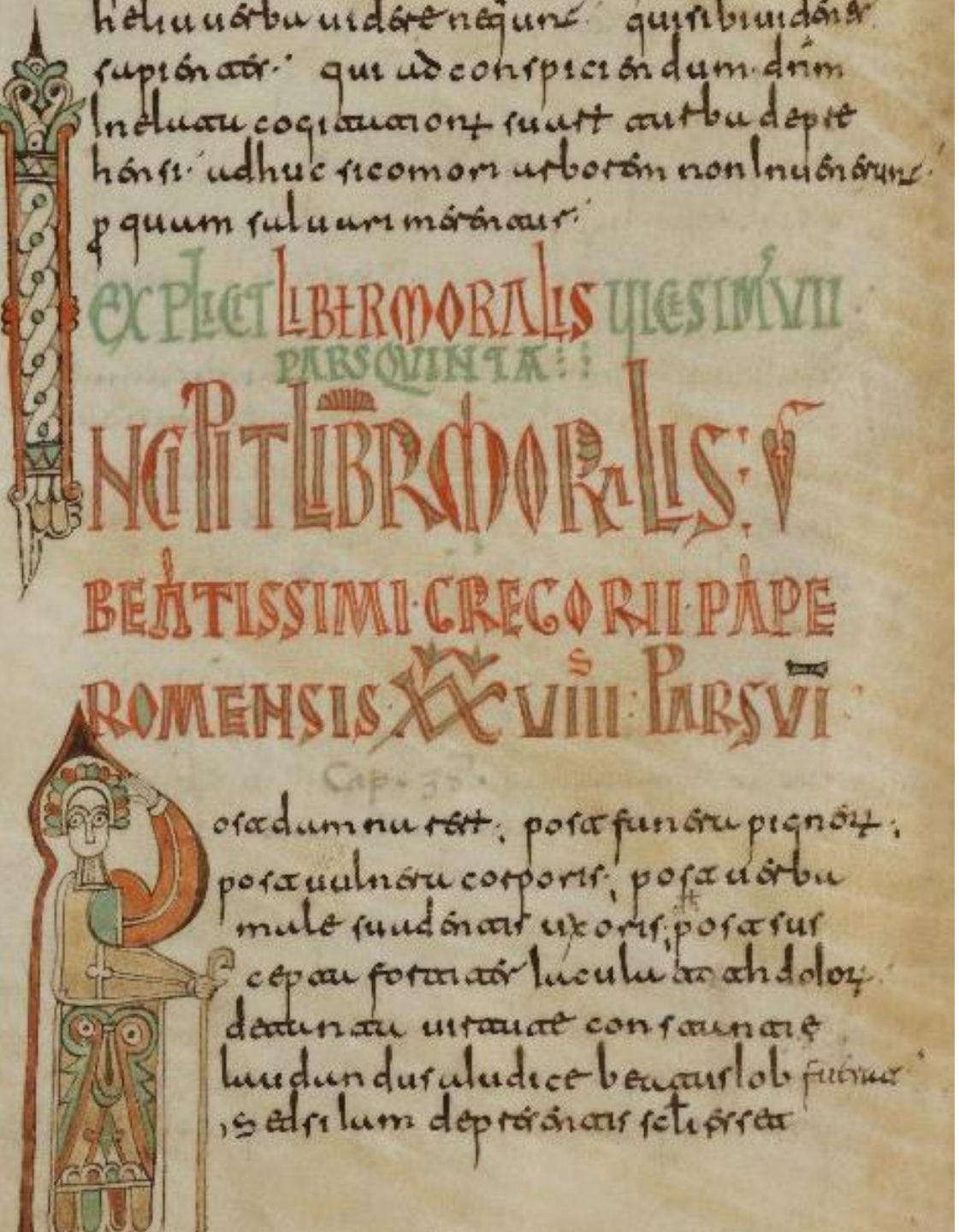


MAKING DIGITAL HISTORY

Active Online Reading

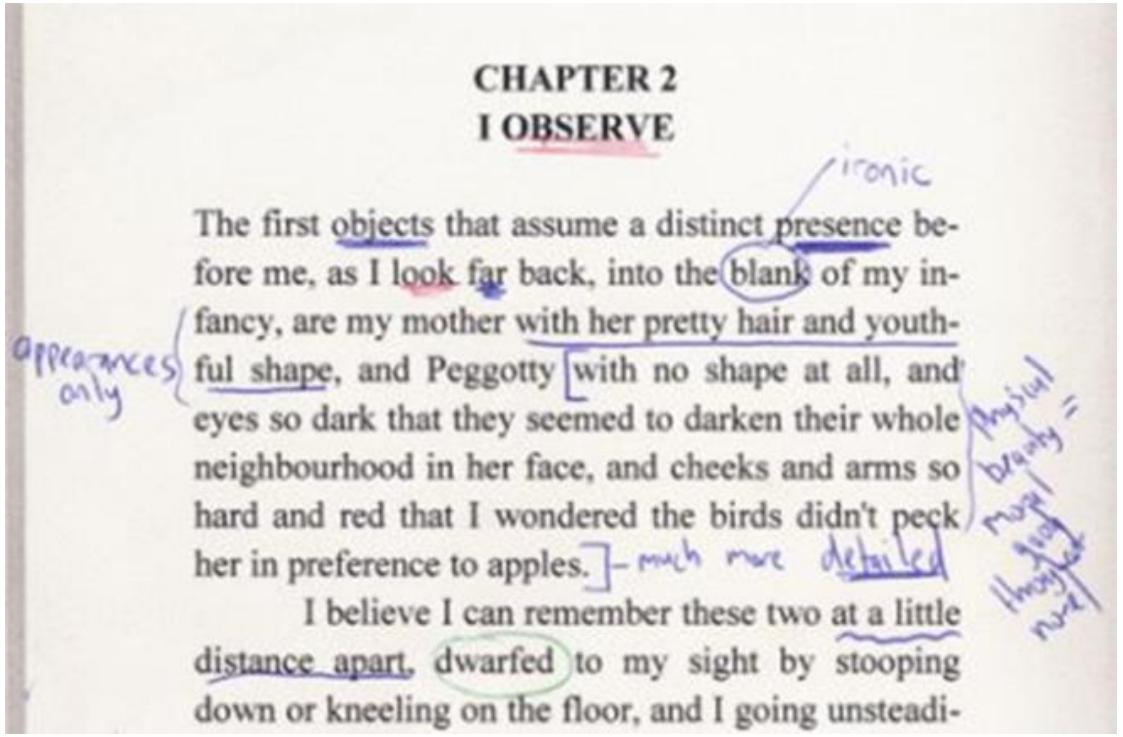
Prof. Jamie Wood

School of History and Heritage

University of Lincoln

Today

- Introducing the project
- Background
- Overview of key findings
  - Staff
  - Students
- Digging deeper
  - Results for L1 undergraduates
  - Results by disability
- Summing up
- Questions



