

E-book readers

They're lighter, cheaper, and better

SOME TECH GURUS predicted that the tablet computer, with its versatility and color screen, would kill the stand-alone e-book reader, with its focus on books and its black-and-white screen. But our latest Ratings reveal that the e-book reader has endured, even thrived, by providing an increasingly optimized book-reading experience at steadily lower prices.

Our Ratings includes six new e-book readers, such as an \$80 version of the latest Kindle from Amazon that scored above competitors costing more than twice as much. And most of the rated models, new and old, are lighter and easier to read than

tablets (especially in bright light) and have much longer battery life (weeks rather than days). So although you can read e-books on tablets and other devices, an e-book reader is still the gadget of choice for serious bookworms.

This is a good time to buy an e-book reader, for plenty of reasons. Here are some of the latest developments:

Prices are dropping. The fourth-generation Kindle from Amazon, a long-time high-scoring brand in our Ratings, markedly lowers the entry-level price for a high-quality e-book reader. Its low price is more associated with accessories than with mobile devices. But the newest Kindle is

very basic, with no touch screen, physical keyboard, 3G connection, or even an included charger. And the \$80 version comes with ads and special offers on its screen saver. The commercial-free version, \$110, is also in our Ratings. Both are CR Best Buys.

In our tests those new Kindles performed comparably, in most respects, to their heavier predecessors, which remain available under the new name Kindle Keyboard. Amazon's first touch-screen reader, the Kindle Touch, is expected in late November and has a version with special offers and ads that's priced well below the competition (see page 30).

It's hard to imagine that Amazon's competitors, notably Barnes & Noble, with its Nook line, won't respond to Amazon's aggressive pricing. That could trigger a repeat of the 2010 e-book-reader price war.

Want color? New choices emerge. A few models in our Ratings trade the black-and-white E Ink screen of most readers for a color LCD screen. That allows them to emphasize magazines, among other content. But it also introduces compromises involved when reading e-books on a tablet, such as type that may be less readable.

Until now, even the priciest and best color e-book reader we've tested, the \$250 Barnes & Noble Nook Color, cost less than tablets from major manufacturers. That will change in November, when Amazon introduces its \$200 Kindle Fire tablet, which promises the same breadth of content as the Nook Color, plus streaming video and music.

Touch is spreading. The names of the models in our Ratings show the growing prevalence of touch screens. The Aluratek



▲ The Nook Simple Touch, Kobo eReader Touch Edition, and Kindle with Special Offers.

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E-book reader or tablet?

An e-book reader offers ...

- Low price.
- Portability.
- Easy reading in bright light.
- Long battery life.

A tablet offers ...

- Bigger, color screens.
- Touch navigation.
- Huge number of apps and magazines.

Scan this code with your smart phone to see our video on e-book readers vs. tablets. (See page 3 for details.) Or go to www.ConsumerReports.org/readerchoice.



Libre Touch and Sony Touch have joined the Nook Simple Touch and Kobo eReader Touch. And there's the Kindle Touch.

Touch capability tends to add to the price of an e-book reader. But on the best models, it provides crisp page turns with minimal effort. It also allows you to use a virtual keyboard and other onscreen controls that are bigger and easier to press than the small physical keys and controls on some nontouch models.

But you might not want to use touch control, at least not all the time. We prefer that touch-screen models also have turn bars as an alternative way to change pages; those models include the top-rated Barnes & Noble Simple Touch.

The under-6-ounce reader is here. The new Kindles and the new Sony Reader each weigh a little less than 6 ounces. That's at least 25 percent less than their predecessors, and it's 50 percent less than

some competitors that also have 6-inch black-and-white screens and Wi-Fi.

Color capability adds weight (the color models we've rated weigh at least 11.9 ounces). The circuitry needed for 3G connectivity also adds weight, although more modestly.

Download books three ways. One model in the Ratings, the Aluratek Libre Color Reader, requires a physical connection to a computer to purchase new content. All of the other models are wireless and allow book purchases via Wi-Fi, which we think suffices for most people. Most of the higher-rated devices come in a version that has free 3G service as well as Wi-Fi. They usually cost \$50 more than their Wi-Fi-only siblings. Choose a 3G model only if being able to order new books anywhere is so vital that you're prepared to pay extra for it.

