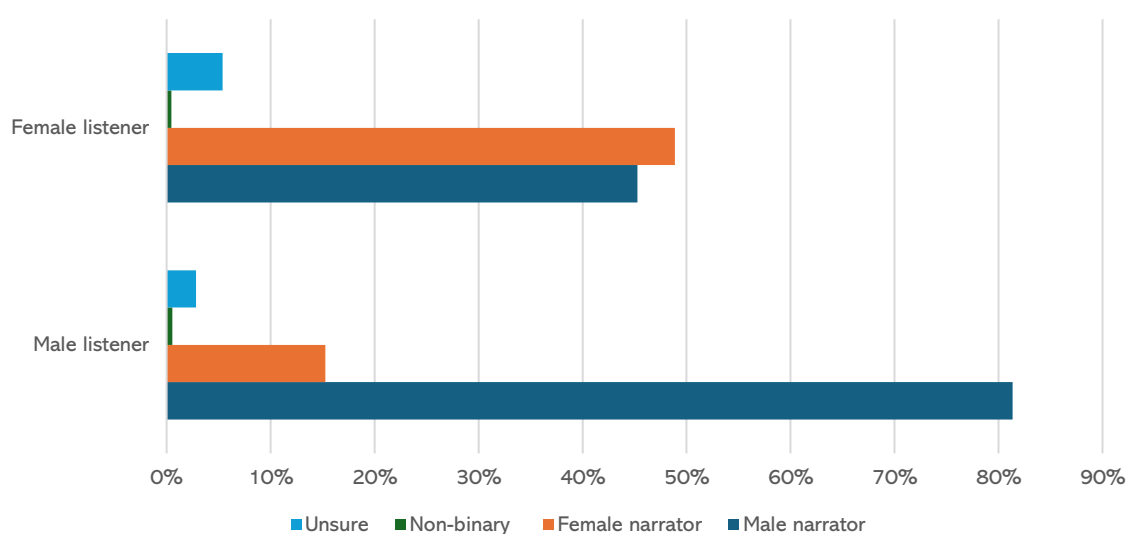
preference for full-cast dramatized audiobooks, particularly with the rising popularity of genres such as LitRPG. There is a small amount of evidence in the survey data to confirm this. Comparing the rate at which audiobook listeners who engage with other media at different frequencies (never, rarely, often, or very often) reported most recently listening to an audiobook narrated by 1, 2, or more than 2 narrators, a comparatively high rate of listening to single-narrator audiobooks combined with the lowest rate of listening to audiobooks narrated by more than 2 narrators was indeed reported by audiobook listeners who never play videogames.

5.2.2. Narrator gender

Focussing throughout this sub-section on the single-narrator audiobooks to which Australian respondents most recently listened (n=402), around three-fifths of narrators are perceived by their listeners as male (61.4%, n=247 male narrators vs. 33.8%, n=136 female narrators; 4.2% of respondents were unsure about the gender and 0.5% indicated they listened to a non-binary narrator).

The rate at which respondents reported listening most recently to a male narrator compared to a female narrator was higher in Germany than Australia (in Germany, 71.0% or n=235 of respondents most recently listened to a male narrator, compared to 61.4% or n=247 of Australian respondents).

Narrator gender, comparison between female and male listeners



The gender of Australian audiobook listeners correlates with the gender of the narrators to which they listen. Most male listeners listened to an audiobook narrated by a male narrator (81.4%, n=144 male vs. 15.3%, n=27 female narrators), while female respondents listened much more evenly to male- and female-narrated titles (45.3%, n=101 male vs. 48.9%, n=109 female narrators). **Men primarily listen to books narrated by men, while women listen equally to books narrated by both men and women.** This was also the case among Germans, although female audiobook listeners in Germany also listened to more male than female narrators (88.4%, n=137 of German men reported listening to female-narrated titles, compared to only 9.7% or n=15 female-narrated titles; 55.7% or n=98 German women listened to male-narrated titles, while 38.1% or n=67 listened to female-narrated titles).

Men preferring to read books by male authors, and with male characters, is a trend that has been reported among print readers: clearly, this carries across to audiobook narration as well, despite the other demographic differences between audiobook and print readers, for example that they tend younger and are more often male.

Looking at age and gender, women between 25–44 report the highest rate of female narrators: 65.9% (n=29) of women between 25–34 years of age have most recently listened to a female narrator, dropping slightly to 57.5% (n=23) between 35–44 years of age. This drops off as readers age. After 45 women are listening to more books with male narrators than female. The trend among male readers is slightly different. Young men have the highest gender congruity with narrators: 100% (n=12) of male respondents aged 18–24 most recently listened to a male narrator. The proportions shift slightly for men between 25–54. At 25–34, 78.3% (n=18) of men most recently listened to a male narrator; at 35–44, 81.3% (n=26) most recently listened to a male narrator; at ages 45–54, 75.0% (n=27) most recently listened to a male narrator. From 55–75, the rate at which male respondents most recently listened to a male narrator increases again, with 86.7% (n=26) of men aged 55–64 and 90.3% (n=28) of men aged 65–74 most recently listening to a male narrator, *but* of the 13 male respondents over 75 in the dataset, only 7 or 53.8% listened to a male-narrated audiobook.

In addition to looking at readers' stated genre preferences, the titles most recently read were coded by genre,¹⁴ and this can be used to examine the relationship between genre and narrator gender. Looking at the genres readers were engaging with at a higher rate than 2-3 titles, **the only genre that saw significantly more**

¹⁴ A combination of sources were used to determine genre, preferencing Kirkus reviews and publisher paratext; while this method is imperfect, results should be reasonably comparable across the dataset.

female-narrated titles than male-narrated titles is romance (and the romantasy subgenre). Women narrated 82.4% (n=14) of the romance titles that Australian readers most recently listened to (5.9% or n=1 were narrated by male narrators, and readers were unsure about the narrator gender for two titles), and of the n=2 YA romance and n=6 romantasy titles, all were narrated by women.

The genres closest to narrator gender parity were historical fiction (with 50.0%, n=8 female and 43.8%, n=7 male narrators, and one reader unsure of narrator gender) and mystery (with 50.0%, n=10 female and 45.0%, n=9 male narrators, and one reader unsure of narrator gender). About a third of memoir, literary fiction, non-fiction and self-help were narrated by women. Very few titles were narrated by non-binary narrators: those that were include a single memoir, and a single work of horror.¹⁵