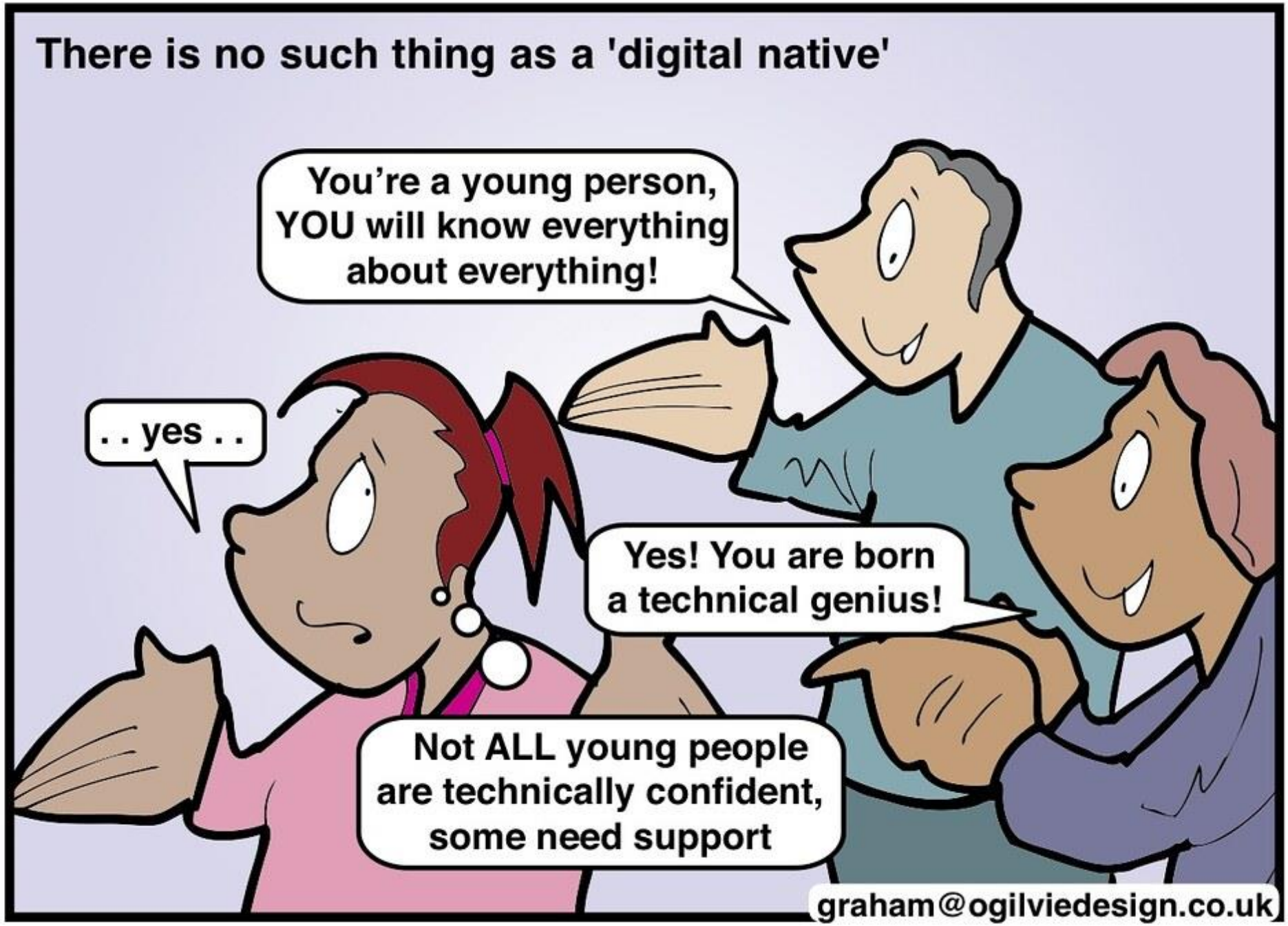
CHAPTER 2
I OBSERVE

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples.

I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart, dwarfed to my sight by stooping down or kneeling on the floor, and I going unsteadi-

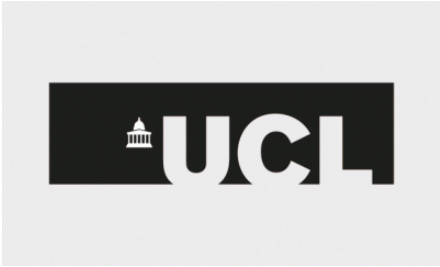
Key points

- The ubiquity of reading
- Development over time
- The power of annotation
- The power of collective reading
- Managing the transition
- Over-estimation of skills (by students)
- Under-estimation of capability (by staff)
- Lack of developed pedagogy for reading in HE


There is no such thing as a 'digital native'
You're a young person, YOU will know everything about everything!
. . yes . .
Yes! You are born a technical genius!
Not ALL young people are technically confident, some need support
graham@ogilviedesign.co.uk

The Active online reading project

- QAA-funded Collaborative Enhancement Project
- April 2021-April 2022
- Building on community of practice in History
- Working with other disciplines and institutions
- Teachers and teacher educators
- Student researchers

