NEWS LESSON

Have We Lost the Habit of Reading?



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	**protected**	☐	A	find something very hard to do
2	**sustained**	☐	B	slowly, a little at a time
3	**inspired**	☐	C	given an idea by something else
4	**gradually**	☐	D	continuing for a long time without stopping
5	**struggle**	☐	E	kept safe so that nothing can disturb it
6	**classic**	☐	F	a famous book that people still read
7	**lifestyle**	☐	G	a way of doing something
8	**approach**	☐	H	the way a person lives every day

3 Read

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

One message, and the paragraph has to be read again. The wish to read is still there; the uninterrupted half hour is not.

1 You return to the novel after checking one message and realise that you have forgotten who is speaking. The same paragraph must be read again. Nothing is wrong with the book, and the desire to read is still there; the protected attention has gone. For people who once became absorbed in stories for hours, that change can feel less like a new habit than the loss of an old ability.

2 There is evidence that reading patterns have changed. A 2025 study used American time-use records from 2004 to 2023. It found that the share of people reading for pleasure on an average day fell from about 28% to 16%. However, a 2026 Pew Research Center survey found that about three-quarters of American adults had read at least part of a book in the previous year. The findings are not contradictory: reading something during a whole year is very different from reading regularly.

3 Smartphones are an obvious suspect. They offer endless opportunities to switch activities, while a book requires sustained attention. But it would be too simple to blame every change on technology. Long working hours, financial pressures and family responsibilities also leave people tired. Some readers struggle to find books that interest them; others feel they should be reading difficult or important titles instead of something they might actually enjoy.

4 In August 2026, novelist Naomi Alderman proposed an eight-week reading programme inspired by the popular Couch to 5K approach to running. The idea was to rebuild reading stamina gradually, beginning with manageable sessions before increasing the time spent with a book. It treats concentration as something that can improve with practice, rather than a talent a person either has or lacks.

5 That approach may be particularly useful for people who have fallen out of the habit. Choosing a short, enjoyable book is often better than forcing yourself through a classic that feels like homework. Keeping your phone out of reach, reading on public transport or joining a small book group can also make regular reading easier. Audiobooks and e-books offer other ways to enjoy stories, especially for people whose lives are already busy.

6 The real concern is not that everyone should spend hours reading novels. It is that losing the habit of sustained attention may make longer, more complex writing feel increasingly difficult. Books give us time to follow ideas and characters without constant interruption. Recovering that experience does not require a dramatic lifestyle change. It may start with putting the phone away, opening a book and allowing ourselves to be bored for a few minutes before the story takes over.

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. The 2025 study and the Pew survey measure the same thing. T F NG
2. The writer thinks technology is not the only reason people read less. T F NG
3. Alderman's programme gives people a fixed list of books to read. T F NG
4. Reading at least part of a book in a year is more common than reading on a typical day. T F NG
5. The writer says everyone should spend hours reading novels. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

desire	evidence	findings	pressures	reward	stamina	talent	target

1. She has the physical _____ to run for an hour without needing a rest.
2. The police said they had found no _____ that anyone had broken in.
3. Work, money and family are common _____ that leave people too tired to read.
4. Her _____ as a pianist was obvious when she was six, and teachers soon noticed it.
5. He felt a strong _____ to leave his job and travel the world.
6. The latest _____ are surprising: they show a rise in some groups and a fall in others.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time she opened the novel again, she _____ who was speaking. (FORGET)
2. When I was a child, a story _____ to me every night. (READ)
3. Reading habits _____ a lot in recent years. (CHANGE)
4. If I switched my phone off, I _____ much more. (READ)
5. While I _____ my messages, the story slipped from my mind. (CHECK)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a meaning you cannot guess from the parts. Check what the whole phrase means in the sentence.

along	away	out	over	round	through	up

1. Be patient: after a few pages, the story will take _____ and you will stop checking the time.
2. Many adults have fallen _____ of the habit of reading since they left school.
3. When you want to focus, put your phone _____ in a drawer.
4. I forced myself _____ the first fifty pages, and then the book became exciting.
5. Sign _____ for a library card, and borrowing books costs nothing.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 stamina · 2 evidence · 3 pressures · 4 talent · 5 desire · 6 findings

6 Verb forms

1 had forgotten · 2 was read · 3 have changed · 4 would read or could read or might read · 5 was checking

7 Language focus

1 over · 2 out · 3 away · 4 through · 5 up

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