

E-book readers

They've never been better or cheaper

YOU CAN READ e-books on all kinds of devices. But if you're a serious book reader, you'll probably be happiest doing your e-reading on a dedicated device like those we cover in this report.

The best e-book readers rival physical books for readability and usability, and their screens are more legible than print pages in bright sunlight. Their crisp type, long battery life, and midrange screen size (a 6-inch, black-and-white screen is usual) make them better for extended reading than a smart phone or laptop.

Yet the greater versatility of some other devices, notably the iPad, make them worthy of consideration if you want a multipurpose, portable device that's also a decent e-book reader with the added benefit of a color screen.

Here's the latest news about e-book readers and advice on how to choose one:

Prices are lower than ever. A price war has cut the cost of the Amazon Kindle and Barnes & Noble Nook, the best-selling e-book readers, from \$260 to as low as \$140 and \$150, respectively.

More models have LCD screens. The first e-book readers, and most current models, have black-and-white, e-ink screens. But more newer models, including a few in our Ratings, and tablet computers with e-book capability, such as the iPad, have color LCD screens—the screen technology that's found in most laptop computers.

In tests for this report, readers with e-ink screens continued to yield the most readable type and the longest battery life, but those attributes varied by brand. E-ink doesn't yet offer color capability, though it's promised for 2011, as are some other low-energy, color-screen technologies for e-book readers.

Budget, Wi-Fi-only models arrive. The most convenient readers for receiving new content are those with free unlimited access to a 3G wireless data network and a Wi-Fi connection. But you can now save \$50 or so by choosing versions of some readers, including the Kindle and Nook, that have only the Wi-Fi connection. Wi-Fi should suffice for everyone

except bookworms who want the unlimited access to new books that's provided by full 3G access. Think twice about readers, including most models from Sony, that lack any wireless connectivity. Such models require a USB connection or use of a memory card to load new content, which is a significant inconvenience. (A new line of Sony e-book readers, all with touch, e-ink screens, started to hit stores

as we finished this issue; we'll report on them in the future.)

New brands mostly fizzle. The price war and the market dominance of the iPad and Kindle have seemingly scared off a



A1 Amazon Kindle



A3 Barnes & Noble

Ratings

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A and B.)

CR Best Buy
 Recommended
● Excellent
○ Very good
○ Good
● Fair
● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results					Features			
					Readability	Versatility	Responsiveness	Page turns	Navigation	File support	Weight (oz.)	3G	Wi-Fi
A REGULAR-SIZED MODELS All have 6-inch, e-ink screens, measured diagonally, except as noted.													
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Amazon Kindle 3G + Wi-Fi	\$190	72	●	○	○	○	○	○	8	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Amazon Kindle Wi-Fi	140	68	●	○	○	○	○	○	8	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Barnes & Noble Nook 3G + Wi-Fi	200	56	○	○	○	○	○	○	12	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Barnes & Noble Nook Wi-Fi	150	53	○	○	○	○	○	○	11	●	●
	5	Pandigital Novel PRD07T2OWBL1*	170	50	○	○	○	○	○	○	12	●	●
	6	BeBook Neo	250	50	○	○	○	○	○	○	11	●	●
	7	Spring Design Alex	400	49	○	○	○	○	○	○	10	●	●
	8	Pandigital Novel PRD07T10WWH7*	170	48	○	○	○	○	○	○	19	●	●
	9	ViewSonic VEB620	180	44	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	●	●
	10	Kobo eReader	150	40	○	○	○	○	○	○	7	●	●
	11	Augen The Book*	120	40	○	○	○	○	○	○	12	●	●
B LARGE MODELS All have e-ink screens of about 9.6 inches, measured diagonally.													
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Amazon Kindle DX (3rd gen.)	380	67	●	○	○	○	○	○	19	●	●
	2	Amazon Kindle DX (2nd gen.)	360	61	○	○	○	○	○	○	19	●	●
	3	enTourage eDGe	500	54	○	○	○	○	○	○	52	●	●

*Screen is 7 inches, measured diagonally, and uses LCD technology.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mostly on test results. **Readability** reflects text in various lighting conditions. **Versatility** signifies convenience. **Responsiveness** reflects speed to turn on, resume from sleep, open an e-book, and transfer an e-book from a computer via a USB connection. **Page turns** reflects speed and the experience, such as whether the screen blinks, etc. **Navigation** includes ability to rotate the screen, bookmark a page, and search for an e-book through an online bookstore. **File support** scores compatibility with typical e-book and file formats. **Weight** is with batteries and without accessories. **3G** means free cellular data service. **Wi-Fi** is the ability to connect to Wi-Fi networks and hot spots. Models with **library rentals** accept at least one e-book format used online by public libraries. **Price** is approximate retail.



B1 Amazon Kindle

bunch of brands that promised e-book readers in 2010. The models that have launched are mostly underwhelming, including the Augen, which is one of the lowest-scoring e-book readers we've tested.

Overview

Performance varies widely among models, as our Ratings show. The best make loading and reading books relatively effortless, while the lowest scorers might frustrate even long-suffering bookworms. Models cited below are recommended for the reasons listed.

Best choices for use everywhere:

- A1 Amazon Kindle 3G + Wi-Fi \$190
- A3 Barnes & Noble Nook 3G + Wi-Fi \$200

Both allow access to e-bookstores and other services via either 3G or Wi-Fi. **A1** is the best reader we've ever tested. It's among the best in navigation and is rivaled in the readability of its text only by its larger sibling, B1. It's also very light. **A3** is a step behind in almost all respects, except versatility. It accepts a host of file formats, including those used by a growing number of public libraries that offer online borrowing of e-books (though generally only via a USB connection).

Best values:

- A2 Amazon Kindle Wi-Fi \$140 CR Best Buy
- A4 Barnes & Noble Nook Wi-Fi \$150 CR Best Buy

These are virtually identical to A1 and A3, respectively, except that you can load new content wirelessly only via Wi-Fi. These versions are better buys than their pricier 3G siblings, unless you expect to frequently need new content when you're out of range of a Wi-Fi network.

If you need a big screen:

- B1 Amazon Kindle DX \$380

It's double or more the size and weight of A1, so it makes sense only if its 9.7-inch screen matters more to you than portability. Its type is more readable than that of its predecessor, B2, which remains available.



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