

Savanta:



MANY WAYS IN - November 2025

Reimagining Reading Engagement Toolkit



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

In partnership with

**National
Literacy
Trust**

Change your story

Introduction

Reading engagement is fundamental to educational attainment, cognitive development, and lifelong opportunity. However, recent evidence reveals a stark generational decline: only one in three children and young people aged 8-18 report enjoying reading in their free time, whilst just one in five read something daily. This decline extends beyond childhood, with adults citing barriers including time pressures, low confidence, and limited access to relevant materials.

In response, the government has commissioned The National Year of Reading 2026 - a private/public funded collective action campaign. The campaign will be led by the National Literacy Trust in collaboration with a consortium of leading literacy organisations, publishers and other partners.

Whilst this campaign is for the whole nation, two priority groups have been identified: boys aged 10-16 and parents/carers from disadvantaged communities – representing both the greatest need and opportunity for intervention. The third priority group for the campaign is children under 5 and their families (not covered by this research).

Supported using public funding by Arts Council England, the National Literacy Trust commissioned Savanta to conduct research to help ensure that the 2026 national reading campaign effectively reaches and motivates those who need it most.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit summarises the key findings from the research commissioned by National Literacy Trust, conducted by Savanta.

It is intended for use by those working in charities and organisations that promote reading, as well as the marketing, communications, and creative agencies that support them.

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Methodology

Our approach involved four key phases, each building on the previous stage to deliver comprehensive insight into reading attitudes and behaviours.

PHASE 1



Rapid evidence review

Rapid evidence review of 22 UK studies which identified gaps in audience understanding that needed to be captured.

PHASE 2



Exploratory qualitative interviews

Qualitative research with 29 participants (4 focus groups + 13 interviews) including boys aged 10-16, disadvantaged parents, and adults who don't see themselves as readers.

PHASE 3



Survey of adults and children

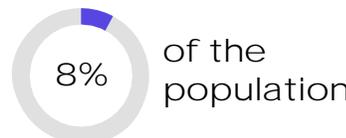
- Comprehensive survey of 6,149 UK adults and children aged 10+.
- Boosts of priority audiences were applied including parents, disadvantaged households, and those from minoritised ethnic groups.
- The COM-B framework for behaviour change was embedded in the survey design to provide clear insight into potential interventions.

PHASE 4

Segmentation and Key Drivers Analysis

- A segmentation analysis (factor & cluster analysis) identified 6 segments based on their primary reading barriers.
- A Key Drivers Analysis was conducted to identify the impact of a) demographic & contextual factors and b) barriers affecting reading behaviour.

Introduction to the Segments

The Keen	The Self-Conscious	The Modern	The Distracted	The Disengaged	The Unconfident
 <p>23% of the population</p>	 <p>9% of the population</p>	 <p>14% of the population</p>	 <p>29% of the population</p>	 <p>16% of the population</p>	 <p>8% of the population</p>
<p>Motivated by an intrinsic love of reading, they perceive no significant barriers.</p> 	<p>Enjoy sharing reading with others – but also sensitive to how reading is perceived by others.</p> 	<p>Favour digital formats for reading and use these to overcome perceived access barriers.</p> 	<p>Express a desire to read but motivation is undermined by other priorities and distractions.</p> 	<p>Lack intrinsic interest or enjoyment in reading, with a preference for other content.</p> 	<p>Face challenges with reading skills and lack confidence in their reading ability.</p> 

← High engagement with reading

Low engagement with reading →

Segment Cheat Sheet | Key traits (1)