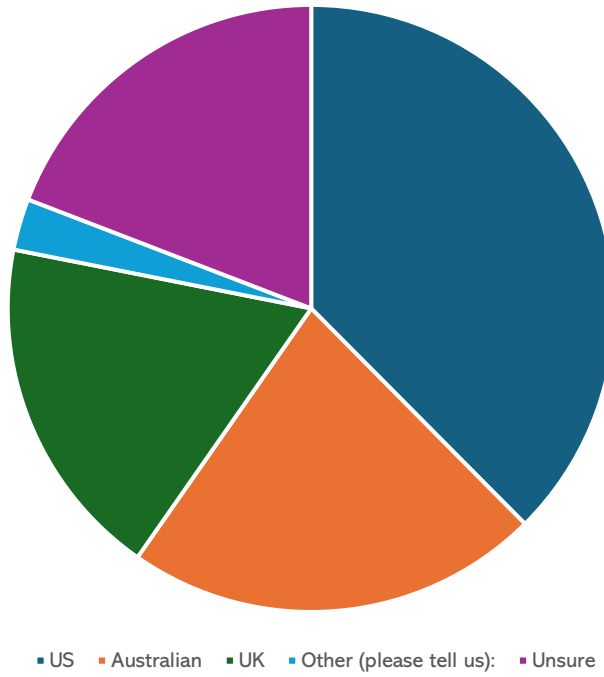
5.2.3. *Narrator accents*

The narrator accents reported among the single-narrator audiobooks to which respondents most recently listened (n=402) reveal the direct effect of the Australian audiobook market's overshadowing by the globally dominant Anglophone markets of the US and UK. **More than a third of Australians most recently listened to an audiobook narrated by somebody with a US accent (37.6% or n=151)**. 22.1% (n=89) reported an Australian accent and 18.4% (n=74) reported a UK accent; only 2.7% (n=11) reported a different accent while 19.2% (n=77) were unsure.

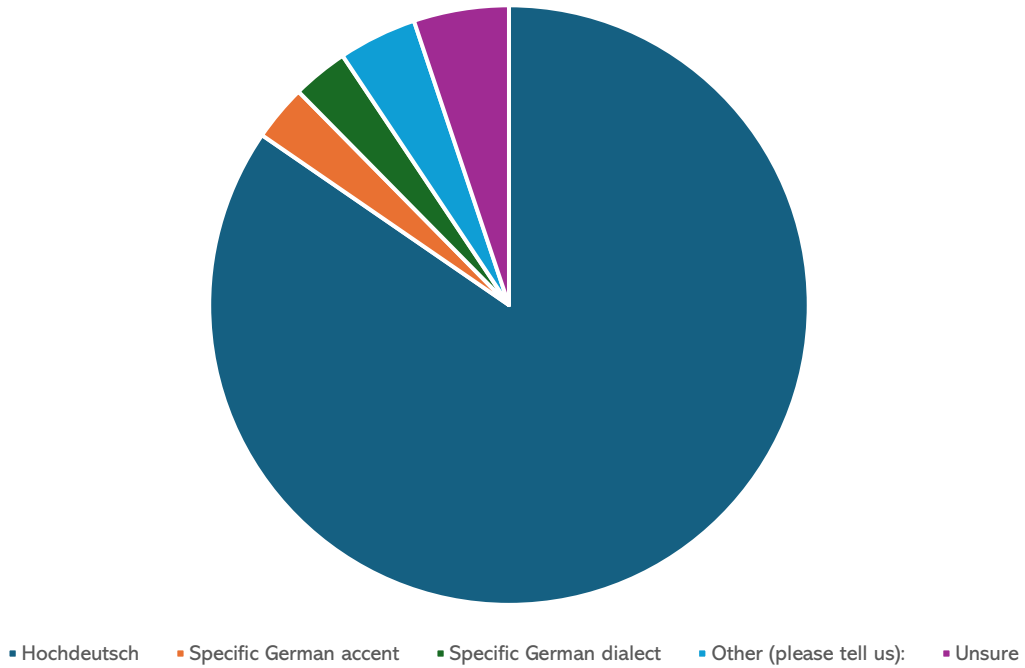
This is, of course, vastly different in Germany. 84.6% (n=280) of German respondents most recently listened to an audiobook narrator with a Hochdeutsch accent (i.e. standard or 'High' German, without specific regional accents). 3.0% (n=10) reported listening to a narrator speaking in a regional dialect, and 3.0% (n=10) listened to a narrator who spoke with a different accent. 4.2% (n=14) specified 'other' and the write-in responses show that these were listeners who were listening to non-German audiobooks: those that specified were mostly listening in English, with one each also in French, Spanish and Russian. In addition, n=17 (5.1%) German respondents indicated they were unsure of the narrator's accent.

¹⁵ There were very few non-binary respondents: given the level of gender congruence exhibited by the survey respondents, it would be interesting to know whether a more representative study of non-binary readers' listening habits would show higher rates of reading of titles narrated by non-binary narrators.

Narrator accents, Australia



Narrator accents, Germany



5.3. Speeding up and slowing down

How long does it take to listen to an audiobook? Looking at the audiobooks to which Australian respondents most recently listened, 40.2% (n=202) listened to it over the course of a week, or a shorter period of time. 29.2% (n=147) took between 1–2 weeks to listen, 14.9% (n=75) took between 2–3 weeks to listen, 7.2% (n=36) took between 3–4 weeks, and 8.5% (n=43) took longer.

Across how many sessions is a book read? While a small number of Australian audiobook listeners—4.2% (n=21)—read a book in 1 session, the majority listen across multiple sessions. Accounting for nearly two-thirds of audiobook listeners, 30.4% (n=153) of respondents said that they listen across 2–5 sessions, and 37.2% (n=187) listen across 6–10 sessions. 12.9% (n=65) listen across 11–15 sessions, and 7.4% (n=37) listen across 16–20 sessions. A small fraction reported listening across a higher number of sessions; while 2.8% (n=14) listened across 21–25 sessions and 1.8% (n=9) listened across 26–30 sessions, a slightly higher fraction—3.4% (n=17)—said that they listened across more than 30 sessions.

On average Australians listen to books faster than Germans. However, this listening takes place across a larger number of sessions. 40.2% or n=202 of Australian respondents report listening to their last audiobook in under a week, compared to 32.0% or n=160 of German respondents. Germans were slightly more likely than Australians to listen to a book in a single session (5.0%, n=25 of German respondents vs. 4.2%, n=21 of Australians) or 2–5 sessions (34.6%, n=173 of German respondents vs. 30.4%, n=153 of Australians), while Australians were much more likely than Germans to listen to a book across between 6–10 sessions (37.2%, n=187 of Australian respondents vs. 26.6%, n=133 of Germans). Audiobook listeners who *rarely* listen to audiobooks are also more likely than frequent listeners to listen to an audiobook in a week or less: 55.3% (n=57) of Australian users who rarely listen to audiobooks and 43.5% (n=37) of German readers who rarely listen to audiobooks listened to their most recent audiobook in under a week. **This could indicate that infrequent listeners prefer shorter audiobooks; it could also point to other behaviours, such as frequent listeners being more likely to have multiple books ‘on the go’ at any given time.**

The majority of audiobook listeners listen to their books at the original playback speed: 87.1% of Australian audiobook listeners (n=438) didn’t alter the speed of the most recent book they read at all. Respondents who listen rarely to audiobooks were more likely than frequent listeners to stick to the original speed—this was true for

91.3% (n=94) of those Australians who listen rarely (and 96.5% or n=109 of those Germans who listen rarely).

