# Team Pages

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*Designing for Serendipity*

*CS 147*



# Team Members



**Rubina Shrestha**
Coterm in CS-HCI



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Coterm in CS-HCI



**Zoe Atkin**
Undergrad in SymSys



**Zaid Akhtar**
Coterm in CS-HCI

# Domain: Reading Habits

**Motivations**:

- We love reading
- The book recommendation landscape is shifting (BookTok, Bookstagram, an interest in preserving local bookstores).
- Books are big time commitments; we wanted to see how people decide what books they commit to.
- We want to see how indie bookstores create local experiences.





# Finding Participants

## 4 Readers

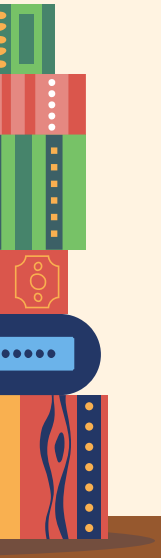
At Kepler's Bookstore, Menlo Park

## 1 Domain Expert

Bookseller at Kepler's

## 1 Non-reader

Non-Stanford College Student





**Compensation:** a coffee for their time!

# How did we do our interviews?

**For each interview, we had a notetaker and an interviewer!**

- 2 members to conduct interviews of average users
- 2 members to conduct interviews of the extreme user and domain expert

**We used...**

- AI tools for transcription assistance
- Voice Notes for recording
- Zoom (for our video interview)
- Google Docs to take notes

# In our interviews, we asked...

Do you have a genre of books that you like reading or would like to read?

What makes you pick a book up off a shelf? What makes you put the book back?

When was the last time you read a book in its entirety?

If I saw your bookshelf, what would it tell me about you?

Whose recommendations do you trust? Which ones do you ignore and why?

Amongst other follow-up questions...

# Andrew: Extreme User

Andrew, a recently graduated young professional working in B2B sales in LA

**We conducted a video interview on Zoom!!**

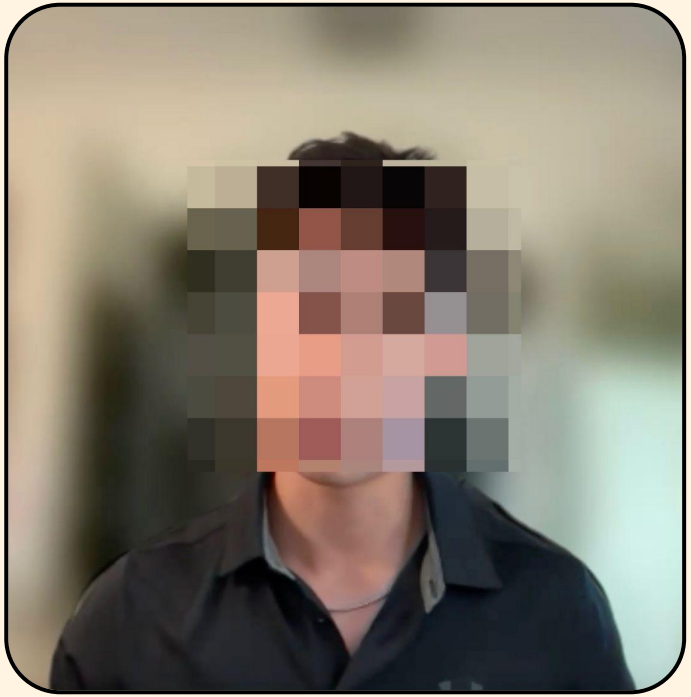


**Image:** Screenshot from Zoom recording (blurred for privacy)

# Quotes and Surprises

"There's a million other things that I'd rather do."

"Everything that I do in general has, like, an intent behind it."

"Reading, it's more of an independent thing. And if possible, I do something else that involves more people."

Surprise!

