

NEWS LESSON

Why Is It So Hard to Finish a Book?

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes you put a book down after a few pages?
2. Would you rather reread a favourite or try something unfamiliar?
3. Where do you find it easiest to pay attention?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**achievement**	☐	A	doing something again and again to get better
2	**ordinary**	☐	B	something you do again and again without thinking
3	**habit**	☐	C	happening often, at the same times
4	**programme**	☐	D	normal, not special
5	**regular**	☐	E	happy and full of energy about something
6	**excited**	☐	F	the thing a book or a talk is about
7	**practice**	☐	G	a plan of things to do, step by step
8	**subject**	☐	H	something good you did with hard work

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The book is open, the phone makes a sound and twenty minutes disappear.

1 You read the same paragraph twice, but it still does not make sense. Your phone made a sound a few minutes ago; one message became a video, then another. The book is still open, but the story has disappeared from your mind. Many people say they want to read more and even buy books they are excited about. The difficult part is staying with one page when a screen keeps offering something new.

2 Reading for pleasure has become less common in some places. A study published in 2025 looked at how Americans spent their time between 2003 and 2023. It found that the number of people reading for pleasure on an average day had fallen. However, other research shows that many Americans still read at least one book in a year, including e-books and audiobooks. The first measures an ordinary day. The second asks about a whole year, so the two results do not contradict each other.

3 Phones may be part of the problem. They offer messages, games, videos and news at any moment. A book asks us to stay with one story or subject for longer. That can feel difficult when we are used to changing activities every few seconds. But reading is not only about concentration. People also need time, quiet places and books they find interesting.

4 In August 2026, the novelist Naomi Alderman described an eight-week plan to help people get back into reading. The idea was similar to a beginner's exercise programme: start with a short time each day and slowly increase it. Someone might begin with ten minutes and then work towards longer reading sessions. The aim was not to finish as many books as possible, but to enjoy the habit again.

5 There are plenty of ways to make reading easier. Choose a book that interests you rather than one you think you should read. Switch your phone off for a while, or listen to an audiobook when travelling. Reading with a friend can also help. Finishing a chapter may not seem like a huge achievement, but regular practice can make it easier to concentrate. A book does not need to compete with everything on your phone. Sometimes it simply needs ten quiet minutes.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Naomi Alderman's plan lasted eight weeks. T F NG
2. A 2025 study looked at how Americans spent their time from 2003 to 2023. T F NG
3. Naomi Alderman's plan aimed to help people finish as many books as possible. T F NG
4. The plan has been tried by thousands of readers. T F NG
5. The text says phones are the only reason people read less. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

avoid	compete	concentrate	contradict	disappeared	increase	offer

1. The two reports measure different things, so they do not _____ each other.
2. It is hard to _____ on homework when your phone keeps making noise.
3. A slow story can find it hard to _____ with a funny video.
4. My free evening quickly _____ while I watched videos.
5. If you want to read more, you could _____ the time you spend on books each week.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Your phone _____ a sound a few minutes ago. (MAKE)
2. A study _____ in 2025 looked at how Americans spent their time. (PUBLISH)
3. A book asks us _____ with one story for longer. (STAY)
4. That can feel difficult when we are used to _____ activities often. (CHANGE)
5. The study found that the number of people reading for pleasure had _____ . (FALL)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A phrasal verb is a verb plus a small word. The small word changes the meaning, so learn them together.

along	back	down	off	towards	up	with

1. Someone might begin with ten minutes and then work _____ longer reading sessions.
2. Switch your phone _____ for a while if you want to read.
3. The writer described a plan to help people get _____ into reading.
4. A book asks us to stay _____ one story for longer.
5. Keep your phone out of reach so you do not pick it _____ every minute.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make reading feel like a pleasure again?
2. Does an audiobook give you what you want from a book?
3. Would reading ten pages happily beat finishing a book you disliked?

9 Role-play: ten minutes a day

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend who wants to read more

You've bought lots of books but you hardly open them. Ask your friend to join you for ten quiet minutes of reading every evening, with phones off. Explain why it would help.

Student B · the friend who loves scrolling

You're tired after work and scrolling relaxes you. Ask questions and explain your worries. You can say yes, no, or yes with a different plan.

Useful phrases

I'd love to get back into reading.
Could we try ten minutes a day?
I'm too tired by the evening.
What if we switched our phones off?
That's a fair point, but I'd rather start small.
Let's give it a week and see how it goes.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree a plan, and is it realistic?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 D · 3 B · 4 G · 5 C · 6 E · 7 A · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 contradict · 2 concentrate · 3 compete · 4 disappeared · 5 increase

6 Verb forms

1 made · 2 published · 3 to stay · 4 changing · 5 fallen

7 Language focus

1 towards · 2 off · 3 back · 4 with · 5 up

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