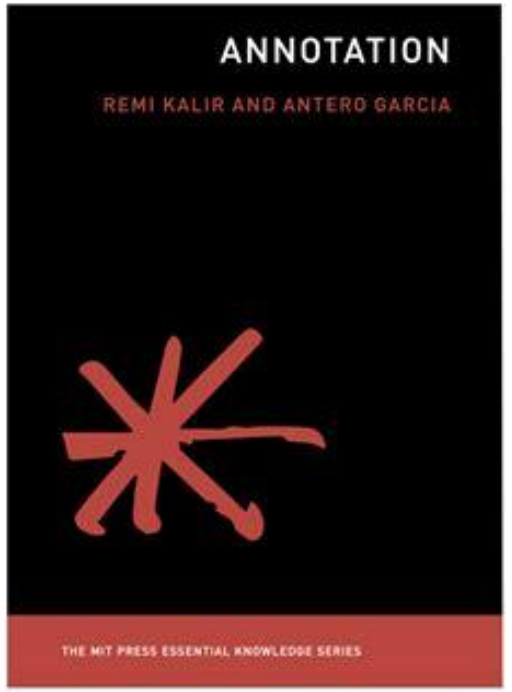


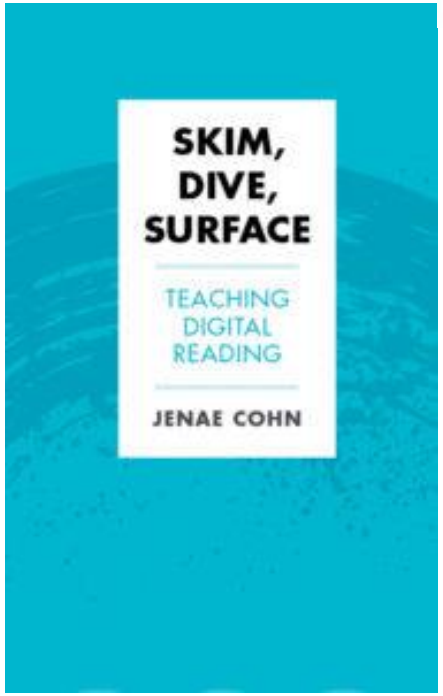
Definitions

- Online Learning: learning that is conducted and/or materials that are delivered via online spaces.
- Digital Reading: reading an electronic text whether online or offline; distinct from digital or information literacy.
- Active Reading: the practice of deep engagement with a text using techniques of annotating, responding, questioning, summarising, and sharing.

The rationale

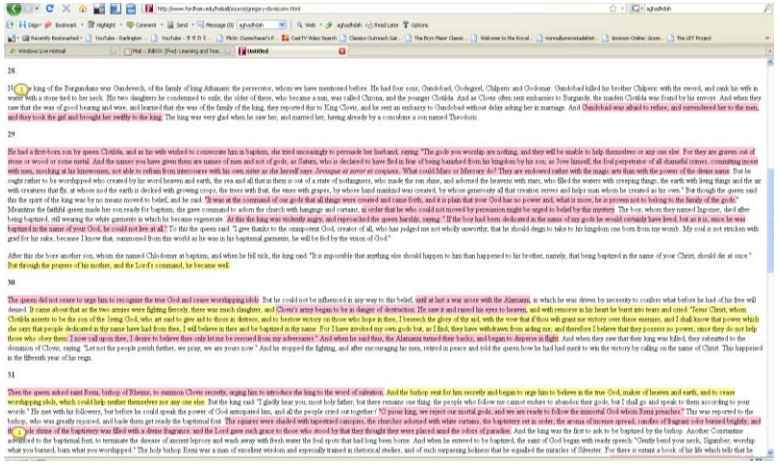
“Students’ reading practices have transformed over the past 20 years, with the increasing digitisation of resources, the emergence and then ubiquity of virtual learning environments, and the widespread use of mobile devices. The pandemic has accelerated such developments, with the rapid roll-out of online and blended learning. Yet we know strikingly little about how students read online, how this relates to their overall learning, and which pedagogic strategies are effective.” (AOR proposal, Jan 2021)

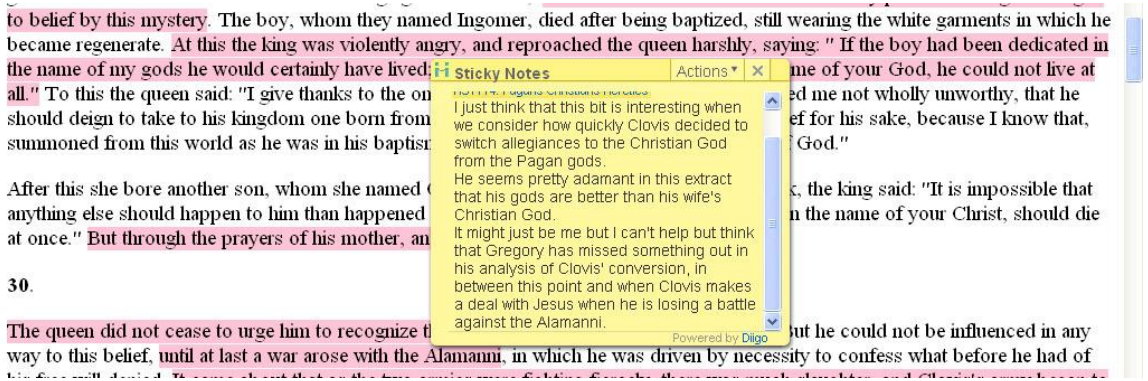




Social bookmarking and questioning (2008-2009)

- L1 History students at Sheffield
- Finding and annotating readings
- Asking questions
- Findings:
  - Improved research skills
  - Posing questions and:
    - **Engaging with sources**: ‘it makes you think about what you're reading a lot more, and opens up the area of reading to different paths of thought.’
    - **Learning from others**: ‘I've found being able to see other people's questions helpful, as it brings up new points that I might not have previously thought about.’
    - **Changing perceptions**: ‘I used to like just being set questions, but now I have realised how beneficial thinking of your own questions is. I much prefer it.’



