# **Reading Medieval History Online – Overview**

**Background and Aims**

The main aim of the activities was to support students on a second-year medieval history module in engaging with historiography and primary sources, building their confidence and providing different platforms of expression, particularly for shy or non-verbal learners. This was done through engaging them in online reading activities using Talis Elevate and Padlet. In 2021-22, the module was delivered via 1-hour face-to face seminar, which followed a 1-hour pre-recorded lecture and a 30-minute online lecture engagement session (Q&A).

**Structure and Delivery**

Students were given access to a set of online primary and secondary sources to read in advance of the seminar. These were related to a broader lecture delivered (and posted) online at least one week in advance of the face-to-face class.

Work on Padlet focused on the secondary sources and involved students answering several specific questions anonymously. The use of directive questions was a way of pointing students towards historiographic debates and of helping them to identify the main arguments in the works that they were reading.

Work on Talis Elevate focused on primary sources, with students annotating them collectively: for example, writing comments to demonstrate their understanding or highlight problematic elements of the texts.

Asynchronous work on both platforms was monitored by the instructor. Feedback was provided by ‘liking’ or responding to student comments, to encourage expansion on initial observations. Talis Elevate and Padlet were also used synchronously in face-to-face seminars as a means of encouraging debate and summarising what had been learnt.

**Feedback and analysis**

Students liked the support that these systems offered. Interaction with peers and feedback from the tutor reassured them of their understanding of the reading prior to the seminar session, encouraging them to participate in the synchronous activities. Students who participated in the asynchronous activities tended to be more adventurous in their participation in class and more precise in their responses to assessments. They also had higher levels of attendance and overall engagement.

However, levels of engagement varied and seemed to correlate both with the ‘popularity’ of the topic and perceived relevance to the summative assessment (the Talis Elevate and Padlet activities were not assessed summatively). Some students preferred to keep their annotations private in Talis Elevate. The overall rate of participation fell across the course of the semester as students selected topics for their essays, many tending to ‘dismiss’ seminars that they deemed irrelevant. Increased workload levels across the course of the semester probably also affected such decisions.

**Recommendations:**

***Assessment***. Integrating these online reading activities into summative assessment would probably increase engagement. This was not possible in 2021-22 due to Covid-related changes to assessment regulations.

***Workload***.We had to cover a lot in a 1-hour seminar. In different teaching conditions it would be preferable to have more time to work on each of the materials rather than having to cram it all in (for example, synchronous work on primary sources could be done during a live lecture, with analysis of secondary sources completed in a seminar).

**Links**

* Padlet: <https://padlet.help/l/en/about-padlet/what-is-padlet>
* Talis Elevate: <https://talis.com/talis-elevate/>