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# How to Choose an e-Reader – Quick Start Guide

Note: This guide was created in 2/2013. Manufacturers release new devices often, so the specifics may no longer be accurate. Check before buying.

## Introduction to eBooks

It can be very confusing trying to choose the right device for reading digital books. There are so many different options, and it often comes down to personal preference. Before you get started, ask yourself a couple of questions. The answers will help guide you in your search.

1. What kind of books do you intend to read? Textbooks? Mainstream fiction or non-fiction books?
2. Do you have a need for a specific feature, such as text-to-speech?
3. Do you already have an iPad or similar tablet? If so, try some of the free apps to see what you think. Kindle, Nook, Sony, and Kobo all have free apps for iPad and Android, as well as for Mac and PC.

Whether or not you have a tablet, you will need to consider whether a tablet or an eReader is right for you as a reading device.

## E-Readers vs. Tablets

The following chart shows some of the differences between eReaders and Tablets:

eReader	Tablet
e-ink screen (looks just like a print book)	LCD or led (like a computer screen)

<b>eReader</b>	<b>Tablet</b>
No light or front-lit (light shines downward towards the text – easier on eyes)	Back-lit (light shines outward towards you – harder on eyes)
No flicker – the screen refreshes only on page turns	Flicker – the screen refreshes faster than your eyes can see, just like a computer screen.
Smaller, lighter	Bigger, heavier
Dedicated for reading ebooks.	Can install variety of apps, watch videos, listen to audio books, have text-to-speech capability, internet – various purposes are possible.
Not accessible!	More accessibility options.
Have to get books from compatible stores.	Can use apps to read books from variety of stores, so not limited on where to buy books.
Can add non-drm books from other sources easily with usb	Not as easy to load your own books into apps.
Textbook options are limited to compatible file downloads with compatible security features. No web-based textbooks will work. PDFs are possible, but formatting is poor.	Better textbook options – can use apps provided by some textbook publishers, and can access web-based textbooks.
Single built-in reading app with proprietary options.	Other reading apps are also available, like iBooks, Blio, Stanza, each with their own options for fonts, contrast, etc.

<b>eReader</b>	<b>Tablet</b>
Grey-scale – no color	Color screen, can change contrast, etc.

## DRM (Digital Rights Management)

- DRM is one of the most important aspects of the ebook world to understand. It affects which books you can buy, and which devices will work with those books.
- DRM is a method of encrypting files so that they can only be opened on authorized devices. A device has to be registered with the software / company for a book to 'unlock.'
- Because of DRM, you cannot just buy any ebook from any store and read it on any reader. Each of the major booksellers has their own way of encrypting the file you buy so that you can only read it on authorized devices – and usually only on their specific reader.
- You cannot buy a book at Barnes & Noble and read it on a Kindle.
- Adobe has another version of file encryption that works across many devices and is used by libraries. If you have one of these devices, you can buy or borrow books from any source that supports Adobe Digital Editions, as long as you authorize your device with Adobe.
- Before you buy any device, realize that you will be limited to buying books made for it. If selection or price of books is important to you, factor that into your decision.

## Some Questions to Consider

Beyond the effects of DRM and the question of which bookstore you want to commit to, there are many factors to consider about the devices themselves. Here are some questions to consider as you wade through all the advertising about the readers available.

1. What are my physical needs?
  - a. Weight of device
  - b. Method of turning pages (Buttons? If buttons, are they in an awkward location? Touchscreen? Swipe or tap?)
  - c. Length of time to read? (short or long – eye fatigue)
  - d. Text-to-speech capability?
  - e. Audiobooks availability?
  - f. Type and size of fonts needed? How customizable is the device?
  - g. Does reading on a computer screen for a long time bother you?

2. What do I want out of the device?
  - a. Just for reading?
  - b. Textbooks vs. mainstream fiction and nonfiction?
  - c. Multiple uses – apps, internet, multiple locations to buy books, audio books, text-to-speech?
  - d. Be able to read for a long time without eye fatigue?
  - e. Be able to read outdoors without glare?
  - f. Have built-in reading light?
  - g. Be able to sleep after reading at night? (Back-lit devices like computers and tablets can make it harder to sleep.)

**Here are a couple general guidelines:**

<b>If you...</b>	<b>Look for a device with...</b>
<b>Experience eye fatigue after reading on a computer screen</b>	e-ink screen, with or without front-lit display
<b>Have sensitivity to screen flickering or refreshing</b>	e-ink screen, with or without front-lit display
<b>Want to read outside without glare</b>	e-ink screen, with or without front-lit display
<b>Have low vision</b>	Large font or zoom capabilities, larger screen size, text-to-speech
<b>Want a device to read textbooks with a lot of images, graphs, etc.</b>	Not available for eReaders. Tablet apps or web-delivery on a computer may be available depending on the publisher.
<b>Want to take notes and highlight</b>	Syncing notes and highlights are widely available on all devices.