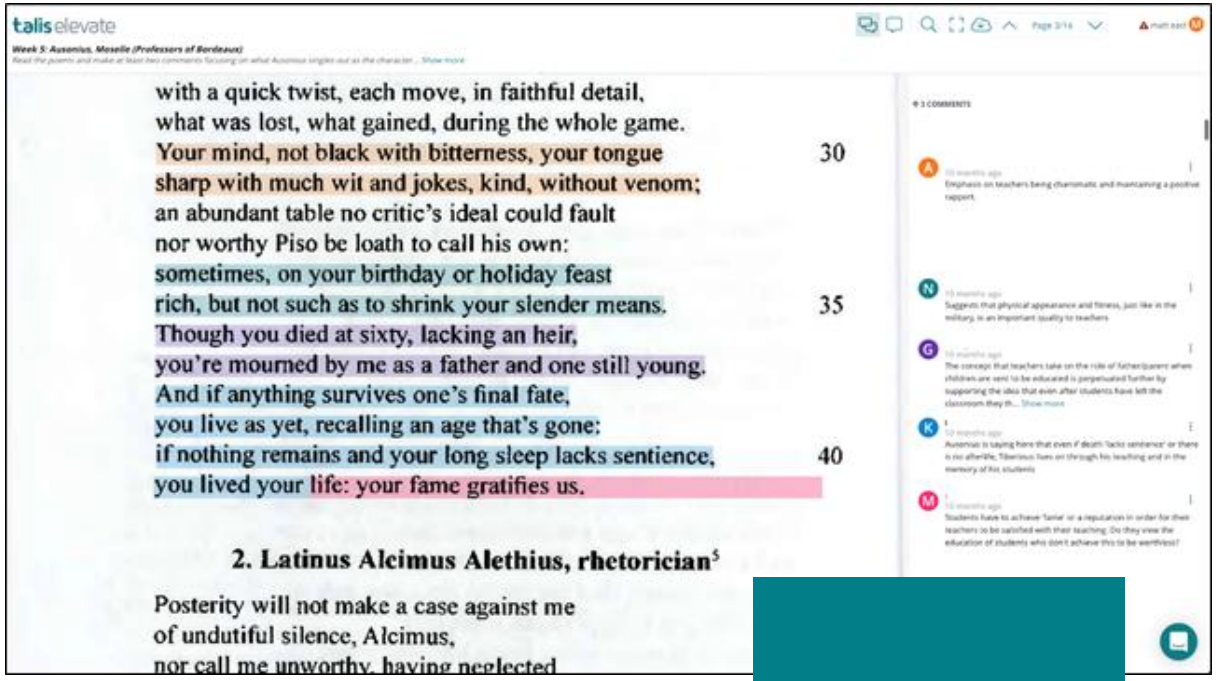


J. Wood, N. Taha and A. Cox, Social Bookmarking Pedagogies in Higher Education: A Comparative Study, *International Journal of Information Systems in the Service Sector*, 6.1 (2014), 24-36.

J. Wood, Helping students to become disciplinary researchers using questioning, social bookmarking and inquiry-based learning, *Practice and Evidence of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 6.1 (2011) [online].

Talis Elevate (2018-present)

- Students required to post 2-3 online comments on weekly reading(s)
  - Points of interest
  - Questions
  - How materials (and weeks) inter-relate
- Informed/ structured seminars
- Knowledge bank



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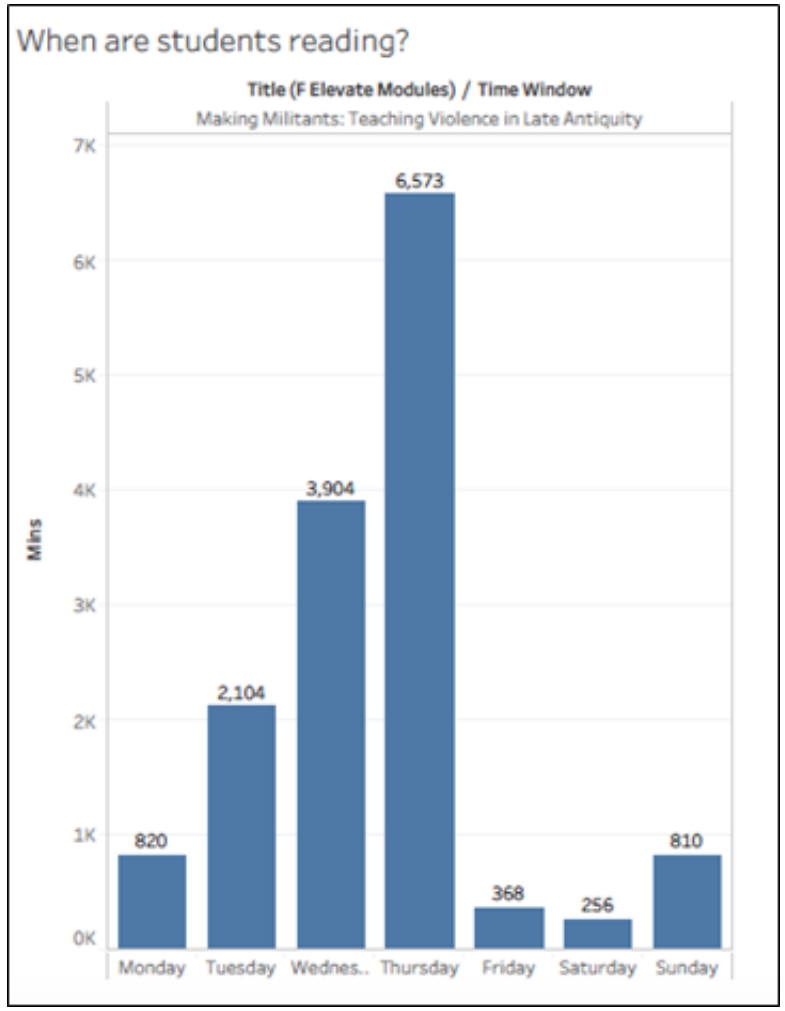
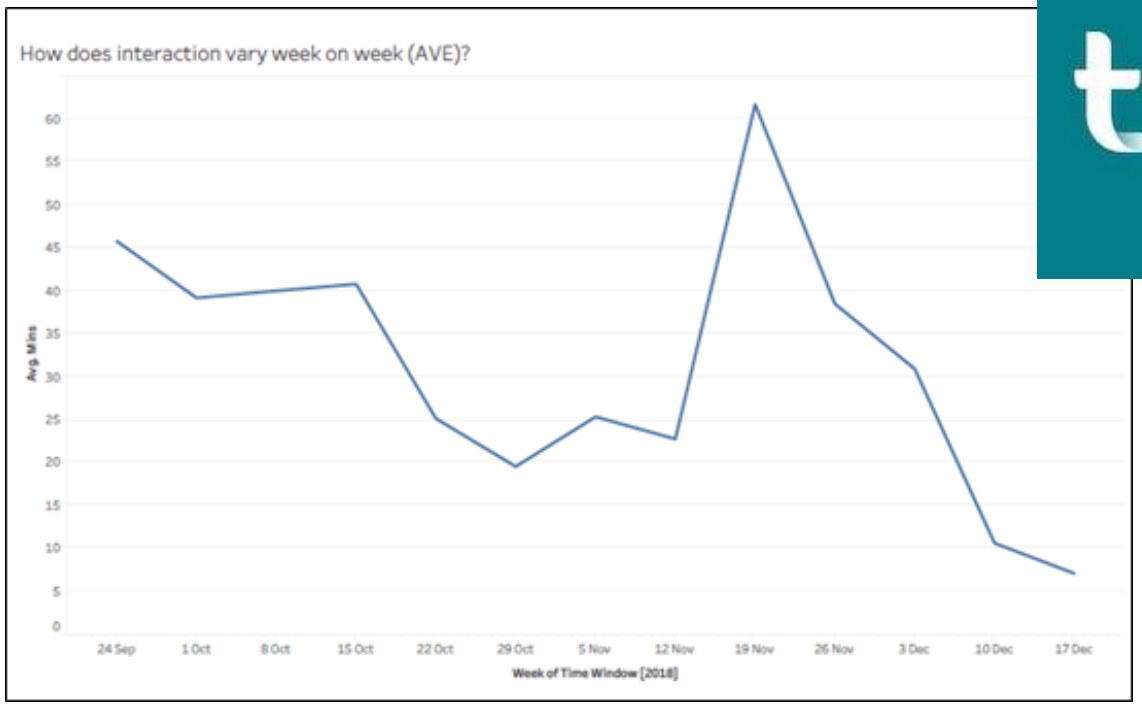
J. Wood, M. East and H. Williard, Collaborative Annotation to Support Students' Online Reading Skills, in. S. Hrastinski, ed., *Designing Courses with Digital Technologies: Insights and Examples from History Education* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 66-71.

