

1 Books

Top Ten Apps

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Audiobook Player

\$0.99 US

My wife and I have always enjoyed listening to audiobooks in our cars. First we listened to cassette tapes; then we listened to CDs; and now we use our iPhones. Until recently, we spent \$10 to \$20 each month on audiobooks from Audible.com (www.audible.com). Then we discovered the fantastic Audiobook Player app from Alex Sokirytsky. With Audiobook Player, we can easily find, download, and listen to more than 2,300 free books.

Audiobook Player's iTunes App Store description claims that it's "the best way to enjoy streaming or offline playback of free

audio books on the iPhone and iPod touch." Audiobook Player is definitely the easiest way to find and download free audio books with its several ways to browse or search for titles that interest you, as shown in the figure on the left.



I'd be remiss, gentle reader, if I didn't at least mention that Audiobook Player gets almost all of its content from Librivox (<http://librivox.org>), a non-commercial, non-profit, ad-free project run by volunteers. Librivox donates all of its volunteer-made recordings to the public domain.

If you don't want to pay 99¢ or you don't care for this app, you can visit the Librivox Web site, download all the audiobooks you like, and import them into iTunes. Audiobook Player just makes it easier to find and manage your audiobook library because you can download new titles right to your iPhone so that you can listen to them immediately. Audiobook Player even breaks the files into chapters.

Best features

One of the best things about Audiobook Player is that — unlike the audiobooks you purchase from Audible.com — you can download free audiobooks one chapter at a time, as shown in the figure on the right, which helps you conserve storage space on your iPhone.

Another nice feature of Audiobook Player is that you can download new titles or chapters over any of your iPhone's three wireless networks — Wi-Fi, 3G, or EDGE.

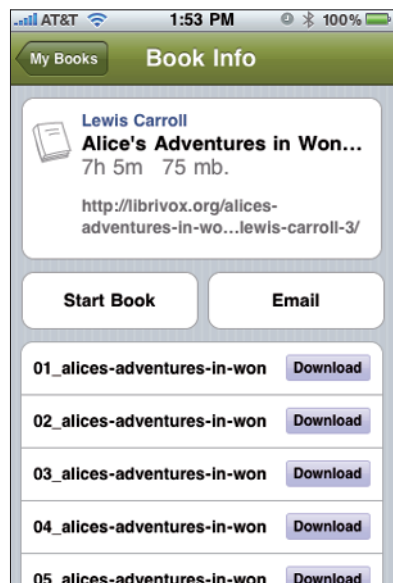
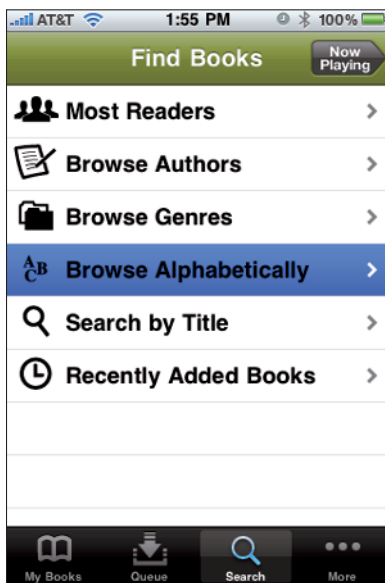
Finally, there's also a free version called Audiobook Player - FREE, which is the same as the paid version, but you're limited to one book at a time.

Worst features

Although the 2,300 free books include classics in the public domain, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, there are few (if any) audiobooks written during *our* lifetimes. This isn't the app's fault, but I still consider it a shortcoming.



If you're looking for current bestsellers or more contemporary fare, the iTunes Store's Audiobook section has a pretty good selection. Keep in mind that the same audiobook you find in the iTunes store often costs less at www.audible.com. You might also check out the AudibleListener Gold plan. My wife and I pay just \$14.95 per month for one audiobook a month, even if the audiobook's list price is substantially higher (as most of them are).





Classics2Go Collection

\$0.99 US

Classics2Go is one of the myriad apps you'll find in the App Store that offers a selection of books that are in the public domain. This one includes more than 50 classic books, is easy on the eyes, and offers a couple of unique features. Although I haven't tried every classic book app in the iTunes Store, I've spent at least \$20 on the ones that look the most promising. After much deliberation, I've concluded that the Classics2Go Collection is the one I like best.