	The Keen	The Self-Conscious	The Modern	The Distracted	The Disengaged	The Unconfident
	23% of the population	9% of the population	14% of the population	29% of the population	16% of the population	8% of the population
Demographics	Skews older (45+), female, white ethnicity and more likely to be homeowners	More likely to be younger adults/middle aged (25-44), mixed gender, lower socioeconomic grade	Skews younger, male, lower socioeconomic group, more likely to be parents/carers	Mix across population: age/sex/social grades but more likely to be adults (25+)	Skews younger, male. Most young boys are in this segment	Mixed ages, skews male. More likely to have a disability that impacts reading
Confidence in reading	97%	95%	96%	96%	93%	64%
Consider themselves a 'reader'	83%	82%	83%	64%	45%	46%
Read at least weekly	82%	72%	73%	59%	47%	45%
Content Preferences	Prefer all types of reading in comparison with other segments, especially mystery and true stories	Prefer mystery stories, and over-index on their preference for fact and record books vs. other segments	Prefer mystery and true stories, also over-index on technology and science & nature	Prefer true stories and over-index on their preference for reading current events/news	Comparatively low levels of preference for any type of reading, most interested in true stories	Lowest interest in any type of reading of all segments, most likely to say, 'I don't read in my free time'
Free Time Activities	Approaching half (46%) choose reading as their preferred free time activity	A quarter select reading as their preferred free-time activity, higher than other segments	Level with The Self-Conscious, a quarter select reading as their preferred free-time activity.	Over-index on social interaction, particularly spending time outdoors. However, preferred activity is watching TV/videos/films	Most likely to watch TV/videos/films in their free time, and over index on gaming & online entertainment	Over-index on gaming & online entertainment, they prefer visual content (TV/videos/film)
Media Preferences	Top platform: WhatsApp/messaging apps. Over-index in using news sources (online and paper)	Top platform: YouTube	Top platform: YouTube. Over-index in using Twitter/X and AI	Top platform: YouTube. Over-index in Facebook usage compared to other segments	Top platform: WhatsApp/messaging apps. Over-index on Snapchat use compared to other segments	Top platform: YouTube. Over-index on using Snapchat and Discord

Segment Cheat Sheet | Key traits (2)

	The Keen	The Self-Conscious	The Modern	The Distracted	The Disengaged	The Unconfident
	23% of the population	9% of the population	14% of the population	29% of the population	16% of the population	8% of the population
Reading Influences	Driven by their own personal interests and interest in specific topics, as well as specific authors.	Significantly more likely to rely on recommendations from online reviews and availability of content when reading.	Personal interest is the main driving influence – they over-index on availability/ accessibility, and diversity/ representation compared to other segments.	Self-driven factors are much more likely to influence this segment. Rely on online search engines to learn something new more so than any other segment.	Relatively low levels of influence of any type, with the most popular being personal interest.	Low levels of influence of any kind, but over-index on length of and availability of text. When learning something new they are significantly more likely to ask friends/ family.
Reading Motivation	Significantly more likely to be motivated by the enjoyment, relaxation and escape they get from reading – it already exists in their routine.	Enjoyment and relaxation are important for this group, as is the self-improvement and social connection they get, more so than other segments.	Enjoyment is the driving motivator for this segment. This segment is also more likely to value the social aspect of reading.	Relaxation, escapism and mental wellbeing as key motivators, they also over-index on curiosity.	Relaxation is the top motivator for this segment, although comparatively lower proportions select it. After the Struggling, they are the second most likely group to say they don't get any enjoyment from reading	Over-indexes in connection, self-improvement and impressing others as top motivators. They are the segment most likely to say they get "no enjoyment at all" from reading.
Primary Barriers	Confident in reading, with high enjoyment – this segment is defined by its lack of tested barriers.	Over-indexes in ranking feeling self-conscious of what others might think of their reading and it being seen as uncool by peers/ family.	Over-indexes in there not being any bookshops and libraries near them, as well as distraction and lack of time.	Lack of time and distraction define this segment – they are significantly more likely to identify these barriers than other segments.	A preference for watching things or playing games and spending time on their phone are top barriers. They are also more likely to say that reading is 'boring'.	Over-indexes in finding reading difficult and hard to concentrate on, as well as lacking reading skills, e.g., reading too slowly and thinking they aren't good at it.