J. Wood, M. East and L. Warriner-Wood, Reading online during lockdown: insights from History and Heritage, in M. G. Jamil and D. Morley, eds., *Agile Learning Environments amid Disruption: Evaluating Academic innovations in Higher Education during Covid-19* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2021).

CLASSICS
Illustrated
JUNIOR
No. 508 25¢
Goldilocks
AND THE THREE BEARS

Talis data insights



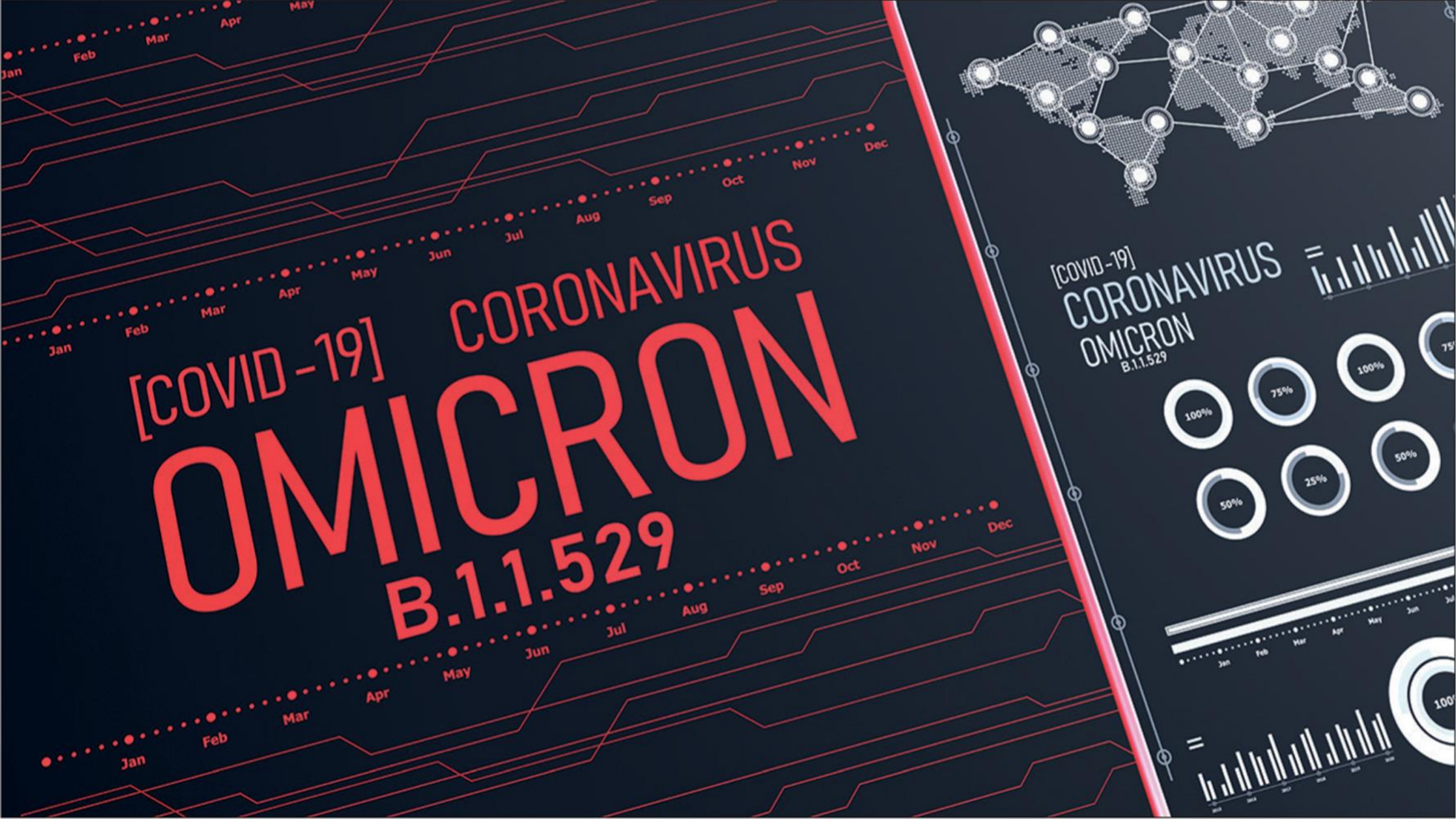


Year	Students	Resources	Annotations	Ave. ann. student
18-19	22	16	471	23
19-20	42	15	1122	27
20-21	15	16	524	31