The Classic2Go library includes more than 50 classics such as *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *Call of the Wild*, *Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Siddhartha*, *Dracula*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Frankenstein*, and dozens more.

One thing that makes this app unique is that several of the books — including *Alice in Wonderland*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Flatland* — feature illustrations, as shown in the figure on the left.

Some apps that are similar to Classics2Go have poorly formatted text with strange line endings and weird page breaks, or they feature ugly typography in unattractive fonts. The books in Classics2Go Collection, though, are nicely formatted and typeset as shown in the figure on the right.

Best features

What I like best about Classics2Go Collection is the elegant typography, thoughtful page layout, and clear, readable text. It's obvious that the developers didn't just copy and paste the raw Project Gutenberg text into the app (see the Introduction to this book for info on Project Gutenberg). The upshot is that text in this app looks better than the text in most of the other "reading" apps I've tested.

Another plus is the quantity and quality of the available titles. You've got to love getting more than 50 of the world's greatest books for less than a buck. Although some of these books are available in other classic book apps, the Classics2Go Collection contains many more books that I'm likely to read and enjoy.

A free version of the app is available. It's called Classics2GoLite Collection and has the same features as the paid version but includes only six books: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *Alice in*

Wonderland, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. So before you plunk down the whopping 99¢ for Classics2Go Collection, you can check out the interface to make sure you like it.

Worst features

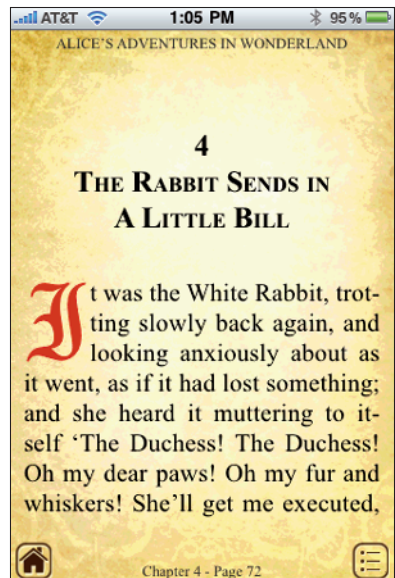
The biggest problem I have with Classics2Go Collection is that you can't select a different font size. I usually find myself wishing I could make text bigger on my iPhone, but in the case of Classics2Go Collection, I'd like to make it a little smaller so that I wouldn't have to turn the page as often. Other than this small complaint, I've found that Classics2Go Collection provides a most pleasant reading experience with nice touches you won't find in other apps.



If you don't want to pay for a public domain book collection, you can download from Project Gutenberg most (if not all) the books any of the similar apps offer. Save them as Microsoft Word, PDF, or plain text files, or send them to yourself in the body of an e-mail message (or messages) so that you can view them on your iPhone without purchasing additional software.



Although downloading from Project Gutenberg may save you a buck or two, you'll miss out on all the cool goodies Classics2Go (and similar apps) offers, such as bookmarks, optimized typography, tables of contents, and illustrations.





Comics

Free

The Comics app is a front-end to the largest comic book library online, offers a ton of free content, and provides a well-designed interface that makes viewing comics on a small screen more pleasant than other comic book reader apps.

Comics is actually three different apps rolled into one. First and foremost, it's a fantastic way of reading comic books on a 3.5-inch touch screen. It's also a comic book store with hundreds of individual comics from dozens of different publishers, including Arcana Comics, Devil's Due, Digital Webbing, Red 5, Zenescope, and many others. Last but not least, it's a great way to organize the comics you own on your iPhone so you can find the one you want quickly and easily.

Let's start with the viewer. Wired.com says Comics, "solves the problem of reading comics on the small screen," and I have to agree. The comics are presented in Comixology's patent-pending Guided View, which keeps the page intact as its creators intended. It "guides" you from panel to panel with beautiful transition animations, panning across frames and offering dramatic pull-backs that enhance the viewing experience, as shown in the figure on the left (which is from Atomic Robo #1, one of many free comics available through the Comics app's built-in comic book store).

In all fairness, comic book purists like my friend Andy Ihnatko don't much care for enhancements such as Guided View. In fact, he recently wrote an article for the *Chicago Sun-Times* in which he expressed his disdain for such frippery: "Even when 'motion comics' are done with great expense and care (such as Marvel's recent 'Spider-Woman' offering) the overall effect is sock-puppetry at best."