## Borrowing Library Books

Some libraries offer eBooks on loan through a service called OverDrive. As long as you have a library card, and your library offers OverDrive eBooks, you can check out a book for a period of 2-3 weeks, and the book will expire automatically – so there are no late fees.

Poudre River Public Library District does offer eBooks. You can browse their eBook selection at <http://overdrive.poudrelibraries.org>.

There are several possible ways to read eBooks from the library:

1. The Sony Reader has built-in library support so you can download ebooks directly over wireless. Other readers still require you to download the files to a computer first.
2. There is an App for OverDrive, so you can download ebooks directly onto a tablet.
3. Download the file to a PC or Mac and transfer it with a usb cable to your device. This requires you to install software called [Adobe Digital Editions](#) (not for Kindle devices). The software is free, but you need to sign up for a free Adobe ID and then to register your device with the software. This is how publishers are handling copyright issues – the file is encrypted, and your device will not be able to read the file without a decryption key from Adobe Digital Editions.
4. Kindle is a little different – you have to sign in to Amazon to have the book sent to your Kindle (not Adobe Digital Editions)
5. You can also read the eBooks directly on your PC or Mac by opening the book in Adobe Digital Editions. There are some limitations – you cannot highlight or copy and paste text outside of the application. According to Adobe, the software is compatible with JAWS, NVDA, and Window-Eyes on Windows, and VoiceOver on Mac.

## Buying eBooks at Other Bookstores

There are some eBook stores online that sell ebooks without forcing you to buy a specific device. Some eReaders are more open to allowing you to buy books at these stores (Sony, Kobo), and some do not allow it at all (Kindle). These online eBook stores use the same software as the library lending service does. Adobe Digital Editions authorizes the books that you buy for your device only, but without an expiration date.

Some of these websites are:

- Blio.com
- Fictionwise.com
- BooksOnBoard.com

- Diesel-ebooks.com
- Smashwords.com (no DRM)
- Baenbooks.com (Mostly fantasy/sci fi. Some are free!)

This website has a good summary of major e-bookstores available, as well as lots of detailed information about eReaders: [The e-Book Reader](#)

There are also some free ebook websites for Public Domain books (copyright falls off after 95 years, so you can get them for free, without DRM):

- Manybooks.net
- Epubbooks.com
- Gutenberg.org

You can usually choose different formats to download depending on your device. You have to use a usb cable to transfer the books to the device. These are sometimes badly formatted, since they are usually OCR'd by volunteers.

## Textbooks

Textbook publishers are lagging behind in the field of e-texts. While fiction and nonfiction publications are becoming widely available, textbooks have still been difficult to find. Even when they are made available by the publisher, they are not compatible with eReaders, which are mainly geared towards displaying text, and do not do as well when graphs and images, or multiple columns, are involved.

That is why eReaders are not recommended if you mainly want to read textbooks on a device. The best solution for e-textbooks (when the publisher makes them available) is a computer or a tablet, depending on the format offered by the publisher.

Some textbooks are now available through online textbook stores with reading apps for computers and/or mobile devices:

- [Amazon](#) - Has textbooks available for the Kindle Fire and the free Kindle Apps for iPad, Android, PC and Mac. Rental prices are available.
- [iBooks](#) – Apple has textbooks from 12 publishers available through iBooks for iPad.
- [Barnes & Noble](#) – “Nook Study” is an app for PC or Mac. eTextbooks are not available for Nook mobile devices because they do not display well, according to B&N. Rental prices on e-textbooks are available. No internet is needed after downloading the book.

Independent Websites that sell eTextbooks:

- [Kno](#) – iPad & Android apps are free, and available through web browser on computer.
- [CourseSmart](#) – iPad, Android, and Kindle Fire apps are free, and available through web browser on computer.
- [Chegg](#) – Web-based textbooks from some publishers. Best on PC, Mac or iPad.
- [eCampus.com](#) – iPad, Android Apps, and web browser delivery. Allows copy and pasting of text.

## Converting e-Books – Calibre

- Calibre will only work with books that have no DRM.
- If you are getting your textbooks created in alt format through RDS, they can be converted for any device using Calibre. The best format to request for Calibre conversion is Word or RTF - *not PDF*. \*If the textbook has a lot of images – the kind that works best with PDF, it will not work well on an eReader.
- PDF is a bad format to convert – never comes out nicely. It is better to choose a native format for your device, or go with a device that can handle PDF fairly well – text reflow is important. If it’s a textbook with lots of images, a larger tablet or computer is recommended.
- It’s best to convert either to epub or mobi, depending on your device. Those are the most standard file types, and they do the best with layout when you change the font size.
- Use mobi for Kindle devices, and epub for everything else.



- Calibre has a lot of features. You can embed fonts in a file, add a cover image, increase the base font size, remove built-in fonts and margins, etc. This is definitely for more tech-savvy users but is appealing to those who want to customize their reading experience.