Types of annotation = types of reading/ learning

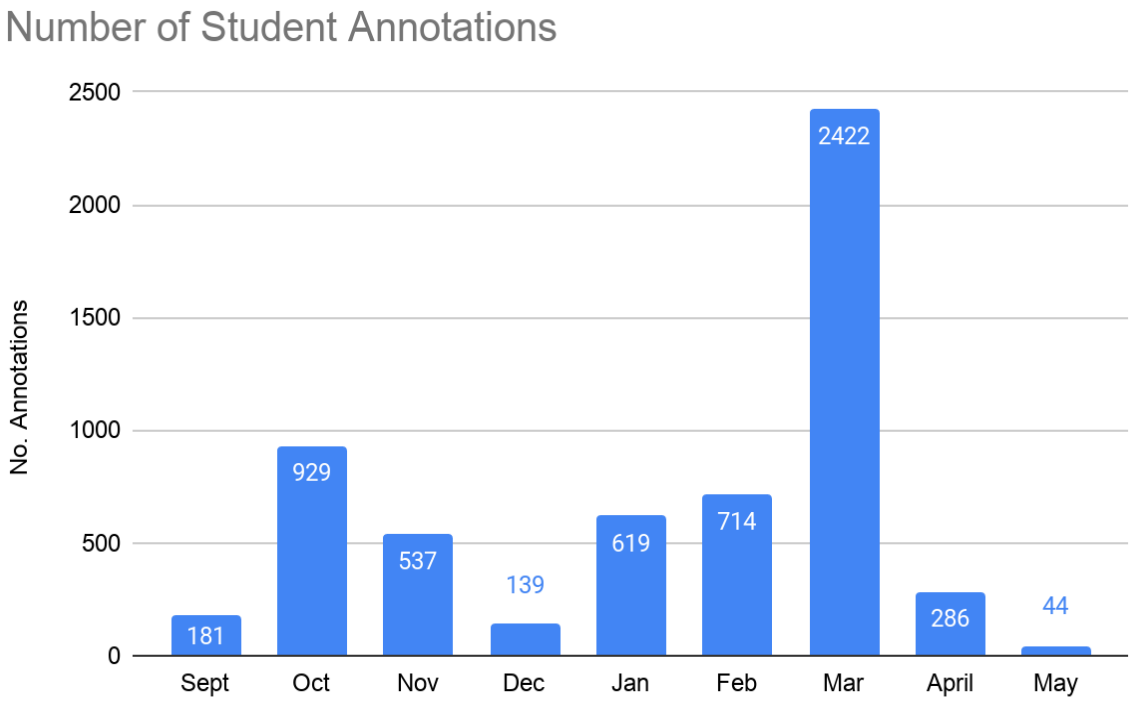
Most common types of comments
Commentary (= “this says x”)
Analysis (= “this implies or means y”)
Posing questions (asking for clarification/ opening out from text)
Discussion, indirect (clustering comments dealing with similar topics)
Making connections (e.g. mentioning other readings)

- Kalir, J., Morales, E., Fleerackers, A. and Alperin, J., When I saw my peers annotating’, *Information and Learning Sciences* 121 (2020), 207-230.
- See also: Bostock, 2021 for a summary.


[COVID-19] CORONAVIRUS
OMICRON
B.1.1.529
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
100%
75%
50%
25%

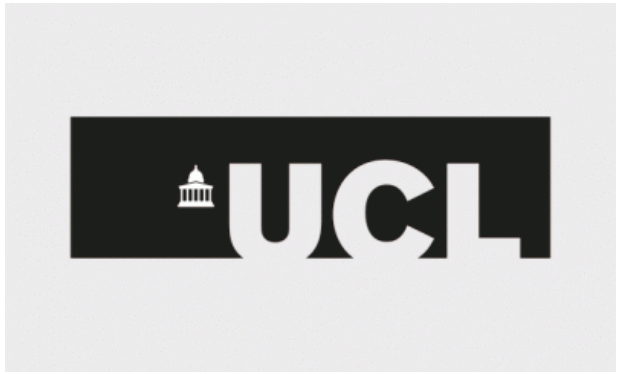
At the first year (2020-present)

93% felt that annotation had helped their learning



- **Accessibility, interaction and engagement:** 'we could still access sources and comment directly on them and our seminar leader replied. This allowed us to have a more detailed discussion and it gave an opportunity for people who are less inclined to speak in front of others to get engaged with the sources more thoroughly'
- **Understanding and confidence through reading other's thoughts:** 'By viewing what others had already written it allowed me to grasp the work quicker and made me feel more confident in my answers.'
- **Accessibility, building a knowledge bank together:** 'It was strange to change at first but I liked the different approach to learning and being able to go back to points other people made as well because you can't always get everything down in a seminar. It affected my learning in a positive way.'
- **Interaction (with peers and tutors), understanding together:** 'I feel like I have learnt other people's views and ways of understanding the text, which allow you to see a different thought process. It is also really nice to get individual feedback, so you know if you are on the right track and where to expand from that.'

A community of practice in History



What are the main benefits and challenges of online reading for you and your students?