Describes himself as a nonreader, but often gifts self-help/improvement books to others

Occasionally will go into bookstores for the aesthetic but without the intention to buy a book

Feels nostalgic for childhood books and will read them (Guinness World Records)





# SAY

"Whenever I read any material, my mind kind of disassociates a little bti

"There's a million other things I'd rather do"

"Everything I do in general has like an intent behind it"

"The main one is it has to be entertaining"

"You watch a 15 minute video that can easily go over the same content as a 100-page book"

"I like to see everything happening in front of me as opposed to reading the words and imagining it in my head"

"The issue always just is time and priorities"

"Reading one or two chapters a day easily checks that box"

"Over 350 pages too intimidating, too big of a commitment"

"Reading alone takes away from what I care about...the social bonding aspect of it"

"Read a book Allison picked? Nine times of ten, I probably would"

# THINK

Reading has to earn its time: knowledge, career, and goal

Reading is good for you. He just can't justify the time yet

Reading is time alone, and time alone competes with time with people

If someone close to him asks him to read, he will be more likely to read it

A book is credible if its author is

Influencer picks are fine unless its an ad

Video gets him the same content faster

He doesn't see himself as a reader

A story he's already seen is easier to picture in his head

# DO

Read two sales books in his months off. Credits them to TikTok/Instagram and to his job interviewers

Recommended those same two books to the new sales rep the day they met.

Gave his anxious girlfriend a positive-mindset book. They read side by side at the pool.

Spends free time on group hobbies: games with his brother, lifting, motorcycle rides.

Started Lord of the Rings after rewatching the films with roommates. Didn't finish.

Collects Spider-Man and Star Wars comics to display. Picks by cover art, story, rarity.

Walks into bookstores to look around, not to buy.

Picks up a book for its cover and author. Puts it back if it's long, bulky or about cooking.

Starts audiobooks on CarPlay but hasn't finished one. Plays music on his 10-min commute.

Reads about a chapter a day. A 350-page book takes him a month.

Used SparkNotes in high school, then ChatGPT and Claude in college, to summarize readings.

# FEEL

Unsure what to expect in his new career. Reassured by advice from people ahead of him.

Proud and useful when he passes a good book on.

Close to Allison when they read side by side.

A little guilty that he doesn't question influencers' motives.

Curious how he compares: "What have other people said?"

Bored by text next to the stimulation of video.

Delighted by cool covers and the feel of a bookstore.

Nostalgic for childhood books (Guiness World Records)

Restless and checked out when reading alone.

Intimidated by thick books and long series.

# SAY

"The issue always just is time and priorities"

"Read a book Allison picked? Nine times of ten, I probably would"

"Over 350 pages too intimidating, too big of a commitment"

"Reading alone takes away from what I care about...the social bonding aspect of it"

Allison picked? Nine times of ten, I probably would"

# THINK

Reading is good for you. He just can't justify the time yet

He doesn't see himself as a reader

He doesn't see himself as a reader

Reading is time alone, and time alone competes with time with people

If someone close to him asks him to read, he will be more likely to read it

# DO

Walks into bookstores to look around, not to buy.

Picks up a book for its cover and author. Puts it back if it's long, bulky or about cooking.

Starts audiobooks on CarPlay but hasn't finished one. Plays music on his 10-min commute.

Reads about a chapter a day. A 350-page book takes him a month.

# FEEL

Nostalgic for childhood books (Guiness World Records)

Proud and useful when he passes a good book on.

Nostalgic for childhood books (Guiness World Records)

Restless and checked out when reading alone.

Intimidated by thick books and long series.

Close to Allison when they read

# Andrew needs...

- To share reading in real time with people he's close to.
- To see a clear payoff before committing to a book.
- To read in small, manageable doses with a finish line in sight.





# Insights

- “Non-reader” is an identity, not a measure of how much someone reads.
- “Non-readers” still use books as social currency.
- Both time and the seemingly anti-social nature of reading are big factors.





# Ella: A Frequent Reader

Ella, a psychology graduate student interested in reading books in a niche genre

**We conducted an in-person interview at Kepler's in Menlo Park!**



**Image:** Pinterest

# Quotes and Surprises

"I'm really picky about books. If I don't like the writing style, I can't read it."

"I think book suggestions are pretty subjective... people like different things with books, so I'll take it with a grain of salt."

"I can't say no to a bookstore."

Surprise!

Uses ChatGPT to find extremely curated book reviews, but also reads recs from her friend outside of her typical genre

Claimed it was rare for her to like a book she stumbles across but really enjoyed the last book she accidentally discovered





# SAY

"I cannot say no to a book store."

"I like the smell. I love the smell in here. Same with libraries."

"I really like being able to go to a store and like pick up a book so I will still support the bookstores"

"I don't typically read outside my genre because I get bored and then I stop reading it."

"If I don't like the writing style I can't read it"

"If they mention like text messaging ... it just rubs me the wrong way."

