

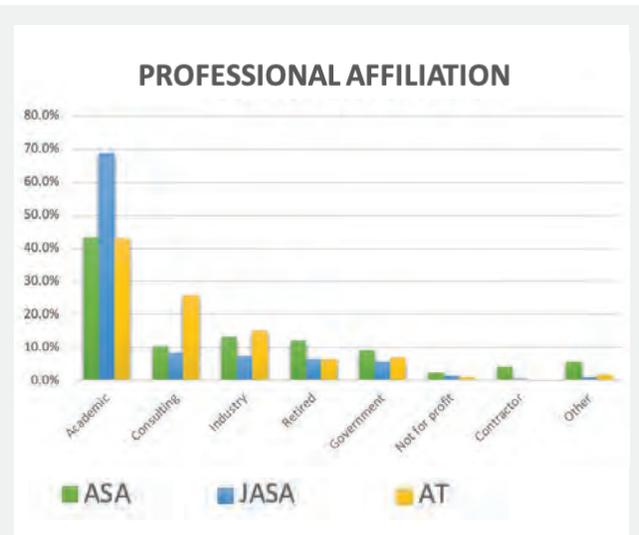
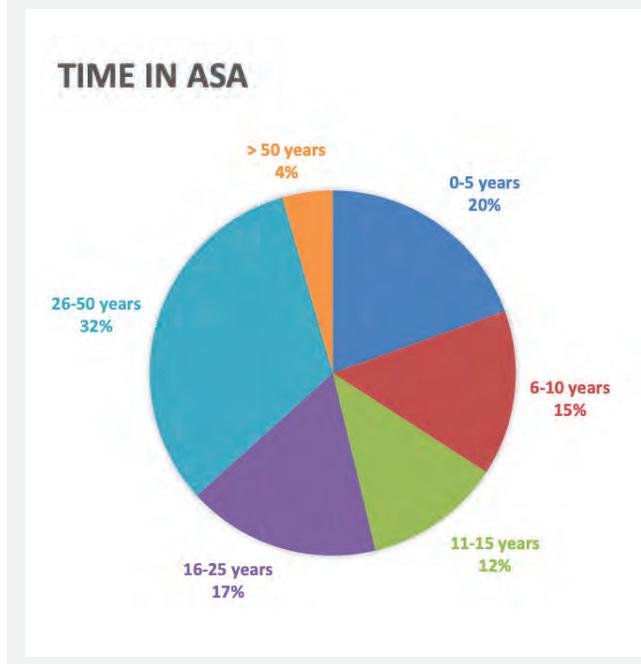
# The *Acoustics Today* Reader Survey

Kat Setzer

This spring, *Acoustics Today* (AT) Editor Arthur Popper and Acoustical Society of America (ASA) Publications conducted a survey of AT readers to help us improve the quality and value of AT to the Society and our members. Primarily, we wanted to ensure that AT continues to provide outstanding articles that help educate readers on a wide range of acoustics topics. A second goal was to enable AT to serve as a source of information useful to ASA members, both about the Society and about topics of particular value.

We received 758 responses, including dozens of helpful comments (some of which I'll share in this article). This article outlines some of the main results from the survey.

**Figure 1.** Pie chart depicting answers to the question, “How long have you been a member (including student or associate member) of the Acoustical Society of America (ASA)?”



**Figure 2.** Bar graphs comparing professional affiliation for ASA members (N = 1,117), authors and readers of *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (JASA; N = 1,453), and readers of *Acoustics Today* (AT; N = 726). Both JASA and AT surveys included student options; because the ASA survey did not include this option, however, these answers have been left out and percentages recalculated.

## Who Took the Survey?

Of the 758 people who responded to the survey, 99.3% (753) were ASA members, which makes sense given that the magazine is included with ASA membership! **Figure 1** shows the breakdown of respondents based on their time as members in the ASA.

The survey also asked for the readers' primary technical committee (TC). These results allowed comparison of our data with data from surveys done of ASA membership and *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (JASA) authors and readers in 2018. **Table 1** shows that the distribution of AT respondents' primary TC closely parallels ASA membership TC distribution.