Of those respondents who alter the playback speed, most speed it up. 9.3% of Australian audiobook listeners (n=47) listened to the entire book at a faster rate, and 2.4% (n=12) listened to the entire book at a slower rate. (Both are less common among German audiobook readers, 5.8% or n=29 of whom sped the book up and only 0.8% or n=4 of whom slowed it down). A very small number (just over 1% of respondents, n=6 Australians and n=5 Germans) sped up or slowed down select passages in combination with listening to the rest of the book at the original speed.

More than a third of Australian audiobook listeners repeat or skip passages (and there is minimal variation—less than 1 percentage point—between Australia and Germany on this). 61.0% (n=307) of respondents neither re-read nor skip; 26.4% (n=133) listen to select passages multiple times, 5.6% (n=28) skip passages, and 7.0% (n=35) both skip and repeat passages while they're listening.

How much does the genre of a title influence these listening behaviours? Looking at how long it takes respondents to listen to different genres *based on the audiobook they most recently listened to*, fantasy aimed at an adult audience took the longest—only 20.0% (n=5) of titles in this category took respondents a week or less to read, and 16.0% (n=4) took more than a month. This corresponds with the (large) number of sessions these titles took to read, with 20.0% (n=5) of fantasy titles being read across more than 30 sessions. The quickest reads were mystery titles, 57.1% (n=16) of which took a week or less to read and only 7.1% (n=2) of which took more than a month to read. Again, this corresponds with the (small) number of sessions across which these titles were read: 10.7% (n=3) of mystery titles were listened to in a single session, 25.0% (n=7) took between 2–5 sessions, and a further 32.1% (n=9) between 6–10 sessions.

Genre impacted the likelihood that readers would alter the playback speed. None of the audiobook listeners who most recently listened to historical fiction altered the playback speed at all, and neither did any of the readers of horror titles or classic literary fiction. Self-help, romance, and children's or YA fantasy were the most likely to be sped up (13.9% or n=9 self-help titles, 13.3% or n=4 romance titles, and 13.0% or n=3 children's or YA fantasy titles were listened to at a faster-than-original playback speed).

Romance titles were the most likely to be sped up—this was true for 16.7% (n=9) of the romance titles respondents had most recently listened to. Memoir, although mostly listened to at original speed, was the genre which respondents were most likely to slow down (with 6.4% or n=4 of memoir titles listened to slower than original speed, and 6.4% or n=4 listened to faster than original speed).

The least skippable genres were mystery and contemporary literary fiction (with no readers skipping passages of either). The most skippable were horror (20%, n=2), children's or YA fantasy (17.4%, n=4), and non-fiction (17.4%, n=4).

5.4. Acquisition and Format

How are audiobooks getting to readers, and in what formats do they consume them? The two biggest channels that Australian audiobook listeners used *to acquire their most recent listen* were Audible or Amazon, which accounted for 43.5% (n=219) of acquisitions, and Spotify, which accounted for 17.1% (n=86) of acquisitions. Library apps were used by 7.8% (n=39) of Australian audiobook listeners. This was followed by purchases through online stores (6.8% or n=34 of acquisitions), purchases through in-person stores (4.4%, n=22) and in-person library borrowing (4.0%, n=20).

Most readers listened in digital formats, with only a small number listening to audiobooks through analogue carriers. 44.1% (n=222) listened to their most recent title on a mobile phone, 12.9% (n=65) on a tablet, and 10.5% (n=53) on a computer. 7.0% listened on a dedicated audio player (n=35), and 4.0% (n=20) listened using a vehicle entertainment system. 4.6% of Australian audiobook listeners used CDs (n=23), and more used vinyl records than cassettes (1.0% or n=5 *vs.* 0.4% or n=2). 1 respondent used a DAISY device and 2 listened to the radio. Respondents were also able to indicate that they used multiple of these options (e.g. listening on both their phone and through their car entertainment system, or both DAISY and computer, etc): 10.3% or n=52 of Australian audiobook listeners indicated that they listened in multiple ways to their most recent title, once again highlighting the way that audiobooks offer readers the opportunity to continue their reading across multiple different situational contexts.

6. IS LISTENING READING?

The question of whether listening to an audiobook 'counts' as reading recurs frequently in scholarly, media and popular conversations about audiobooks. Respondents were asked to outline their position on audiobook consumption as a form of reading. Analysing these responses, 40.0% (n=201) of Australian audiobook listeners considered consuming an audiobook to be 'reading', while 33.6% (n=169) said they consider it to be more 'listening' as distinct from reading; and the remaining 26.4% (n=133) gave answers that were ambivalent, neutral or undetermined.

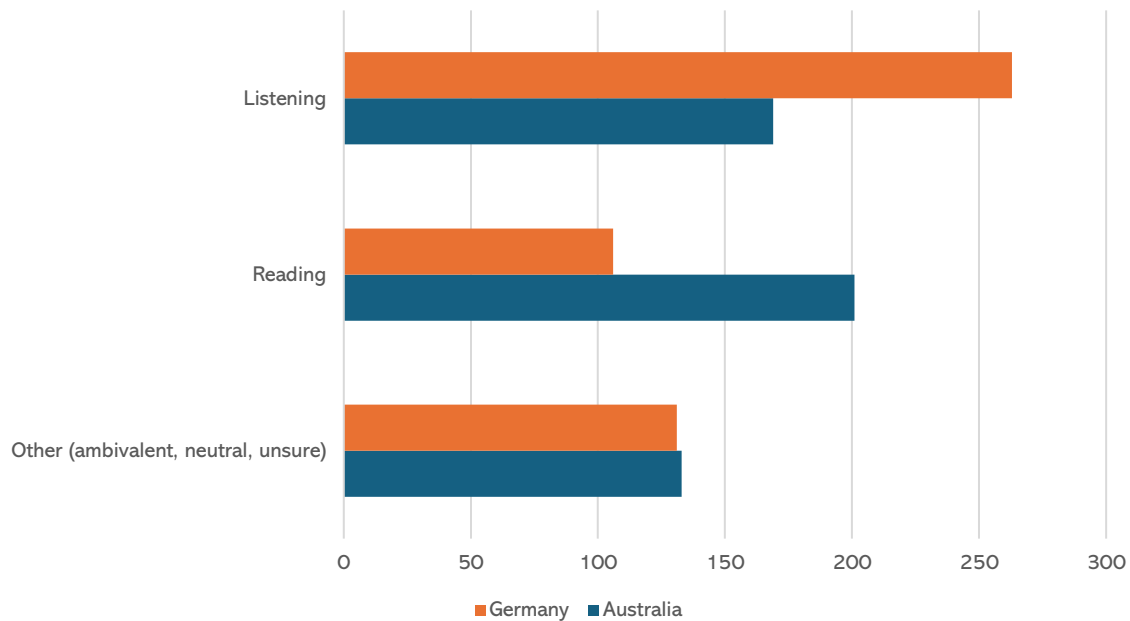
How frequently respondents listen to audiobooks closely correlates with their position on whether consuming an audiobook is listening or reading. Australian audiobook listeners who very often (once a week or more) engage with audiobooks (around three-fifths of respondents overall) consider it reading at a higher rate than the rest of the group: 45.3% (n=135) of highly frequent audiobook consumers consider engaging with an audiobook to be reading while 28.9% (n=86) consider it listening as distinct from reading, with around a quarter of highly frequent consumers (25.8% or n=77) ambivalent, neutral or undetermined.