## Comparison of Devices – General Features

Features change as new eReaders are released, so be sure to double-check at the source before you buy anything. This is not an exhaustive comparison – there are other features that may be important that are not listed here, such as battery life, storage size, etc. Use this as a starting point, and then check out the devices yourself – in person if you can. There’s nothing like holding it yourself to help you decide.

	Kindle	Kindle Paperwhite	Kindle Fire	Nook Simple Touch / Simple Touch with Glow Light	Nook HD / HD+	Sony PRS-T2	Kobo Glo
<b>Type of Device</b>	Reader	Reader	Tablet (Proprietary)	Reader	Tablet (Proprietary)	Reader	Reader
<b>Cost of Device</b>	With ads: \$69 No ads: \$89	With ads: \$119 No ads: \$139	\$159-\$499	\$79-\$119	\$199-\$269	\$129	n/a
<b>Screen Type</b>	E-Ink	E-Ink	LCD Color	E-Ink	LCD Color	E-Ink	E-Ink
<b>Light Source</b>	None	Front-lit (LED)	Back-lit (LCD)	None / Front-lit (LED)	Back-lit (LCD)	None	Front-lit (LED) Light is evenly distributed (claims better than Kindle & Nook)
<b>Main File Format</b>	mobi	mobi	mobi	epub	epub	epub	epub
<b>Others</b>	azw3, azw, txt, pdf, prc	azw3, azw, txt, pdf, prc	azw3, azw, txt, pdf, prc  (Plus some audio & video)	pdf	pdf  Microsoft Office Capable	pdf	mobi pdf
<b>PDF Handling</b>						Decent with	

	Kindle	Kindle Paperwhite	Kindle Fire	Nook Simple Touch / Simple Touch with Glow Light	Nook HD / HD+	Sony PRS-T2	Kobo Glo
						mostly text – has text reflow technology.	
<b>Where you can buy books</b>	Amazon	Amazon	Amazon	Barnes & Noble	Barnes & Noble	Sony Store + any online store that offers epub with ADE	Kobobooks.com + any online store that offers epub with ADE
<b>How you get books onto the device</b>	Wireless Delivery Buy at Amazon & send to device or from device itself	Wireless Delivery Buy at Amazon & send to device or from device itself	Wireless Delivery Buy at Amazon & send to device or from device itself	Wireless Delivery, Connect to computer via USB	Wireless Delivery, Connect to computer via USB	Wireless Delivery, Connect to computer via USB	Wireless Delivery, Connect to computer via USB
<b>Library Lending</b>	Yes (on web with sign-in to Amazon)	Yes (on web with sign-in to Amazon)	Yes (on web with sign-in to Amazon)	Yes – with transfer from computer (epub, pdf)	Yes – with transfer from computer (epub, pdf)	Yes – direct browsing on device & transfer from computer (epub, pdf)	Yes – with transfer from computer (epub, pdf)
<b>App for PC, Mac &amp; Mobile without Device Purchase</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Sync Across Devices &amp; Apps</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
<b>Other Apps / Email / Internet / Movies</b>	No	No	Yes – But Amazon Apps Only	No	Yes	Some – Evernote, Facebook, Wiki, Google	No

## Comparison of Devices – Accessibility Considerations

	Kindle	Kindle Paperwhite	Kindle Fire	Nook	Nook HD / HD+	Sony	Kobo
<b>Screen Type</b>	E-Ink	E-Ink	LCD Color	E-Ink		E-Ink	E-Ink
<b>Light Source</b>	None	Front-lit (LED)	Back-lit (LCD)	Front-lit (LED)		None	Front-lit (LED)
<b>Light Control</b>	None	Always on, but can adjust	Always on, but can adjust			N/A	Can adjust AND turn off
<b>Screen Size</b>	6"	6"	7" or 8.9"			6"	6"
<b>Weight</b>	5.98 oz	7.5 oz	14 oz or 20 oz			5.78 oz	6.5 oz
<b>Page Turning</b>	Buttons on the sides	Touchscreen	Touchscreen			Buttons and Touchscreen	Touchscreen
<b>Font Styles</b>	3 Fonts	6 Fonts	?	?	?	7 Fonts	8 Fonts + import. Adjustable weight, sharpness & margins.
<b>Font Sizes</b>		8 Sizes	8 Sizes			8 Sizes	24 Sizes
<b>Zoom</b>			Yes			Yes	Up to 200%
<b>Contrast Settings</b>	No	No	Yes				
<b>Sync Across Devices &amp; Apps</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes				
<b>Highlight / Notes</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
<b>Text-to-Speech</b>	No	No	Yes (When available from Publisher)		Yes (When available from Publisher)	No	
<b>Audio Books</b>	No	No	Yes – Audible in sync with Kindle		Yes	No	No