Some people say opinions are like noses (or other body parts not normally mentioned in a G-rated book such as this) because everybody has one. I'm sorry, Andy, but in my humble opinion the animations are innovative and not at all "sock-puppetry." In fact, I'd go so far as to say that I think Comixology's Guided View looks much better than the other comic book reader apps that abruptly jump from panel to panel. Call me ignorant or unsophisticated or whatever you like, but I say Guided View is very cool and is a reason to love this app.

The free Comics app includes more than 65 free comics, including a good exclusive weekly series — Box 13. If you want more comics, use the Comics app's excellent in-app comic store (see the figure on the right), which offers hundreds of comics and series and generally lets you download for free the first issue in a series to see if you like it enough to buy subsequent issues. Most of the comics in the store cost 99¢ to \$1.99.

New releases are available every Wednesday, so visit the store often to check out the latest and greatest offerings. And speaking of new offerings, the latest version of Comics, which came out while I was writing this chapter, offers push notifications so you'll never miss new issues of your favorite comic book series.

Finally, both the store and your personal comic collection are well-organized and easy to use.

Best features

Comics provides a fantastic viewing experience — immersive, enjoyable, and more cinematic than you expect from a comic book.

Worst features

Comics offers lots of different comics, but I've never heard of many of them. Although that's not necessarily a bad thing, I'd love to see more comics from the big guys (such as Marvel and DC Comics) available in the Comics store.





Kindle for iPhone

Free

Amazon.com's free Kindle app lets you shop for hundreds of thousands of eBooks, newspapers, and magazines at Amazon.com and read them at your leisure on your iPhone.

Before I tell you about the Kindle app, though, you need to know about the Kindle device that it emulates.

The Kindle is Amazon.com's \$250+ wireless handheld reading device (see the figure on the left), which lets you shop for, buy, and read Kindle books, magazines, and newspapers on its black-and-white screen.

The Kindle app for the iPhone (see the figure on the right) does more or less the same things as a Kindle, but on your iPhone instead of on a separate, bulky, expensive, single-purpose device.

Amazon's Kindle store offers more than 350,000 books, as well as newspapers, magazines, and blogs at prices well below their printed counterparts. You can read the books, newspapers, and magazines you buy on the Kindle device or on your iPhone with the free Kindle app.

The best thing about reading anything on either the Kindle device or with the Kindle app is that prices for the electronic versions of books are almost always a lot less than the printed versions. For example, some of the best deals are on *The New York Times* Best Sellers, which generally cost just \$9.99 for the Kindle version. At press time, examples of best-selling titles include Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol* (\$29.95 in print; 67% saved); James Patterson and Richard DiLallo's *Alex Cross's Trial* (\$27.99 in print; 64% saved); E. L. Doctorow's *Homer & Langley: A Novel* (\$26 in print; 62% saved); and Jon Krakauer's *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman* (\$27.95 in print; 64% saved). Magazines and newspaper subscriptions are less expensive than their hard copy counterparts, too. For example, *The New York Times* Kindle Edition costs \$13.99 per month (vs. \$45–\$60 per month depending on where you live), and many magazines are less than \$2 per month.

Another unique feature of both the Kindle device and the Kindle app for the iPhone is that you can read the beginning of any book free before you buy it.

How does the free Kindle iPhone app stack up to the \$250 Kindle device? Glad you asked! The Kindle has a bigger screen than your iPhone and includes a physical keyboard. Unlike your iPhone, the Kindle has a black-and-white screen and doesn't include e-mail, maps, a camera, SMS or MMS messaging, a music player, or a video player. And, of course, you can't install iPhone apps on it.

The Kindle iPhone app lets you read in portrait or landscape mode, choose the text size, choose background and text colors, add bookmarks, and zoom in and out at will. You can also create notes that are backed up automatically, as well as synchronized with your Kindle device (if you happen to own one in addition to owning the Kindle iPhone app).

To be perfectly fair, the Kindle iPhone app lacks some of the Kindle device's features, such as a battery that lasts for days, text-to-speech, full-text search, and a highlighter.

That said, do you really want to pay \$250 to lug around a device four or five times larger than your iPhone just to read books and newspapers on a bigger black-and-white screen?