At the other end of the frequency scale, respondents who only rarely (less than once a month) listen to audiobooks lean strongly towards listening: only 29.1% (n=30) of infrequent audiobook consumers consider engaging with an audiobook to be reading, while 47.6% (n=49) consider it listening as distinct from reading, with the remaining infrequent consumers (23.3% or n=24) ambivalent, neutral or undetermined.

Readers who consume audiobooks less than once a week but at least once a month are very evenly divided on this point between listening, reading, and ambivalent neutral or undetermined responses: 35.3% (n=36) lean towards reading; 33.3% (n=34) lean towards listening and 31.4% (n=32) are ambivalent, neutral or undetermined.

Answers to this question showed one of the starkest differences between the Australian and German populations. **Australians were nearly twice as likely as Germans to consider listening to an audiobook to be reading**, with 40.0% (n=201) of Australian respondents considering audiobook consumption a form of reading, but only 21.2% (n=106) of German respondents considering audiobook consumption a form of reading.

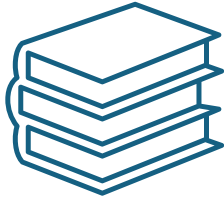
Is consuming an audiobook listening or reading?



Whether respondents consider audiobook consumption to be reading fluctuated significantly across ages. Younger readers (18–24) are slightly more likely to consider it listening than reading, but this flips at 25–34 years: 59.3% (n=51) consider it reading, compared to only 19.8% or n=17 for listening, with other 25–34-year-olds ambivalent, neutral or undecided. Similarly, 51.1% (n=48) of 35–44-year-olds consider audiobook consumption reading compared to 31.9% (n=30) who consider it listening. Between 45–54 years respondents are balanced between the two perspectives (35.7% or n=35 consider it reading and 34.7% or n=34 consider it listening). Audiobook consumers aged between 55–75 are more likely to consider it listening than reading; 32.6% (n=28) of 55–64-year-olds consider it reading vs. 46.5% (n=40) listening, and only 16.1% (n=10) of 65–74 year olds consider it reading vs. 38.7% (n=24) listening and 45.2% (n=28) ambivalent, neutral or undecided. Older respondents—above 75 years of age—are once again significantly more likely to consider consuming an audiobook reading (50.0%, n=15) than listening (20.0%, n=6).

This question connects to perceptions about audiobooks' status and cultural value, and the degree of nuance in the ambivalent responses, making up 11.5% (n=58) of respondents, demonstrate that many audiobook consumers engage critically with the terminology.

Many respondents noted that while the action itself did not qualify, for them, as “reading,” the books—once listened to in entirety—qualify as “having been read.”



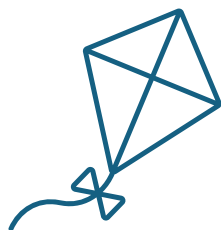
If it is a volume of something that is new to you, that is reading. If you are listening to it for a second or subsequent time, that is listening.
(Australian respondent, female, late 40s)

They are both different alternatives to consuming the same media.
(Australian respondent, male, late 20s)



I think it sort of counts as reading. Even though you're not actually reading the words. But it's a great way for people to read books who aren't very literate.
(Australian respondent, female, late 40s)

I think I see it as reading with my mind.
(Australian respondent, male, early 30s)



In some ways it counts as reading as you know about another book when it's finished.
(Australian respondent, female, late 40s)

I think that listening to a book can be called reading. The content is just coming to your brain through your ears instead of your eyes.
(Australian respondent, female, over 75)

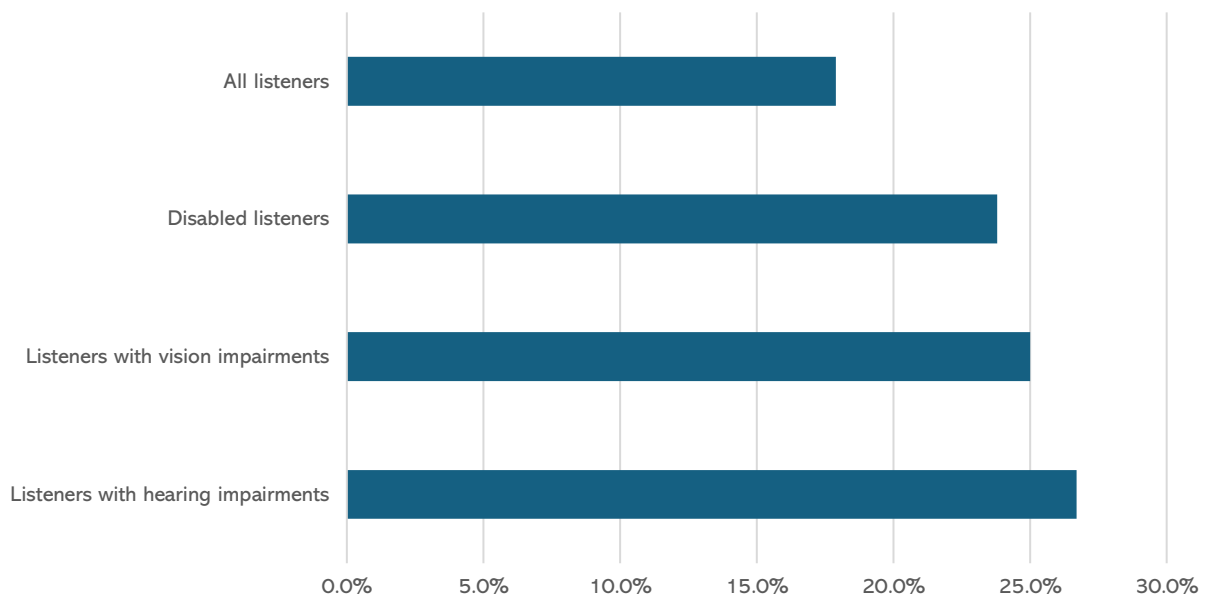


7. AI NARRATION

The majority (82.1%, n=413) of Australian audiobook listeners have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook: but 17.9% (n=90) of respondents have. Synthetic voices are a pressing concern for many audiobook producers and narrators. On the one hand, AI encroachment is seen to threaten narrators' livelihoods, and also potentially degrades the collective quality of the audiobook market overall. On the other hand, the use of Generative AI for audiobook narration offers the promise of greater access to more titles that would not have been financially viable to produce as audiobooks with human narrators.