Library lending goes wireless. The ability to borrow e-books from more than

10,000 libraries nationwide has been a feature on a number of e-book readers for a while. And now, for the first time, every model in the Ratings has that capability.

The borrowing process usually requires downloading software to a computer. After that, you can order and download e-books from the library. They are transferred from a computer to an e-book reader via a USB cable. There are no late fines; the borrowed title simply won't open in your library after the due date.

Sony and Amazon have made the library process wireless, via Wi-Fi, on their new models and on most older models if they've received a free firmware update.

Wireless loans on Sonys can be completed without a computer, downloading directly to the e-book reader. With Kindles, you still must order the title via a computer or smart phone, but you can send it to the Kindle wirelessly.

First look: A Kindle gets the touch

Kindle Touch e-book reader • \$99

Amazon's first touch-screen e-book reader, the Kindle Touch, is expected in late November. It's a direct competitor to the Barnes & Noble Nook Simple Touch Reader, the top-rated model in our Ratings.

The Touch has at least two key advantages over the Nook: It's more than 1.5 ounces lighter, a notable difference in an e-book reader. And with prices that start at \$99 (for a Wi-Fi version with ads and special offers), the Touch will cost up to \$40 less than the Nook.

Here are observations about the Kindle Touch, based on specifications and our reporter's look at an early version:

Faster page turns. Like most of the better e-readers on the market, including the Nook, the Touch has a 6-inch screen that uses the latest Pearl version of E Ink, the energy-frugal, black-and-white screen technology. And the Kindle Touch, like the new \$80 Kindle and the Nook Simple Touch, stores (or "caches") pages in groups of six; that reduces the incidence of seeing a momentary black screen before the next page appears. It also helps speed up page turns. (The \$80 Kindle turned pages slightly faster and had fewer black screens than its predecessor, now called the Kindle Keyboard with Special Offers.)

Touch, and touch only. Like the Nook Simple Touch, the Kindle Touch uses infrared touch technology, which eliminates the

need for the additional glass layer that made type look soft on early touch-screen readers. Unlike the Simple Touch, the Kindle Touch unfortunately does not offer page-turn bars as an alternative means of turning pages.

A new e-book resource. The Kindle Touch has a feature called X-Ray that allows you to view references to characters and phrases throughout the book or to link to Wikipedia entries on historical figures, places, and events, among other items. The feature worked well enough, from what our reporter saw, though it will be interesting to see how many Kindle owners actually use it.

Bottom line. We don't know how the Amazon device will stack up in performance. We'll test it when it arrives and expect to report the results in our January issue.

But other Kindles have done well in our tests, and the Kindle Touch appeared to perform very competently in limited use by our reporter. The Kindle Touch also promises low prices if you are willing to put up with ads and special offers. If you aren't, there's a Kindle Touch for \$139. Kindle Touch 3G models will cost \$149 with ads and special offers and \$189 without them.



DIGIT DRIVEN
The Kindle Touch has virtually no physical controls.

Overview

The Ratings lists models with a 6- to 7-inch screen, which offers the best combination of screen size, portability, and price for most people. Some recommended models are listed below.

Best values:

- 5 Amazon \$100 CR Best Buy**
- 7 Amazon \$110 CR Best Buy**
- 8 Amazon \$80 CR Best Buy**
- 12 Barnes & Noble \$90 CR Best Buy**

All of these models are modestly priced, in part because they load content wirelessly using only Wi-Fi; we think that type of connectivity is sufficient for most people. **8** is almost identical to **7** but costs \$30 less because its screen saver carries ads, and it allows access to special offers such as discounts on Amazon purchases. **5** is the pricier predecessor to **8** and weighs more. Consider it mostly if you prefer a keyboard to enter data, rather than a virtual keyboard that you control with a joystick, as on **7** and **8**, and if you value extras such as an MP3 player and text-to-speech capability. **12** is the least expensive alternative to a Kindle but is much heavier.