**Table 1. Technical Committee Breakdowns**

	<b>Acoustical Society of America (N = 1,117)</b>	<b>The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (N = 1,619)</b>	<b>Acoustics Today (N = 729)</b>
Acoustical Oceanography	2.6%	2.3%	4.1%
Animal Bioacoustics	5.6%	5.9%	5.6%
Architectural Acoustics	15.7%	7.6%	16.9%
Biomedical Acoustics	3.9%	4.1%	4.3%
Computational Acoustics	0.9%	n/a	1.9%
Engineering Acoustics	7.8%	7.7%	6.5%
Musical Acoustics	4.4%	4.6%	5.1%
Noise	8.9%	7.4%	10.4%
Physical Acoustics	7.5%	10.1%	6.0%
Psychological and Physiological Acoustics	13.0%	11.7%	15.1%
Signal Processing	5.5%	8.6%	4.1%
Speech Communication	13.3%	16.4%	11.0%
Structural Acoustics and Vibration	3.6%	5.2%	2.1%
Underwater Acoustics	7.5%	8.5%	7.0%

This suggests that *AT*'s readership closely reflects the demographics of the overall Society and that the magazine is reaching our goal of catering to the diverse areas of interest within the Society.

Another aspect we wanted to consider about *AT* readers was their professional affiliation. **Figure 2** shows the breakdown of professional affiliation for *AT*, *JASA*, and the ASA as a whole. As a publication presenting new research results, *JASA* understandably finds the majority of its readership in academia. And although *AT* certainly has its fair share of academics, a third of our readers either work in industry or as consultants. As with TC affiliations, *AT* readers' professional affiliations more closely parallel those of the Society at large.

### How Do They Read *Acoustics Today*?

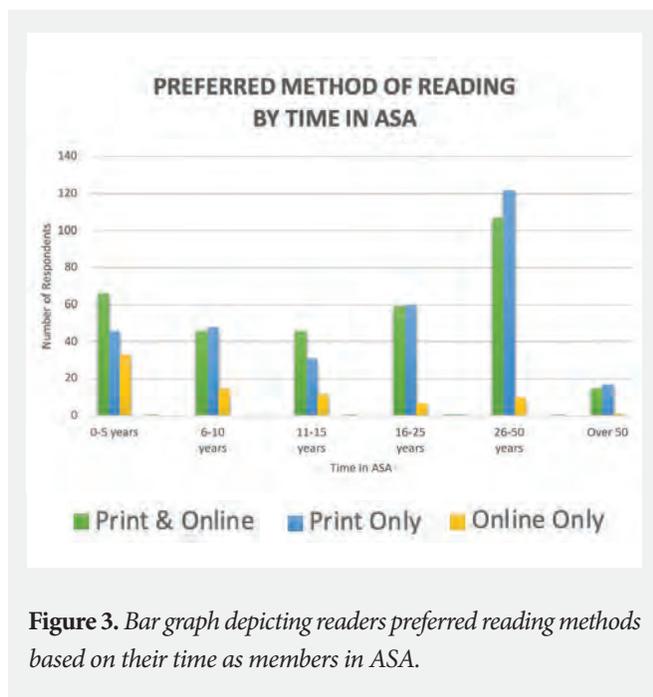
Once we answered the question of *who* reads *AT*, we wanted to find out more about *how* they read *AT*. The first thing we wanted to know was whether people were more likely to read the magazine online or in print. Although we live in a digital age, it turns out the majority of respondents read our print edition, whether some or all of the time. Out of the 758 responses we received, 331 (43.7%)

said they only read the print format, whereas 343 (45.3%) said they might read either online or in print.

Of course, this breakdown may be related to age group, with more digitally attuned younger members reading more online than older members. We didn't ask respondents' ages, but we could do a comparison based on how long respondents had been in the ASA (which I'll refer to as their "ASA age" going forward). Obviously, it's not a perfect comparison, but the results were interesting nonetheless.

As shown in **Figure 3**, newer (and presumably younger) members were more likely than any other ASA age group to only read the magazine's online edition, with 22.8% of respondents who had been members less than 5 years saying that they read the online version exclusively. This ASA age group also had the lowest proportion of respondents who said they only read the print edition, but, to be clear, these readers still made up 31.7% of the respondents in this ASA age group!