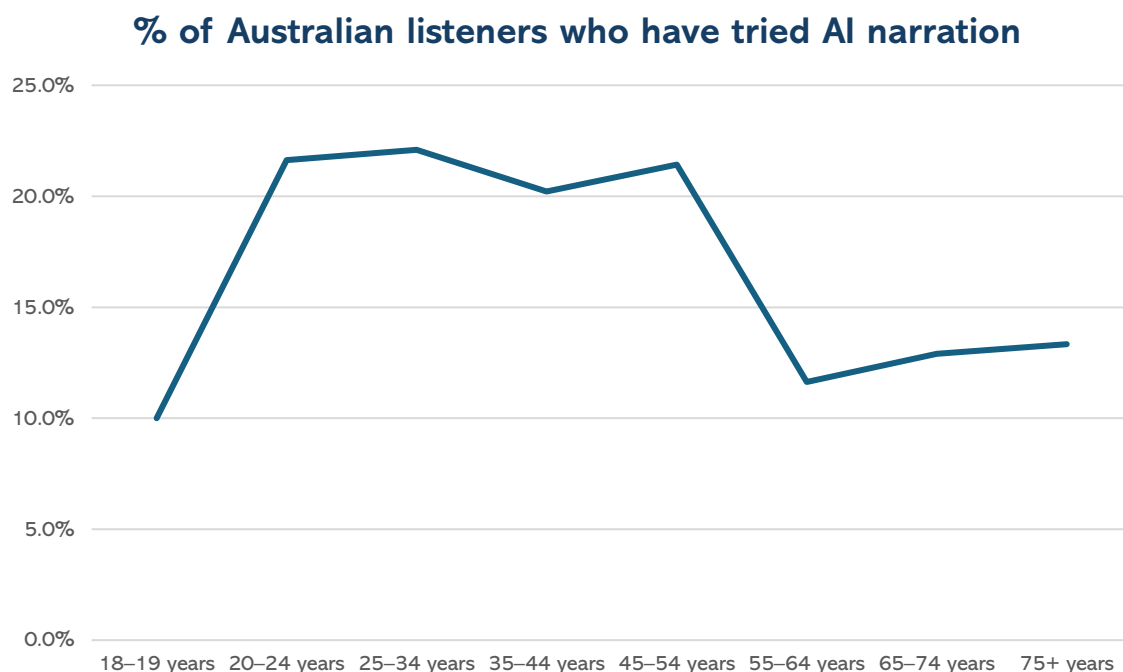
The rate of AI listening is higher among Australian audiobook listeners with disabilities than among the sample overall, with 23.8% (n=15) of disabled respondents reporting that they have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook. **The rate is higher again for disabled listeners with vision impairments or difficulty processing written language (25.0% or n=3 of whom have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook) and higher still for disabled listeners with hearing impairments or difficulty processing spoken language (26.7% or n=4 of whom have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook).** While these figures are too small to be representative, they underscore that accessibility considerations need to be front and centre of discussions around AI-narrated audiobooks.

% of Australian listeners who have tried AI narration



The proportion at which audiobook listeners report having listened to an AI-narrated audiobook is very similar in both markets: there is only around one percentage point difference, with 16.8% or n=84 of German audiobook listeners having listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

Male audiobook listeners are more likely to have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook (20.1% or n=46 of Australian men vs. 15.8% or n=43 of Australian women have listened to an AI-narrated audiobook). Openness to AI narration is also commoner among younger and middle-aged listeners, dropping off sharply after 55 years of age.



A little over half of the respondents who have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook were neutral or ambivalent in their response.¹⁶ While a small number of respondents offered highly nuanced negotiations of the pros and cons of AI, most of them don't care, aren't interested in, or haven't thought about (or even heard of) AI-narrated audiobooks. Neutral or ambivalent responses accounted for 57.6% (n=238) of respondents who said they have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

Around a quarter of the respondents who have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook explained that they don't listen to them because synthetic voices lack valuable qualities. These respondents had strong opinions on this question: they talk

¹⁶ Free-text responses were initially divided into two groups—those who have listened to at least one AI audiobook and those who have not—and then coded using an 'open coding' approach. These codes were then refined with a second pass through the data.

about emotion, nuance, pronunciation, pacing and more in relation to human narrators, and/or talk about the robotic, electronic, mechanical, wooden, tinny, stiff, or similar qualities of AI voices. They also described human-narrated audiobooks as lifelike, human, real, normal and personal; while AI voices were artificial, unnatural, not engaging, fake, unbelievable, annoying, terrible, etc. These kinds of responses accounted for 24.2% (n=100) of Australian audiobook listeners who said they have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

A further 15.7% (n=65) of respondents who have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook expressed a less detailed dislike of AI narration: most of these were shorter responses (variations of 'I don't like these voices').

Only a very small proportion—2.2% or n=9—of respondents who have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook specifically chose not to for ethical reasons. These respondents mentioned job loss, lack of trust, concerns that AI is dangerous, the possibility of introduced errors, the need to express support for human creators, and environmental concerns.

Of those readers who *have* listened to at least one AI-narrated audiobook, 41.1% (n=37) did so out of preference for AI narration. A number of these respondents described AI voices as easier to understand or clearer; many just stated that it is their preference or simply that they enjoy them. A handful explained that they felt synthetic voices introduced less bias in the text than human voices: as one reader explained, "Sometimes you better understand the perspective of the author this way".

Functionality was also important, with 15.6% (n=14) of readers who have listened to at least one AI-narrated audiobook drawn to specific functions or affordances. A number of these readers explained that they needed particular accessibility functions—including relating to vision, concentration, and navigation. As one reader explained, "It allows convenience, consistent, and often customizable listening experiences". Several of these respondents also use text-to-speech functions or another form of synthetic voice in specific settings such as to access a cookbook while cooking or to continue reading an ebook while driving. Others explain that they prefer human narration for longer texts but choose AI-narrated options for newspapers and journal articles.

Availability is a driving factor for 10.0% (n=9) of those readers who have listened to at least one AI-narrated audiobook. Meanwhile, 24.4% (n=22) don't have a strong

opinion; these respondents explained that they are “not fussed who reads it”, opting for “whatever is convenient”, “what works best”, or “is easy to find”. 6.7% (n=6) of those readers who have listened to at least one AI-narrated audiobook have tried AI-narration out of curiosity or interest in the novelty factor, and 2.2% (n=2) used the free-text field to talk about how much they dislike AI-narrated audiobooks, despite (or perhaps because of) having listened to at least one.

8. FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

8.1. Findings

There are a larger number of high frequency audiobook readers than general population surveys suggest. 59.2% of audiobook readers listen to an audiobook at least once a week. The data in this report is of active audiobook listeners—people who have listened to at least one audiobook in the last year—rather than the general population overall. This suggests that, once readers begin listening to audiobooks, many quickly become regular, habitual audiobook readers. Despite this, **multitasking continues to dominate audiobook consumption behaviours**, with only 16.9% of Australian listeners using audiobooks *without* multitasking; this is consistent with established understandings of listening practices.

