

Humanities
INDICATORS



The Humanities in American Life At a Glance

Insights from a Survey of the Public's Attitudes & Engagement

AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

About the Survey

The Survey of the Humanities in American Life is a first-of-its-kind nationally representative survey of Americans about their engagement with and perception of the humanities.

The survey was developed over the course of two years by the staff of the Humanities Indicators (a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), in consultation with leaders from public humanities organizations, scholarly societies, and federal agencies with an interest in the field. The survey was administered in November 2019, in English and Spanish, to 5,015 U.S. adults age 18 and older who participate in NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak Panel.

The enclosed pages present the key findings from the survey in four parts:

- Engagement with the Humanities
- Attitudes about the Humanities
- The Humanities in Childhood and Education
- Humanities Skills in the Workplace

The findings included here only skim the surface of the results. Visit bit.ly/HumSurvey for a detailed report on the survey findings, which includes an analysis by gender, age, and other key demographics, as well as a detailed description of the survey methodology.

The Academy gratefully acknowledges the financial support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the primary funder of the Humanities Indicators, for underwriting this study.

Engagement with the Humanities

97%

of Americans occasionally engage in at least one form of humanities activity.



44%

of Americans often read a work of fiction or nonfiction.



A larger share of the public engage frequently with the humanities by watching history shows on TV or online (46%) than by reading fiction (35%) or nonfiction books (26%).

Black Americans are more engaged with the humanities than the general public, due principally to higher rates of religious study, literary and poetry event attendance, and online sharing of humanities content.



College graduates 

are more likely to engage with humanities activities than other Americans, especially in the forms of reading, internet research, and visiting museums and historic sites.



A majority of Americans frequently engage in three or more humanities activities.

Attitudes about the Humanities

85%

of Americans respond favorably to the term “humanities.”

48%

of Americans hold a strongly favorable view of history, similar to the share for science (52%).



56%



More than half of Americans strongly agree that the humanities “should be an important part of every American’s education.”



Around **90%**

of Americans believe the humanities help people understand others whose lives are different from their own.

40%

of Americans feel humanities activities cost too much.



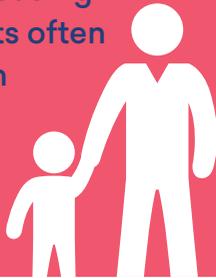
86% of Americans feel the humanities help strengthen American democracy.



73% think the humanities make the economy stronger.

The Humanities in Childhood and Education

With the exception of reading, a majority of Americans do not remember seeing their parents often engaging in humanities activities.



53%



of American adults recall seeing their parents read often, but only 36% recall frequently participating in reading activities with them.

Almost half of American adults wish they took more language courses while in school.



Almost

95%



of Americans agree that the humanities should be an important part of every American's education.



College graduates are more likely to have been highly exposed to the humanities as children than people with only a high school education.

Beyond basic reading and writing, a third or more of Americans believe elementary school is too early for humanities learning.



Humanities Skills in the Workplace

81%

of Americans frequently use at least one humanities skill in their jobs.



57%

of American workers often write to describe or explain something on their jobs (and another 20% do so sometimes).



9%

of Americans often use a language other than English on their jobs.



29%

of Americans feel their career advancement was at least partially impaired by a deficiency in one or more humanistic skills.

Americans without a college education



are much less likely to respond that they need humanities skills in their jobs.

The highest-income Americans are **substantially more likely** than less-affluent Americans to use humanities skills in their work.