Readers are most motivated by the pure pleasure of reading

Motivations to read in free time

Enjoyment

say they are motivated by enjoyment, relaxation, escapism, calm and wellbeing



Learning

say they are motivated by curiosity, wanting to find out more about topics, and improving knowledge and skills



Connection

say they are motivated by personal recommendation, opportunity for discussion and connection, and impressing others



Passing time

say they are motivated by boredom and passing the time



Habit

say reading is part of their routine



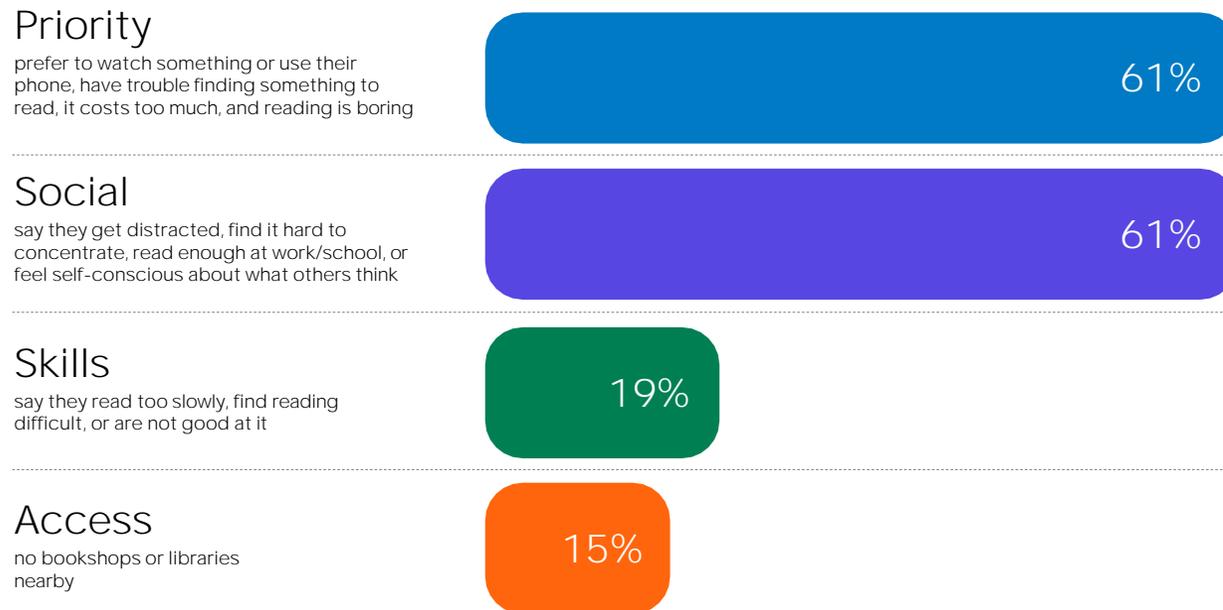
How Does This Look For NLT Priority Audiences?

	BOYS AGED 10-16	GIRLS AGED 10-16	PARENTS/CARERS	DISADVANTAGED PARENTS
Enjoyment	65%	79%	79%	83%
Learning	58%	56%	51%	52%
Connection	40%	41%	29%	31%
Passing time	25%	22%	19%	17%
Habit	18%	23%	21%	23%

Q21. What are the main reasons or motivations that you read in your free time? Base: All respondents (n=6,149) Reduced using a factor analysis.