The Australian market is dominated by US accents. 37.6% of Australian respondents' 'most recent listens' were narrated by a US-accented narrator, compared to only 22.1% of Australian-accented narrators. Audible accounts for the majority of the Australian audiobook market, and ACX—the most straightforward route to audiobook publication and circulation for self-published and independent authors and independent audiobook narrators alike—is not available in Australia. This is potentially further intensified by the strength of genre publishing overseas compared to in an Australian market. Platforms like Spotify are starting to offer alternatives, however this suggests a need for better audiobook production and distribution infrastructure for Australian authors and narrators.

Male listeners listen almost exclusively to male narrators, while female listeners listen to both male and female narrators relatively evenly. 81.4% of men and 45.3% of women most recently listened to a book narrated by a male narrator. This may reflect trends in print publishing and reading, as well as genre trends; it may also reflect listener preferences for gender identification with the narrator. This has potential implications for casting decisions relating to narration, in conjunction with data about narrator casting decisions across audiobook titles overall.

The uptake of AI narration is higher among listeners with vision and hearing impairments, compared to respondents overall. This likely reflects both accessibility need, and potentially greater facility with synthesised voices as a result of the prominence both now and in the past of text-to-speech technologies and screen readers. The number of respondents with vision or hearing impairments were small, and more, targeted research is required to assess readers' requirements, preferences,

and behaviours in this space. With public discussion of AI narration largely focused on economic and aesthetic concerns to date, accessibility needs to be made more prominent in conversations about AI narration.

Most people have never listened to an AI-narrated audiobook, although listeners who haven't tried AI narration are more often neutral or ambivalent about the technology rather than definitively opposed. 17.4% of Australian audiobook listeners have tried an AI-narrated audiobook or other text-to-speech technology, and among those who haven't, 57.6% are either neutral or ambivalent towards AI. The growing availability and sophistication of AI narration technologies coupled with this data on listener disposition suggests that the industry is heading towards significant changes in this space.

Lastly, **respondents are more likely to definitively classify audiobook consumption as 'reading' than 'listening'**, but this is by no means a universal position. 40.0% consider audiobook consumption 'reading', 33.6% consider it 'listening', and 26.4% are ambivalent, neutral, or undetermined in their response. The cultural status of the audiobook is complex and evolving, and readers are at the coalface of their re-evaluation.

8.2. Limitations

This research explores the listening experiences, preferences and behaviours of Australian audiobook readers. It highlights the maturity of the Australian audiobook market through the habitual nature of Australian audiobook listening, as well as the impact on listeners of the Australian market's significant structural and technological constraints.

There are several limitations to the current study, and further research is needed to address or complement these. The survey sample is of opt-in, active listeners, rather than a representative sample of the general public: while the report provides granular detail about audiobook listeners' behaviours and preferences, it does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the general public overall. Further, as with all survey data, the results are limited by respondents' desire and ability to report on their own perceptions and behaviours. Beyond usual concerns about recall, etc., this can be seen clearly for example in relation to the question about whether respondents have ever listened to an AI-narrated audiobook, which relies on respondents *knowing* whether they have ever listened to an AI-narrated audiobook.

Age and gender were controlled in the sampling process, enabling consideration of these demographics in detail, but other characteristics were unable to be controlled: findings from groups including First Nations respondents, CALD respondents, and respondents with disabilities, are thus indicative only. The coding of title genres, as well as the analysis of the two free-text responses, were done manually and are consequently subjective: the genre coding used a combination of Kirkus reviews, where available, and publisher paratexts, while the free-text response coding used open coding approaches iteratively applied across multiple passes of the dataset.

8.3. Future research

Future research directions include studies that offer a deep-dive into the listening cultures among specific communities. Indicative findings in this report highlight the need for dedicated work with First Nations and CALD listeners. The ongoing significance of audiobooks for people with vision impairments is flagged in this report, as is the importance of audiobooks for people with hearing impairments: dedicated work is required to better understand experiences, preferences and behaviours among these readers so that they can be better supported by book and library industries.

Investigation of the perceptions and expectations of non-listeners would help understand the broader status of audiobook listening in Australian cultural life, and map out the pathways and barriers that potential listeners experience. A comparative investigation of audiobook production would help untangle the reasons behind some of the dynamics identified in this report: for example, are things like the dominance of US accents or the preference for male narrators the result of listener preference, catalogue structures, genres, or something else? Meanwhile, a repeat of this survey at a later date would enable a longitudinal comparison, identifying whether this report's findings—including genre preferences, gendered reading patterns, reading frequency, AI narration and more—are stable, growing or shrinking as time progresses.

APPENDIX 1, WHO IS LISTENING?: DEMOGRAPHICS TABLES

Respondent profile, Australia (I): Age, Gender, Location

	Total (n=)	First Nations (n=)	CALD (n=)	Disability (n=)
Total	503	35	76	63
Age				
18–19 years	10	1	1	1
20–24 years	37	5	10	6
25–34 years	86	13	17	6
35–44 years	94	8	13	8
45–54 years	98	7	20	14
55–64 years	86	1	6	13
65 years and older	92	0	9	15
Gender				
Man	229	20	36	24
Woman	272	15	40	39
Gender diverse	2	0	0	0
State/Territory*				
NSW	174	15	28	21
ACT	14	1	2	2
VIC	136	5	21	17
QLD	80	5	13	8
SA	44	1	5	5
WA	40	5	3	7
TAS	10	2	4	2
NT	3	1	0	1
Location**				
Metro	393	24	67	42
Regional	103	11	9	20
Remote	4	0	0	1

*Residents were asked to supply a postcode; State/Territory was not identifiable for two of the postcodes

**Postcodes supplied were coded according to ASGS in line with three-tier model used in NAPS interpretation by Creative Australia

Respondent profile, Germany (I): Age, Gender, Location

	Total (n=)	First Nations (n=)	CALD (n=)	Disability (n=)	Migration status (n=)
Total	500	-	85	36	70
Age					
18–19 years	9	-	3	1	5
20–24 years	37	-	13	2	13
25–34 years	87	-	19	4	15
35–44 years	92	-	13	4	10
45–54 years	101	-	15	8	13
55–64 years	102	-	12	7	7
65 years and older	72	-	10	10	7
Gender					
Man	232	-	37	15	31
Woman	268	-	48	21	39
Gender diverse	0	-	0	0	0
State/Territory					
NSW	-	-	-	-	-
ACT	-	-	-	-	-
VIC	-	-	-	-	-
QLD	-	-	-	-	-
SA	-	-	-	-	-
WA	-	-	-	-	-
TAS	-	-	-	-	-
NT	-	-	-	-	-
Location					
Metro	-	-	-	-	-
Regional	-	-	-	-	-
Remote	-	-	-	-	-

Respondent profile, Australia (II): Employment, Income and Education

	Total (n=)	First Nations (n=)	CALD (n=)	Disability (n=)
Total	503	35	76	63
Employment				
Employed	345	30	58	22
Studying	18	0	5	4
Unemployed	138	5	13	35
Prefer not to say	2	0	0	2
Income				
Less than \$40,000	72	4	4	20
\$40,000 - \$69,999	94	5	19	11
\$70,000 - \$99,999	85	3	11	13
\$100,000 - \$139,999	70	7	8	6
\$140,000 - \$169,999	48	2	9	4
\$170,000 - \$199,999	45	3	10	1
More than \$200,000	65	11	12	4
Don't know	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to say	24	0	3	4
Education				
Did not complete high school	27	1	1	9
High school diploma	85	7	7	10
TAFE or technical	128	3	16	21
University	175	12	29	16
Post-graduate	88	12	23	7