I thought not.

Best features

The best thing about the Kindle app is that the Kindle store has a huge selection of titles, and you can carry almost anything you care to read in your pocket without spending \$250 on a separate electronic device.

Worst features

You can't buy books from within the app. It's awkward to shop for and purchase books using a Web browser, and it's especially awkward to do so with Safari on your iPhone's 3.5-inch screen. Lastly, as I mentioned earlier, the iPhone app lacks a search function or highlighter.

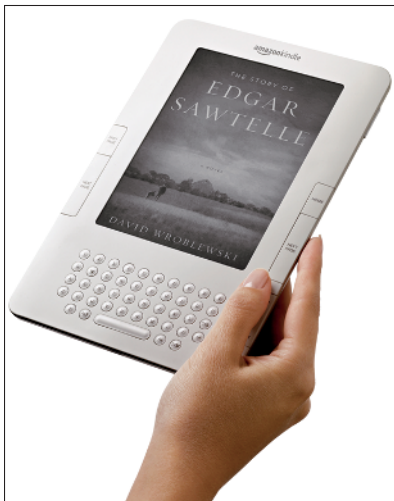
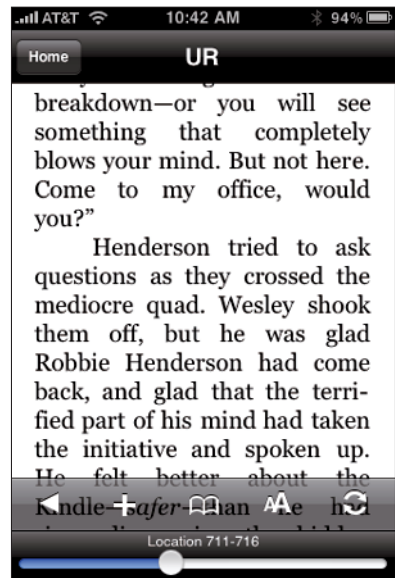


Photo courtesy of Amazon.com



Chapter 1: Books



Stanza

Free

Stanza is another free eBook reader with more and better features than the Kindle app but a significantly smaller selection of titles.

Unlike the Kindle, there's not a \$250 handheld Stanza device, but I suspect most of you won't care.

Stanza has all the features that are missing from the Kindle app and more. Some of Stanza's niceties include almost infinite control over page layout, so you can specify not only font size but also margins, line and paragraph spacing, indentation, page color, and more. Being able to adjust layout settings makes a huge difference, especially if you read in a variety of places with different types of lighting.

You can look up words using the built-in dictionary and jot down annotations, as you can see in the figure on the left.

Plus, you can search for a word or phrase in any book, sort your library by title or author, or even create custom collections within your library. If you're a fan of the Cover Flow view found in iTunes and Mac OS X Leopard and Snow Leopard, you'll be pleased to know that you can browse your Stanza library in a Cover Flow–like view. And, although this is kind of silly, if you don't like the cover that came with a book, you can replace it with other artwork using Stanza's Cover Lookup feature.

You can set multiple bookmarks in each book, and if you leave the app for any reason — a phone call, text message, or just because your eyes are tired — Stanza remembers where you left off and takes you back to that page the next time you launch the app.

(*The Audacity of Hope*), Stephen King (too many titles to name), and James Patterson (ditto).

Stanza offers access to a lot of free books, probably more than any other app I've tested, including most (if not all) of the titles found in Classics2Go Collection, as well as other titles from authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, Oscar Wilde, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and P. G. Wodehouse.

The Stanza catalog is easy to use and makes finding titles easy to do. You can browse by subject, language, or author, or you can use Stanza's excellent search mechanism.