Meanwhile, our longer term members, those with ASA ages over 26 years, were less likely to read just the online edition, with 4% reporting only reading *AT* online. These



**Figure 3.** Bar graph depicting readers preferred reading methods based on their time as members in ASA.

respondents also reported a higher likelihood than other ASA age groups for reading only the print edition, with 51.1% selecting this response.

What do we do with this information? First and foremost, it shows us that although so much media is moving to electronic formats, our print edition still has a place in the Society, and not just with readers who remember time before the internet. In fact, a number of respondents mentioned that they read the print magazine as a way to take a break from all the screen time required in the modern era.

A few readers mentioned they wished they could get e-mail notifications so they could find out about updates to the *AT* website. Great news! We actually already have this set up, and all ASA members should receive a notification to the e-mail address associated with their ASA membership. If you are not a member or would like to receive additional notifications, you can sign up to receive notifications of new *AT* issues on the website (see [acousticstoday.org](http://acousticstoday.org)).

### What Do They Read? Why?

Our next line of questions inquired about what our readers focus on in the magazine. Of respondents, 59.1% read some or most of each issue, 37.8% said they read articles in some issues if the topics interest them, and 3.0% said they don't generally read *AT*.

The main articles in the magazine draw the most attention, with 98.7% of readers saying they read some or all of the articles sometimes or always. "Sound Perspective" essays are also frequently read, with 89% saying they read some or all of the essays sometimes or always. Many respondents mentioned that they skim through the entire issue and read what they find interesting. One reader noted, "I'm pleasantly surprised by how much of each issue is really interesting. The breadth of topics is a real plus." Another said, "Usually there is at least one article that I read or skim, and often more. Loved the article on Carleen Hutchins!"

When we tried to parse what types of material are readers' favorites, we found that readers are most likely to read research articles in their general fields of interest (selected by 83.4% of respondents) and about the history of various acoustical topics (76.3% of respondents). Quite a few readers also appreciate articles about the work of noted acousticians and about research fields outside of their own areas of interests. And, we were happy to see, some admitted that it was hard to choose one option over another; one reader quipped, "These three favorites are more favorite than my other three favorites."

Because *AT* goes to all members of the Society, the magazine provides features like Letters from the Editor and the President as well as "Sound Perspectives" essays on various TCs, administrative comments, special groups, and so on to keep members informed about the Society. The overall consensus of readers was that this information is useful and informative as is.

We also asked readers why they read *AT*. Although the most common reason listed was to read articles in one's own field (selected by 81.6% of respondents), many (73%) also read to learn about acoustic topics outside of their field and about other interesting topics. One reader said, "*AT* is my 'fashion' magazine. I feel I keep updated with what researchers are doing in their fields." Another wrote, "It is my connection to others in my field and the status of new developments, technologies, etc." And, as it turns out, quite a few instructors like to use *AT* in their classrooms, with many mentioning that they use the material both for undergraduate and graduate students...and even to educate random nonacousticians in their lives.

### Acoustics Today Online

One fact that quickly became apparent from the survey is the number of people who don't realize that *AT* is

available for free online at [acousticstoday.org](http://acousticstoday.org). So, if you didn't know already, please be aware that *every* issue is available online! Even better, the website has some special content, like interviews with past ASA presidents, Spanish language articles, and pieces about important moments in acoustics history!

### The Value of the Survey to the Acoustical Society of America

The survey is the first one we have done for *AT* in five years. During that time, we have gently shifted the focus of the magazine to have a broader of scope of content and to have articles written at a level so that everyone in the ASA could, presumably, understand all the material. We have also redesigned the magazine and added essays to inform members about interesting issues. In doing the survey, we wanted to find out if we have succeeded in our goals and if our goals have helped make *AT* valuable to members and to the Society. Our conclusion is that we have been successful. Moreover, it is clear from the comments in the survey that *AT* fills a valuable educational role for ASA members and that there is interest in our continuing on the

current paths. Of course, we have no interest in continuing with the “same old stuff.” Rather, our additional goal is to continue to make *AT* more interesting and more valuable to ASA members and to the Society.

### Thank You

For those who took the time to share your thoughts with us, we greatly appreciate it. We are considering your comments and discussing ways to make *AT* even better and to serve our readership and Society members more. If you ever think of a way to help improve *AT* or have an article you want to pitch, please reach out to our editor, Arthur Popper, at [apopper@umd.edu](mailto:apopper@umd.edu).

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