Respondent profile, Germany (II): Employment, Income and Education

	Total (n=)	First Nations (n=)	CALD (n=)	Disability (n=)	Migration Status (n=)
Total	500	-	85	36	70
Employment					
Employed	351	-	64	21	46
Studying	19	-	7	1	7
Unemployed	129	-	14	14	17
Prefer not to say	1	-	0	0	0
Income					
Less than €22000	72	-	12	6	12
€22000 - €39999	132	-	16	13	19
€40000 - €59999	125	-	23	9	22
€60000 - €77999	64	-	15	2	3
€78000 - €94999	34	-	5	4	6
€95000 - €109999	13	-	0	1	0
More than \$200,000	35	-	11	0	3
Don't know	5	-	1	1	3
Prefer not to say	20	-	2	0	2
Education					
Did not complete high school	151	-	19	16	18
High school diploma	84	-	18	3	18
TAFE or technical	130	-	13	11	13
University	125	-	32	6	20
Post-graduate	10	-	3	0	1

APPENDIX 2, AUDIOBOOKS IN A CULTURAL LIFE: READING FREQUENCY; MULTI-TASKING; OTHER CONSUMPTION

Frequency x nationality (rarely: less than 1xmonth; often: between 1xweek and 1xmonth; very often: 1xweek)

	Australia	Germany	Total
Rarely	103	85	188
Often	102	118	220
Very often	298	297	595
Total	503	500	1003

Frequency x gender; Australia only

	Non-binary	Woman	Man
Rarely	1	61	41
Often	0	51	51
Very often	1	160	137
Total	2	272	229

Frequency x age; Australia only

	18–19 years	20–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years	75+ years
Rarely	2	7	12	11	23	21	18	9
Often	2	9	15	22	19	20	6	9
Very often	6	21	59	61	56	45	38	12
Total	10	37	86	94	98	86	62	30

Frequency x disability; Australia only

	Identifies as d/Deaf, disabled, or person with disability	Impairment to vision or difficulty processing written language	Impairment to hearing or difficulty processing spoken language
Rarely	14	1	2
Often	12	2	3
Very often	37	9	10
Total	63	12	15

Multitasking while using audiobooks, and print and ebooks x nationality

	Audiobooks			Print or ebooks		
	Australia	Germany	Total	Australia	Germany	Total
Commuting	158	110	268	146	96	242
Sleeping/falling asleep	179	207	386	190	202	392
Cooking	137	139	276	89	94	183
Housework	152	185	337	83	111	194
Exercise	133	94	227	86	65	151
Using my phone	121	101	222	123	100	223
Gardening	76	63	139	49	35	84
Other	16	18	34	17	16	33
None of the above	85	103	188	145	173	318

Multitasking while using audiobooks x age; Australia only

	18–19 years	20–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years	75+ years
Commuting	6	12	39	33	28	26	11	3
Sleeping/falling asleep	4	7	29	30	37	40	25	7
Cooking	2	16	34	23	28	15	17	2
Housework	4	13	43	33	30	11	16	2
Exercise	3	13	36	28	27	8	12	6
Using my phone	5	12	33	29	18	13	9	2
Gardening	0	7	17	16	10	9	14	3
Other	0	1	1	3	2	4	2	3
None of the above	0	3	7	9	15	20	19	12
Total	10	37	86	94	98	86	62	30

Frequency across different media; Australia and Germany combined

	Audiobook	Print Book	Ebook	Radio	Music	Podcast	Tv/Film	Video Game
Never	0	78	320	72	4	152	4	161
Rarely	188	144	146	71	11	128	13	60
Often	220	194	185	70	43	184	55	91
Very often	595	587	352	790	945	539	931	691
Total	1003	1003	1003	1003	1003	1003	1003	1003

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x print (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	6	8	24	10	3	27
Rarely	32	26	21	28	20	17
Often	22	30	48	18	37	39
Very often	43	38	205	29	58	214
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x ebooks (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	34	27	74	37	52	96
Rarely	30	24	21	23	23	25
Often	22	29	52	11	25	46
Very often	17	22	151	14	18	130
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x radio (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	9	11	22	4	10	16
Rarely	9	8	21	10	5	18
Often	10	7	19	7	12	15
Very often	75	76	236	64	91	248
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x music (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	0	0	0	2	0	2
Rarely	3	0	6	0	0	2
Often	3	3	19	4	6	8
Very often	97	99	273	79	112	285
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x podcasts (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	25	17	42	18	12	38
Rarely	25	18	25	23	12	25
Often	23	27	36	26	30	42
Very often	30	40	195	18	64	192
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x tv or movies (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	1	0	2	1	0	0
Rarely	1	0	4	2	3	3
Often	5	10	16	5	8	11
Very often	96	92	276	77	107	283
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

Frequency of audiobooks (rarely, often, very often) x videogames (never, rarely, often, very often) x nationality

	Australia			Germany		
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Rarely	Often	Very often
Never	23	21	48	14	18	37
Rarely	7	10	17	7	9	10
Often	10	14	24	9	12	22
Very often	63	57	209	55	79	228
Total	103	102	298	85	118	297

APPENDIX 3, LISTENING PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOUR: GENRES, NARRATORS, LISTENING SPEEDS, AND FORMAT AND ACQUISITION CHANNEL

Genre preferences – audiobook x print and ebook x nationality

	Audiobooks		Print and ebooks	
	Australia	Germany	Australia	Germany
A popular or genre novel, e.g. crime, fantasy, romance, action and adventure, etc.	283	318	243	199
A literary novel, e.g. prize-winning title or classic literary work	120	192	118	143
Memoir or autobiography	146	83	119	61
Other creative non-fiction e.g. biography or history	117	139	92	113
Instructional non-fiction e.g. guide book or cookbook	91	126	91	110
A play	38	79	29	54
Poetry	43	53	40	50
Graphic novel or comic	76	35	79	56
A short story	131	161	114	95
Children's fiction or non-fiction e.g. picture books or chapter books for younger readers	46	54	49	44
YA fiction or non-fiction	96	71	87	62
Other (please tell us):	17	11	11	10
Total	503	500	345	294

Number of narrators x nationality

	1	2	More than 2
Australia	402	77	24
Germany	331	110	59

Number of narrators x frequency of audiobook listening; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Rarely	90	11	2
Often	87	8	7
Very often	225	58	15

Number of narrators x gender; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Non-binary	2	0	0
Woman	223	38	11
Man	177	39	13

Number of narrators x age; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
18–19 years	6	3	1
20–24 years	31	4	2
25–34 years	67	14	5
35–44 years	73	14	7
45–54 years	82	13	3
55–64 years	68	16	2
65–74 years	52	10	
75+ years	23	3	4