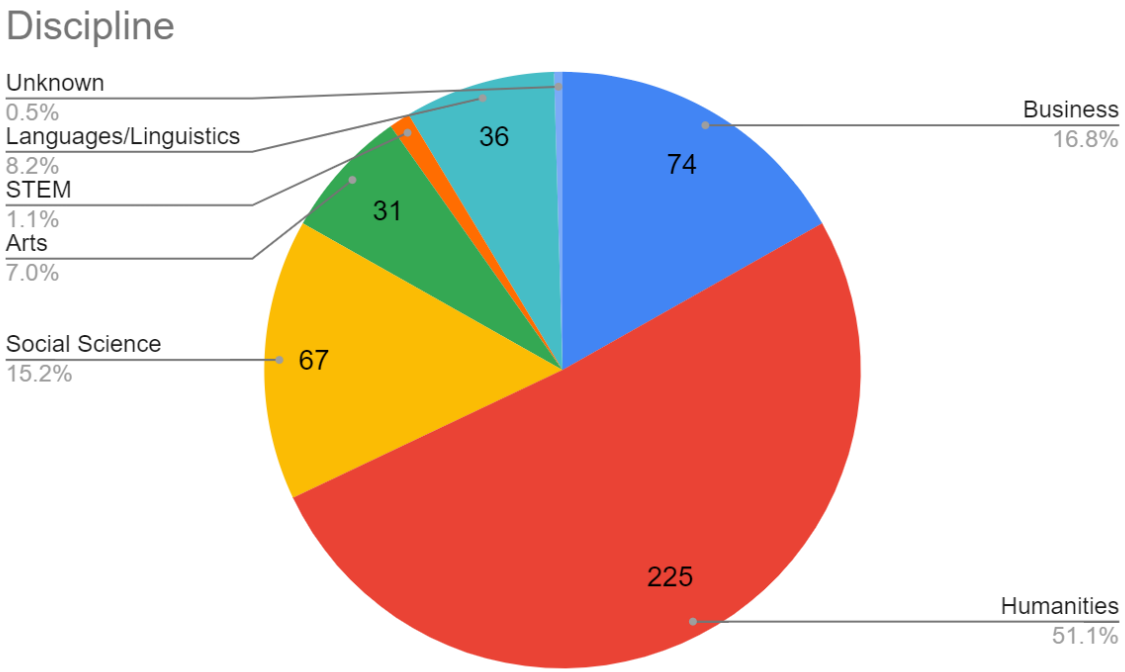
AOR method

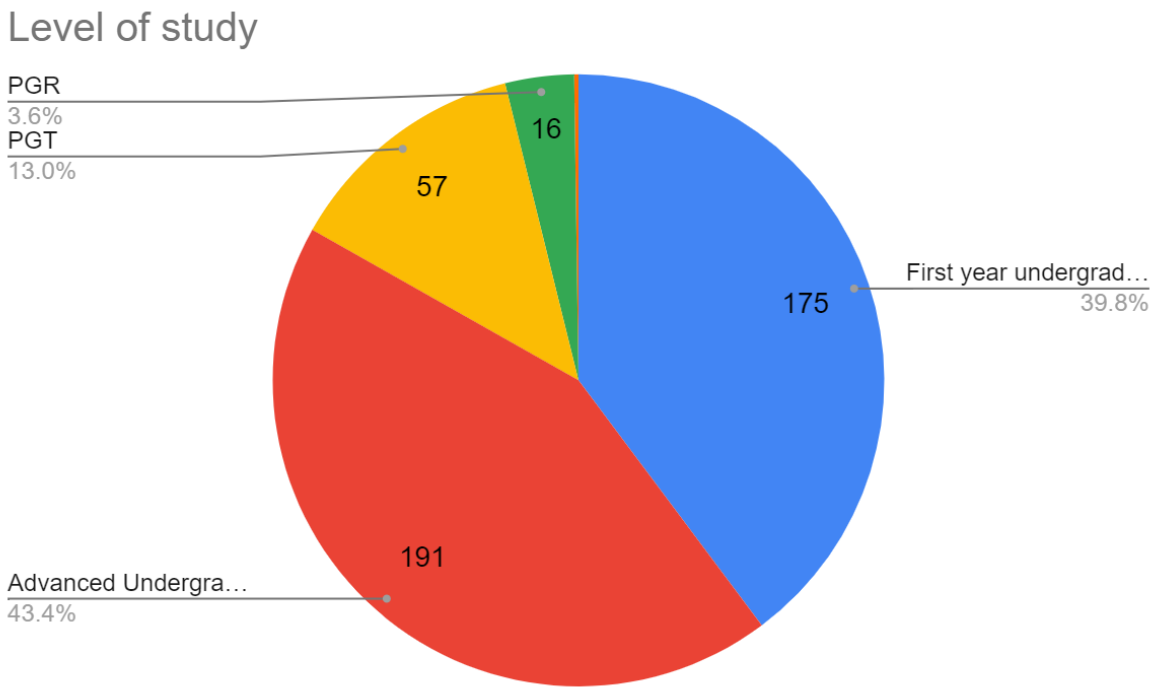
- Workshops
- Thematic analysis of student annotation
- Reflective blogs
- Literature review
  - The Purpose and Practice of Academic Reading (Bartley, 2022)
  - Comparing Digital and Print Academic Reading (Bartley, 2022)
- Case studies
- Pedagogic resources
- Surveys of staff and students

Survey
(November 2021-January 2022)

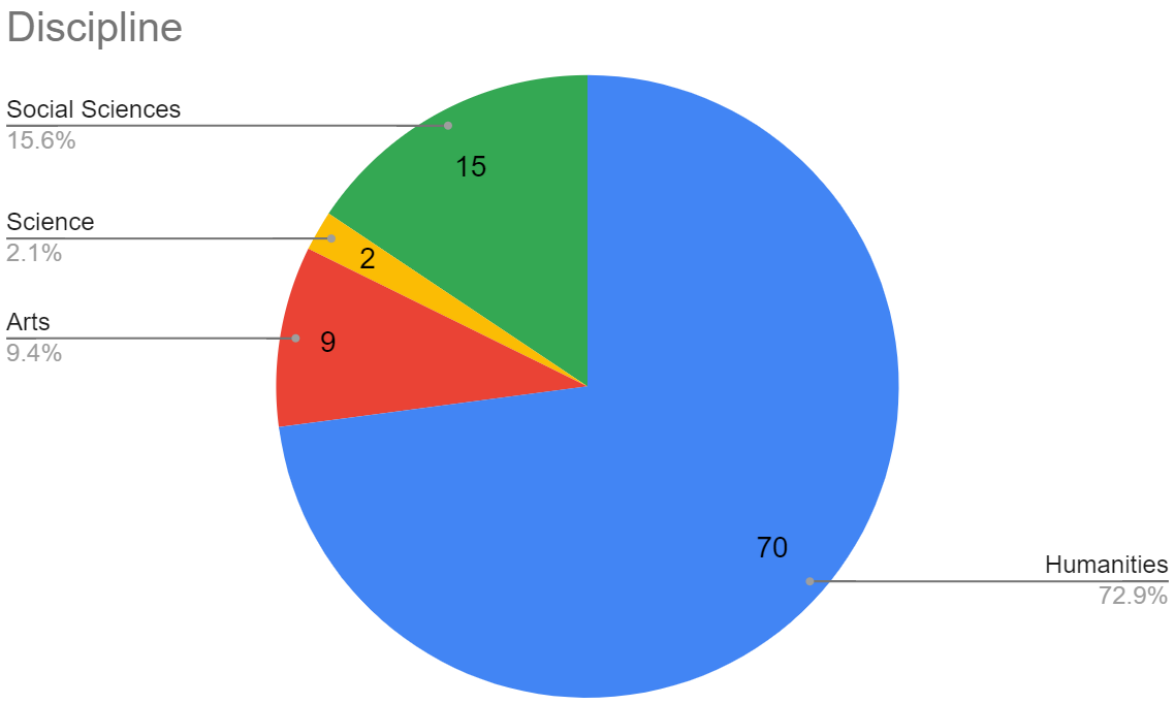
- Student survey: 442 responses
  - 15% self-identified as having a disability that affects their ability to read
- Staff survey: 98 responses
- 10 countries
- 50+ institutions