"It's usually a blurb that's what gets me"

On NYT critics: "they've never [steered] me wrong."

On a friend's picks: "I let her sell me on it. I'll typically buy the books anyway"

On book clubs: "No I'm very anti-social."

"It's always on a staff pick and I'm like I don't get it"

# THINK

Writing style decides it. A good concept can't save bad prose.

Modern details like texting break the spell of a story.

A good cover means the publisher hired a good designer, so the book got care.

Bookstores are a dying breed, worth keeping alive with her money.

Taste is subjective, so a crowd favorite may not be hers.

One trusted critic per genre beats a pile of reviews.

Saying yes to a friend's pick matters, even if she won't finish it.

Short book videos get people reading, but you still have to go looking.

Her students won't read the art books she would recommend.

Characters don't need to be likable. Messy, awful people make better stories.

# DO

Walked into this bookstore on impulse after breakfast next door.

Kept a friend's pick in her Amazon cart until it came out, then bought it in a store.

Gives a book a chance for a good cover. Picked up Heart-Shaped Box for its title.

Hasn't opened her Kindle in a while, with a book on it almost finished.

Drops her friend's romance picks after about a chapter.

Vets a book in stages: blurb, Amazon and Goodreads reviews, a sample passage, then buys.

Reads several books at once. Took ages on one, read Child of God in a night.

Follows NYT book picks on Instagram and saves suggestions from her feed for later.

Gets ideas from browsing another big reader's bookshelf.

Keeps one ChatGPT thread for picks, telling it what she dislikes, and another to discuss books.

Pushed art and graffiti books on her students. They said "nah."

# FEEL

At home in bookstores and libraries, down to the smell.

Sad that bookstores are struggling.

Bored, then done, once a book drifts outside her genre.

Irritated by contemporary details that feel wrong to her.

A little guilty about leaving a book unfinished: "I really need to finish it."

Thrilled when a book is "an experience," as Hell House was.

Fascinated by morbid psychology and the minds behind crimes.

Hopeless about young readers: "such an uphill battle."

Intimidated by thick books and long series.

# SAY

"I cannot say no to a book store."

"I really like being able to go to a store and like pick up a book so I will still support the bookstores"

"I don't typically read outside my genre because I get bored and then I stop reading it."

On a friend's picks: "I let her sell me on it. I'll typically buy the books anyway"

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# THINK

Writing style decid... good ... can't s... pr...

Modern ... k ... a

A good cover means the publisher hired a good designer, so the book got care.

Bookstores are a dying breed, worth keeping alive with her money.

Vets a book in stages: blurb, Amazon and Goodreads reviews, a sample passage, then buys.

One trusted critic pe... genre bea... pile of reviews

Saving yes to ...

Keeps one ChatGPT thread for picks, telling it what she dislikes, and another to discuss books.

Short book videos get people reading, but you still have to go looking.

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Writing style decides it. A good concept can't save bad prose.

Gives a book a chance for a good cover. Picked up Heart-Shaped Box for its title.

Hasn't opened her Kindle in a while, with a book on it almost finished.

One trusted critic per genre beats a pile of reviews.

Gets ideas from browsing another big reader's bookshelf.

Keeps one ChatGPT thread for picks, telling it what she dislikes, and another to discuss books.

said "nah."

# FEEL

At hom... bookst... and libra... down to... smel...

At home in bookstores and libraries, down to the smell.

Bored, then done, once a book drifts outside her

Understood when ChatGPT adjusts to what she dislikes.

Irrita... conten... detai... feel wrong to her.

finish it."

Fascinated by morbid psychology and the minds behind crimes.

Hopeless about young readers: "such an uphill battle."

Intimidated by thick books and long series.

# Ella needs...

- To know a book will be worth it before committing to it.
- To browse and buy books in a physical location.
- To have a trusted guide for book recommendations.





# Insights

- Ella defines her taste by what she doesn't like to read, book taste is very subjective.
- Loves the physical experience of being in a bookstore, thinks local bookstores are worth fighting for.
- Uses digital tools (ChatGPT) to give her recommendations.





# Reflection

## What surprised us:

- People had a lot in common as readers (even our extreme user!). The same themes kept coming up across very different people.
- People wanted to chat much more than they said they would.
- Conversation flowed naturally and insights became clear.
- It was easier to ask follow-up questions than we thought it would be.