Number of narrators x frequency of print reading; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Never	27	4	7
Rarely	65	11	3
Often	84	9	7
Very often	226	53	7

Number of narrators x frequency of ebook reading; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Never	114	17	4
Rarely	62	7	6
Often	74	22	7
Very often	152	31	7

Number of narrators x frequency of podcast listening; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Never	73	9	2
Rarely	56	9	3
Often	72	7	7
Very often	201	52	12

Number of narrators x frequency of videogame playing; Australia only

	1	2	More than 2
Never	78	12	2
Rarely	25	4	5
Often	42	3	3
Very often	257	58	14

Narrator gender, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator; Australia only

Non-binary narrator	2
Female narrator	136
Male narrator	247
Unsure	17

Narrator gender, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator x reader gender x nationality

	Australia				Germany		
	Non-binary	Woman	Man	Total	Woman	Man	Total
Non-binary narrator	0	1	1	2	2	1	3
Female narrator	0	109	27	136	67	15	82
Male narrator	2	101	144	247	98	137	235
Unsure	0	12	5	17	9	2	11
Total	2	223	177	402	176	155	331

Narrator gender, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator x age: Australian, male readers

	18–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years	75+ years
Male narrator	12	18	26	27	26	28	7
Non-binary narrator				1			
Unsure of narrator gender			2		1	1	1
Female narrator		5	4	8	3	2	5
Total	12	23	32	36	30	31	13

Narrator gender, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator x age: Australian, female readers

	12	13	16	22	19	13	6
Male narrator						1	
Non-binary narrator	2	2	1	1	3	2	1
Unsure of narrator gender	11	29	23	22	16	5	3
Female narrator	4	44	40	45	38	21	10
Total	12	13	16	22	19	13	6

Narrator accent, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator, Australia

Australian	89
Other (please tell us):	11
UK	74
Unsure	77
US	151
Total	402

Narrator accent, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator, Germany

Accent	10
Dialect	10
Hochdeutsch	280
Other (please tell us):	14
Unsure	17
Total	331

Narrator accent, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator x gender, Australia

	Man	Non-binary	Woman
Australian	47	0	42
Other (please tell us):	3	0	8
UK	33	0	41
Unsure	27	1	49
US	67	1	83
Total	177	2	223

Narrator accent, last audiobook listened to, audiobooks with single narrator x gender, Germany

	Man	Woman
Accent	7	3
Dialect	3	7
Hochdeutsch	136	144
Other (please tell us):	2	12
Unsure	7	10
Total	155	176

How long did it take you to read the book x nationality

	Australia	Germany
1 week or less	202	160
1-2 weeks	147	177
2-3 weeks	75	97
3-4 weeks	36	32
More than 1 month	43	34

Over how many sessions did you read the book x nationality

	Australia	Germany
1 session	21	25
2-5 sessions	153	173
6-10 sessions	187	133
11-15 sessions	65	82
16-20 sessions	37	41
21-25 sessions	14	15
26-30 sessions	9	7
More than 30 sessions	17	24

Playback speed x nationality

	Australia	Germany
Original speed only	438	462
Faster than original speed only	47	29
Slower than original speed only	12	4
Combination of original and faster than original speed	3	4
Combination of original and slower than original speed	3	0
Combination of original, faster, and slower than original speed	0	1

Re-reading and skipping behaviour x nationality

	Australia	Germany
Neither re-read nor skipped any passages	307	310
Listened to some passages multiple times	133	130
Skipped some passages	28	32
Both re-read some and skipped some passages	35	28

Acquisition channel

Amazon or Audible	219
Spotify	86
Other streaming services	8
Purchased from in person store	22
Purchased from online store	34
Direct from the author	12
Google Books	17
In person library borrowing	20
Library apps	39
Pirated	10
Legal free options e.g. Librivox	6
Other or multiple	30

Format

Radio	2	0.4%
Cassette	4	0.8%
CD	23	4.6%
DAISY	1	0.2%
Preloaded USB	10	2.0%
Dedicated audio player	35	7.0%
Vehicle	20	4.0%
Computer	53	10.5%
Mobile phone	222	44.1%
Tablet	65	12.9%
Record	5	1.0%
Other	11	2.2%
Multiple	52	10.3%
Total	503	100.0%

APPENDIX 4, IS LISTENING READING?

Listening vs. reading x nationality

	Australia	Germany
Listening	169	263
Reading	201	106
Other (ambivalent, neutral, unsure)	133	131

Listening vs. reading x audiobook consumption frequency; Australia only

	Rarely	Often	Very often
Listening	49	34	86
Reading	30	36	135
Other (ambivalent, neutral, unsure)	24	32	77
Total	103	102	298

Listening vs. reading x gender x nationality

	Australia			Germany	
	Non-binary	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
Listening	1	92	76	151	112
Reading	1	112	88	59	47
Other (ambivalent, neutral, unsure)	0	68	65	58	73
Total	2	272	229	268	232

Listening vs. reading x age; Australia only

	18–19 years	20–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years	75+ years
Listening	6	12	17	30	34	40	24	6
Reading	3	11	51	48	35	28	10	15
Other (ambivalent, neutral, unsure)	1	14	18	16	29	18	28	9
Total	10	37	86	94	98	86	62	30

APPENDIX 5, AI NARRATION

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x nationality

	Australia	Germany
No	413	416
Yes	90	84

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x gender x nationality

	Australia			Germany	
	Non-binary	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
No	1	229	183	223	193
Yes	1	43	46	45	39
Total	2	272	229	268	232

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x age; Australia only

	18–19 years	20–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years	75+ years
No	9	29	67	75	77	76	54	26
Yes	1	8	19	19	21	10	8	4
Total	10	37	86	94	98	86	62	30

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x audiobook listening frequency; Australia only

	Rarely	Often	Very often
No	85	89	239
Yes	18	13	59
Total	103	102	298

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x disabled readers; Australia only

	No	Prefer not to say	Yes
No	359	6	48
Yes	75		15
Total	434	6	63

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x disabled readers, asked if they have hearing impairment/difficulty processing spoken language; Australia only

No	11
Yes	4
Total	15

Has listened to at least one AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook x disabled readers, asked if they have vision impairment/difficulty processing written language; Australia only

No	9
Yes	3
Total	12

Why have you not listened to an AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook?

	Australia	Germany	Total
General expression of dislike of AI	65	67	132
Neutral/ambivalent about AI vs human narrator	238	243	481
Environmental concerns	1	0	1
Ethical stance	9	11	20
Concerns about quality of AI voices	100	95	195
Total	413	416	829

Why have you listened to an AI-narrated or text-to-speech audiobook?

	Australia	Germany	Total
Only AI available	9	8	17
Dislike AI narration but listened anyway	2	8	10
Neutral/ambivalent about AI vs human narrator	22	14	36
Functionality of AI	14	18	32
Novelty	6	5	11
Quality/enjoyment of AI voices	37	31	68
Total	90	84	174