Best touch-screen model:

- 1 Barnes & Noble \$140**

This Nook offers standout touch navigation. It's also relatively light and is among the fastest models to start up and to turn pages. But Amazon is launching a touch-screen Kindle in November.

Best color model:

- 6 Barnes & Noble \$250**

The consistently decent performance of the Nook Color outpaces all other rated models with color screens. It's a fine budget alternative to most tablets for reading e-magazines and heavily illustrated e-books. But Amazon's Kindle Fire tablet, due in November, promises many of the same capabilities for \$50 less.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mostly on test results. **Readability** is for 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 using a USB connection. **Page turn** reflects speed and overall experience, such as whether the screen blinks. **Navigation** includes ability to rotate the screen, bookmark a page, and perform e-book searches in the bookstore. **File support** scores compatibility with common e-book and file formats. **Claimed battery life** is the manufacturer's figure. **Weight** is with batteries and without accessories. Under **screen**, we list its viewable **display size**, measured diagonally, and whether it has **color** or **touch** capability. **Price** is approximate retail.



1 Barnes & Noble



2 Amazon



10 Sony

Ratings E-book readers

In performance order.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results					Features	Screen			
					Readability	Versatility	Responsiveness	Page turn	Navigation		File support	Claimed battery life	Weight (oz.)	Display size (in.)
✓ CR Best Buy	1	Barnes & Noble Nook Simple Touch Reader	\$140	75	●	○	●	●	●	●	60 days	7.5	6	●
✓ CR Best Buy	2	Amazon Kindle Keyboard 3G	190	73	●	○	○	○	○	○	60 days	8.2	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	3	Amazon Kindle Keyboard 3G with Special Offers	140	73	●	○	○	○	○	○	60 days	8.2	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	4	Amazon Kindle Keyboard	140	69	●	○	○	○	○	○	60 days	7.7	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	5	Amazon Kindle Keyboard with Special Offers	100	69	●	○	○	○	○	○	60 days	7.7	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	6	Barnes & Noble Nook Color	250	69	○	○	●	●	○	○	up to 8 hr.	15.8	6.8	● ●
✓ CR Best Buy	7	Amazon Kindle	110	68	●	○	○	○	○	○	30 days	5.9	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	8	Amazon Kindle with Special Offers	80	68	●	○	○	○	○	○	30 days	5.9	6	
✓ CR Best Buy	9	Kobo eReader Touch Edition	130	65	○	○	○	○	○	○	30 days	6.6	6	●
✓ CR Best Buy	10	Sony Reader Wi-Fi PRS-T1	150	65	○	○	○	○	○	○	> 30 days	5.8	5.9	●
✓ CR Best Buy	11	Barnes & Noble Nook 3G + Wi-Fi	170	61	○	○	○	○	○	○	10 days	12	6	★
✓ CR Best Buy	12	Barnes & Noble Nook Wi-Fi	90	59	○	○	○	○	○	○	10 days	11.4	6	★
	13	iRiver Story HD	140	56	○	○	○	○	○	○	42 days	7.2	5.9	
	14	BeBook Neo	250	52	○	○	○	○	○	○	4,000 page turns	10.9	6.1	●
	15	Bookeen Cybook Orizon	190	50	○	○	○	○	○	○	21 days	8.6	6	●
	16	Aluratek Libre Touch	150	49	○	○	○	○	○	○	8-10 hr.	11.9	7	● ●
	17	Aluratek Libre Color eBook Reader	130	47	○	○	○	○	○	○	6 hr.	13	6.9	●
	18	Pandigital Novel PRD07T10WWH7	150	47	○	○	○	○	○	○	6 hr.	19	7	● ●
	19	Pandigital Novel PRD07T20WBL1	150	46	○	○	○	○	○	○	6 hr.	12.4	7	● ●
	20	Kobo Wireless eReader	100	45	○	○	○	○	○	○	10 days	6.7	5.9	
	21	Pandigital Novel 6" Personal eReader	140	45	○	○	○	○	○	○	6,000 page turns	9.1	5.9	●

*Main screen is black-and-white. Has a second, smaller color screen for navigation.