Distractions and a failure to prioritise reading are the most common barriers

Barriers to reading in free time



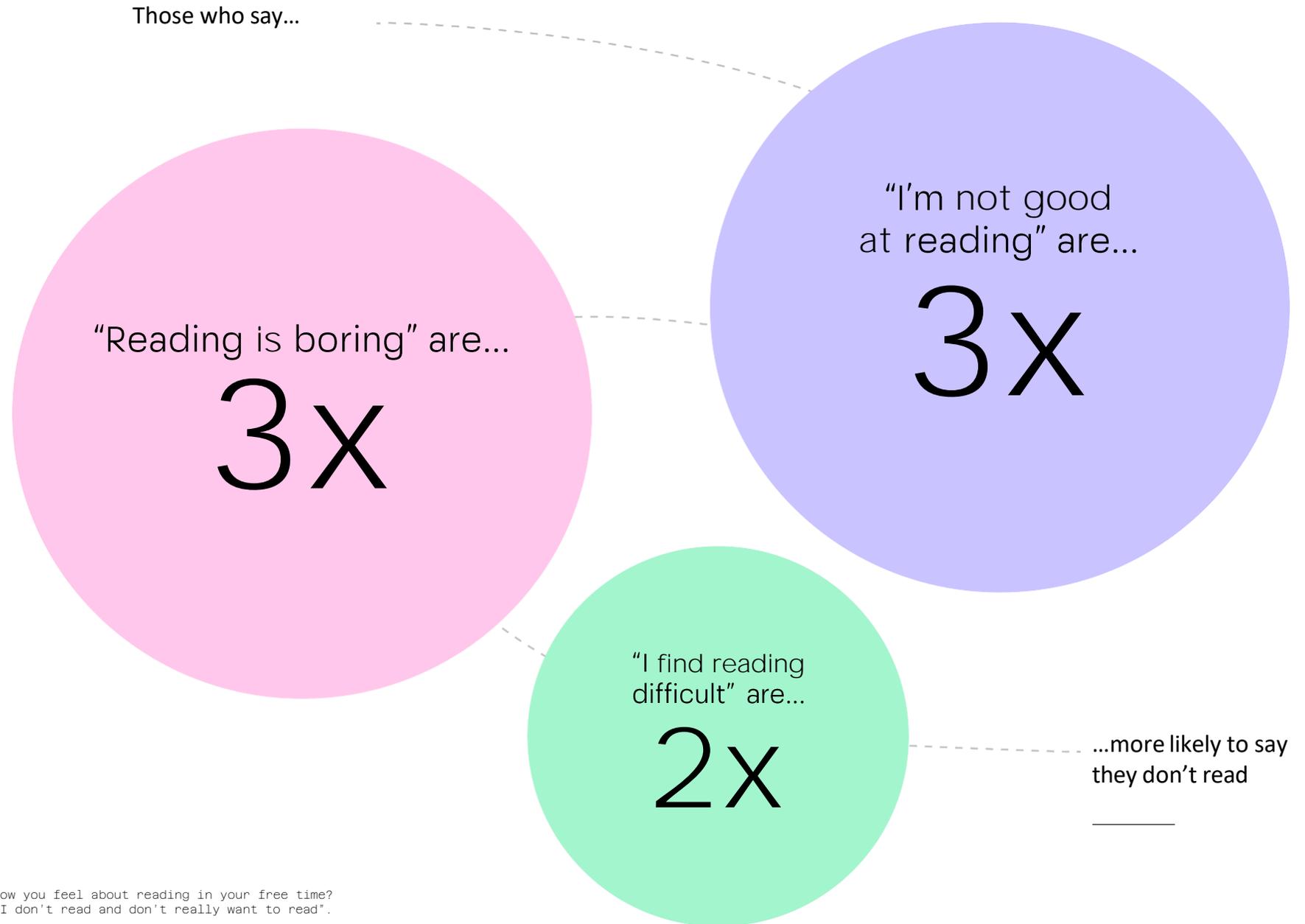
How Does This Look For NLT Priority Audiences?

	BOYS AGED 10-16	GIRLS AGED 10-16	PARENTS/ CARERS	DISADVANTAGED PARENTS
Priority	68%	70%	60%	59%
Social	67%	69%	61%	58%
Skills	19%	17%	18%	18%
Access	21%	24%	17%	19%

Q16. What are the top three things that stop you from reading more in your free time? Base: All respondents (n=6,149) Reduced using a factor analysis.

A lack of engagement and skills have by far the greatest impact on likelihood not to read

Key Drivers Analysis: Barriers driving disengagement from reading



DEPENDENT VARIABLE: 08. Which of the following best describes how you feel about reading in your free time?
NET: Those who replied "I don't really think about reading" or "I don't read and don't really want to read".