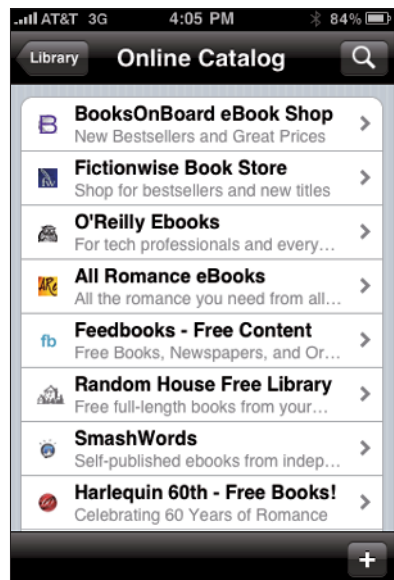
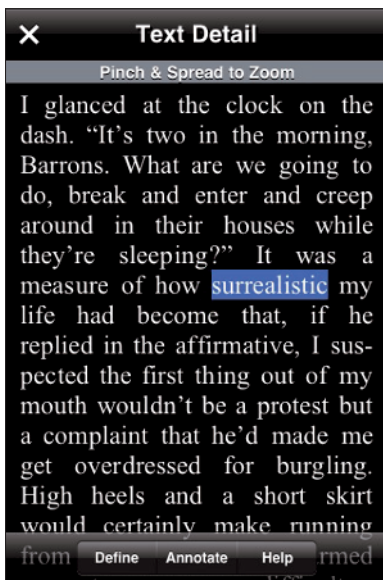
This app has been lauded by *TIME* magazine (Top 11 iPhone Apps), *PC Magazine* (Editor's Choice), *Wired* (10 Most Awesome iPhone Apps), and BestAppEver.com. Because Stanza is free, you have no excuse not to give it a try.

Best features

I love having complete control over the way my pages look. I wish every app I use to read anything had this feature. I also like all the thoughtful touches such as search, built-in dictionary, and instant annotation.

Worst features

The biggest drawback to this app is its smaller selection of titles (compared to Kindle).





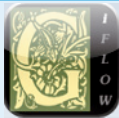
IVerse Comics

Free

IVerse Comics is another comic book reader and store that lets you download both free and inexpensive issues of comic books. Like the Comics app, it has an integrated comic book viewer and is free.

IVerse Comics isn't as elegant as the Comics app. In portrait mode you see a full comic book page at once. To see panels at a readable size, though, you have to flip your phone into landscape mode, which feels clunky compared to Guided View in Comics.

On the other hand, IVerse Comics offers titles not available in the Comics app, including *Archie* comics, Dean Koontz graphic novels, and the excellent *Dynamo 5* series.



Grimm's Fairy Tales by Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm

Free

I've always preferred the darker Grimm versions of fairy tale classics such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* to the sanitized Disney renditions, so I was tickled to discover this app.

In addition to more than 200 stories, this free app has pretty much every feature you could ask for and then some. You can choose the typeface, font size, text color, and paper color. The unique AutoScroll feature, which causes the text to scroll up the screen, much like a teleprompter, is way cool. It takes a few minutes to get the hang of using AutoScroll, but after you do, you'll wish every app offered it.



Holy Bible

Free

The Holy Bible app includes six complete translations of the Holy Bible. If that's not enough, with a couple of taps you can download more than a dozen additional translations, including the World English Bible, American Standard Version, and even the Bible in Basic English.

The presentation is slick and professional and includes useful features such as search, notes, bookmarks, and more. I like the way you can drag your finger up or down the right side of the screen to jump to a specific verse.

Unlike most apps, you won't have to wish that the Holy Bible app had AutoScroll because it does.



Self Help Classics

\$0.99 US

They say that if something sounds too good to be true it usually is. With the complete text of 16 self-help books for less than a buck, Self Help Classics isn't one of those things. It's good and it's true.

The titles include *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, *The Master Key System* by Charles F. Haanel, *The Art of Public Speaking* by Dale Carnegie and Joseph Berg Esenwein, plus the autobiography of Andrew Carnegie, America's first self-made billionaire.

Then there's the app itself, which is nicely designed and has bookmarks, font size control, navigation shortcut buttons, and (yea!) AutoScroll. Furthermore, the text is nicely set and easy to read.



Shakespeare

Free

If you're a fan of the Bard you'll love this free app, which includes the full texts of 40 plays, all 6 poems, all 154 sonnets, and a searchable concordance.

Produced in part by PlayShakespeare.com, which is known as "the ultimate free Shakespeare resource," the works in this app are drawn from the First Folio of 1623 (and Quartos where applicable) and the Globe Edition of 1866, which have been re-edited and updated to reflect the editorial standards of PlayShakespeare.com's scholarly team.

Finally, this is one of the few apps that has a landscape reading option that hides all the buttons and controls when you turn your iPhone sideways. Yea!