

Research Report

‘Words are holding us back’
- an Australian literacy report



Overview

According to the [2021 SBS documentary, 'Lost for Words'](#), 43% of Australians don't have the necessary literacy skills to navigate everyday life.

We wanted to find out how common the issue is in Australia, so we commissioned research with global research company, Censuswide. The questionnaire surveyed 2,007 Australian respondents over a week period between 10th - 18th May, 2022. A breakdown by state can be found in a table below.

Key findings and insights

Literacy is a major challenge for Australians

- 56% of Australians who took part in our survey said they had difficulties with literacy during their education.

Literacy challenges impact our ability to navigate the world

- 23% of people said they don't find it easy reading books aloud to a preschooler or a primary aged child.
- 30% of Australians said they have little-to-no confidence helping their kids with homework.
- 20% find it hard to understand paperwork such as rental agreements and phone contracts.
- 23% said they find it difficult to understand terms and conditions of applications and contracts.

Literacy challenges impact us emotionally

- 26% of people said they feel less motivated to complete tasks if they are struggling with reading and writing.
- 49% of people said they feel frustrated when they have difficulties with a task.
- 30% said they feel embarrassed by their literacy skills.
- 27% said their literacy skills make them feel inadequate and 26% said they feel less confident in everyday life.
- 23% said they feel less confident at work when they find tasks difficult.

Having the right tools is essential to developing strong literacy skills in education and beyond

- 71% of people surveyed said they think some form of technology would have been helpful to them in overcoming their literacy difficulties during education.
- Respondents were most likely to say they think spell-checker (43%) would have been helpful. Followed by grammar checker (39%), text dictionary (31%), picture dictionary (17%), text-to-speech (15%) and speech-to-text (15%).
- Those who did have assistive technology tools available during education were more likely to say they were supportive than unsupportive (34% versus 15%).

Gender Insights

- 32% of females who took part in our survey said literacy difficulties make them feel inadequate. 19% of male people said the same.
- 11% men struggle to write text messages compared to 4% women.
- Women are more likely to ask a friend, family member or colleague for help with literacy tasks than men (Women 49% : Men 36%).
- Men are more likely to struggle with spelling during their education (Men 25% : Women 21%).

Spelling statistics

- 39% of people didn't recognise the correct spelling of the word 'misspelt'.
- 49% of people cannot accurately spell the word 'harass'.
- 24% of people cannot correctly spell the word 'forty'.
- Three of the most commonly misspelt words are definitely, receive and necessary.

State insights

- 26% of Western Australian adults find it difficult reading books aloud to primary aged children.
- 15% of New South Wales adults find writing emails to colleagues difficult.
- 24% of Victorians surveyed admitted to having difficulties with homework during their education.
- In South Australia only 25% of adults had access to tutors to assist in their literacy learning during education.
- In Queensland 27% of adults didn't seek help with their literacy challenges because they feared being judged or bullied.

The findings suggest there is a widespread literacy problem amongst the Australians surveyed. It clearly impacts their everyday lives. The results show that people feel shame and embarrassment as a result of their literacy skills. Many adults would rather struggle along than ask for help. But this holds people back. Maybe they won't go for a promotion at work, or they won't take a training opportunity.

For most people the problems began during their education, but help wasn't available to them. The majority of people felt technology could have helped them during their education. We know that access to technology is constantly improving, and for us it's about making sure everyone has the same access to the tools they need.

It's clear that technology needs to be integrated in education to break the cycle of literacy struggles and to give Australians the best chance of success in life. The earlier people receive the support they need, the better their outcomes will be.

To find out more about **Texthelp** and the "**Words Can't Hold us Back**" campaign, visit our website.

text.help/words

Breakdown of respondent numbers per state

State	Number of respondents
New South Wales	538
Northern Territory	18
Queensland	488
South Australia	231
Tasmania	81
Victoria	442
Western Australia	209