## How we adapted:

- We started with a script, let each interviewee lead, and asked follow-ups.
- We worked around what people were already doing. Our domain expert was working, so we talked while she worked.





# Key Learnings



## A recommendation is only as good as the person giving it.

People trust recommendations from people they know over anonymous reviews. Opinions were split on AI recommendations.



## People choose books for the feeling or aesthetic, not the genre.

Two books can share a theme but have a different “heart.”



## The problem is too many books, not too few.

Readers decide fast, from the first five pages or the cover, and drop books that don’t hook them.



## A bookstore is a place to be, not just a place to buy.

People go for community, how it looks and feels, and local / regional identity, even when traveling.



## People want community, but loose community.

They bond over book recommendations and the vibe of a bookstore, but some readers avoid book clubs / don’t listen to recommendations at all.

# What's Next

## Community

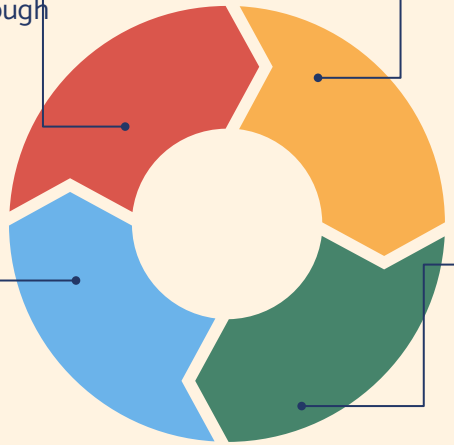
People bond over books. They make friends through recommendations and through the store.

- ***How do readers connect around books without it feeling like an obligation?***

## Aesthetic

How the store looks, how displays are arranged and what a book's cover looks like all shape what people pick up and keep.

- ***How does the look and feel of a space or a book affect discovery and buying?***



## Physical bookstore

Indie stores reflect their region, and readers seek them out, even on trips.

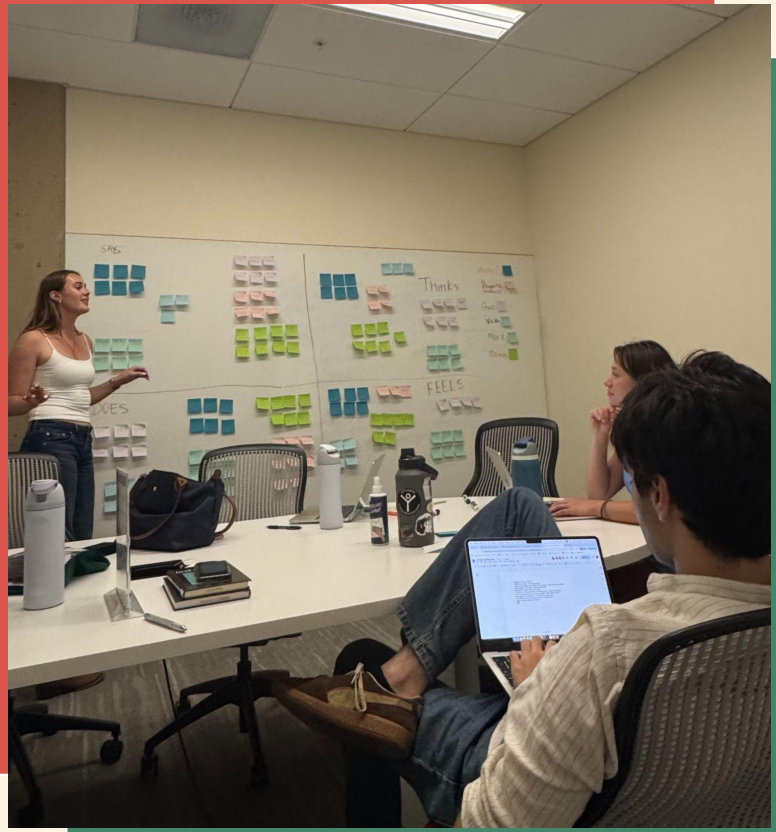
- ***What makes a bookstore feel like it belongs to its community, and why does that matter to readers?***

## Book Recs

Readers trust people they know, like staff picks or a friend's taste,  or even an algorithms that know their taste. They want picks that match how a book feels, not just its genre.

- ***What makes a curated pick feel personal and trustworthy?***

# Making our Empathy Maps!



# **Thank you!**
# Any Questions?