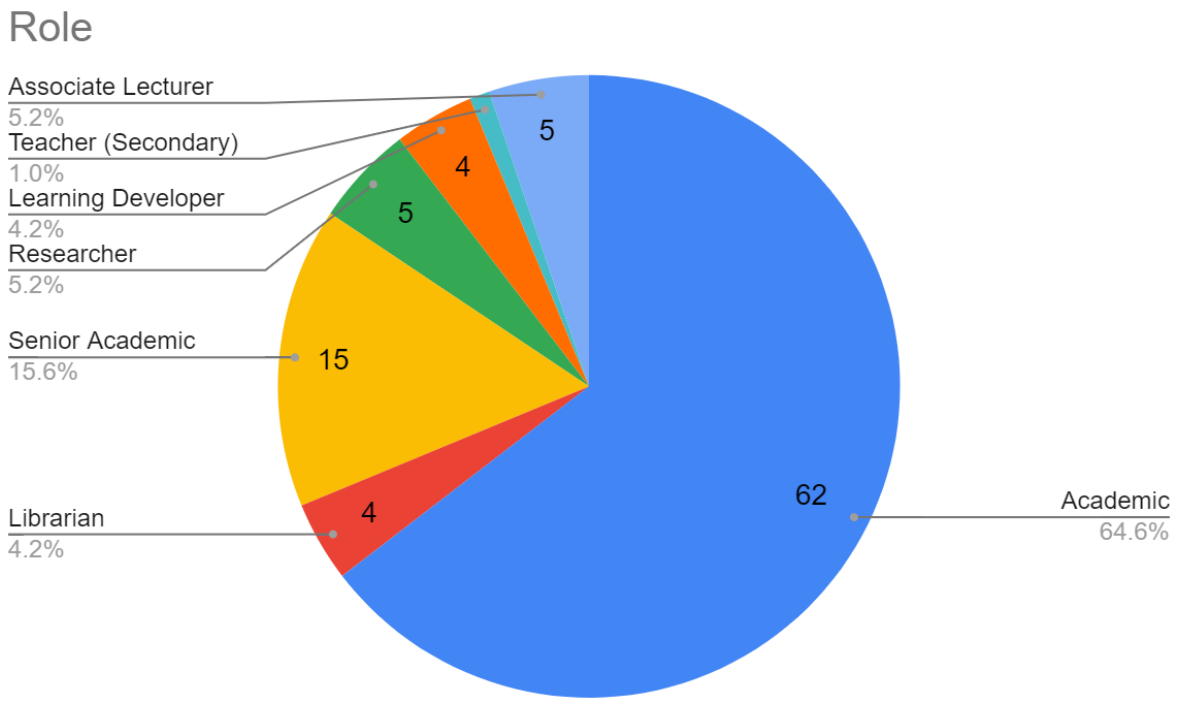
Students


Discipline
Unknown
0.5%
Languages/Linguistics
8.2%
STEM
1.1%
Arts
7.0%
Social Science
15.2%
Business
16.8%
Humanities
51.1%
74
225
67
31
36

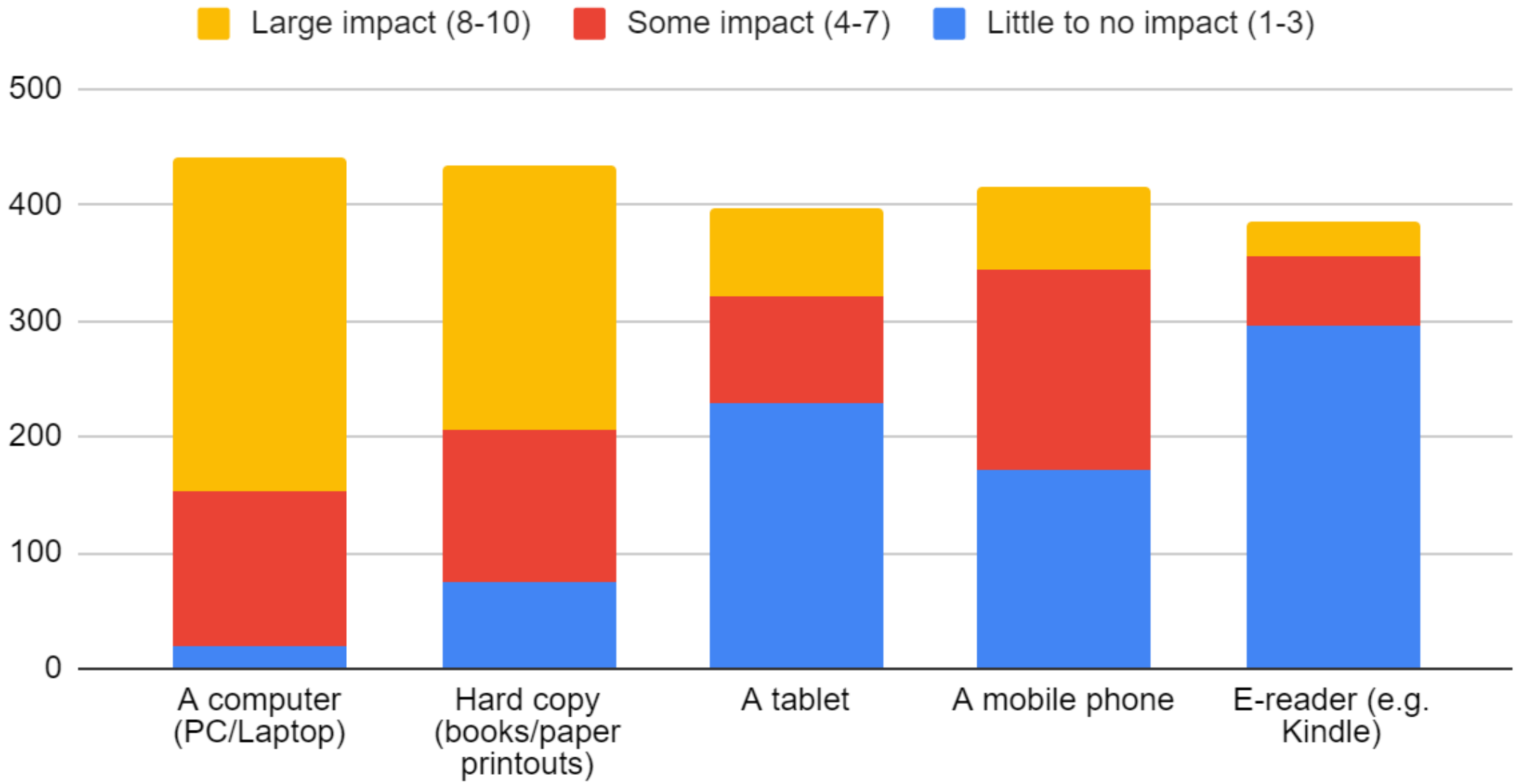

Level of study
PGR
3.6%
PGT
13.0%
First year undergrad…
39.8%
Advanced Undergra…
43.4%
175
191
57
16

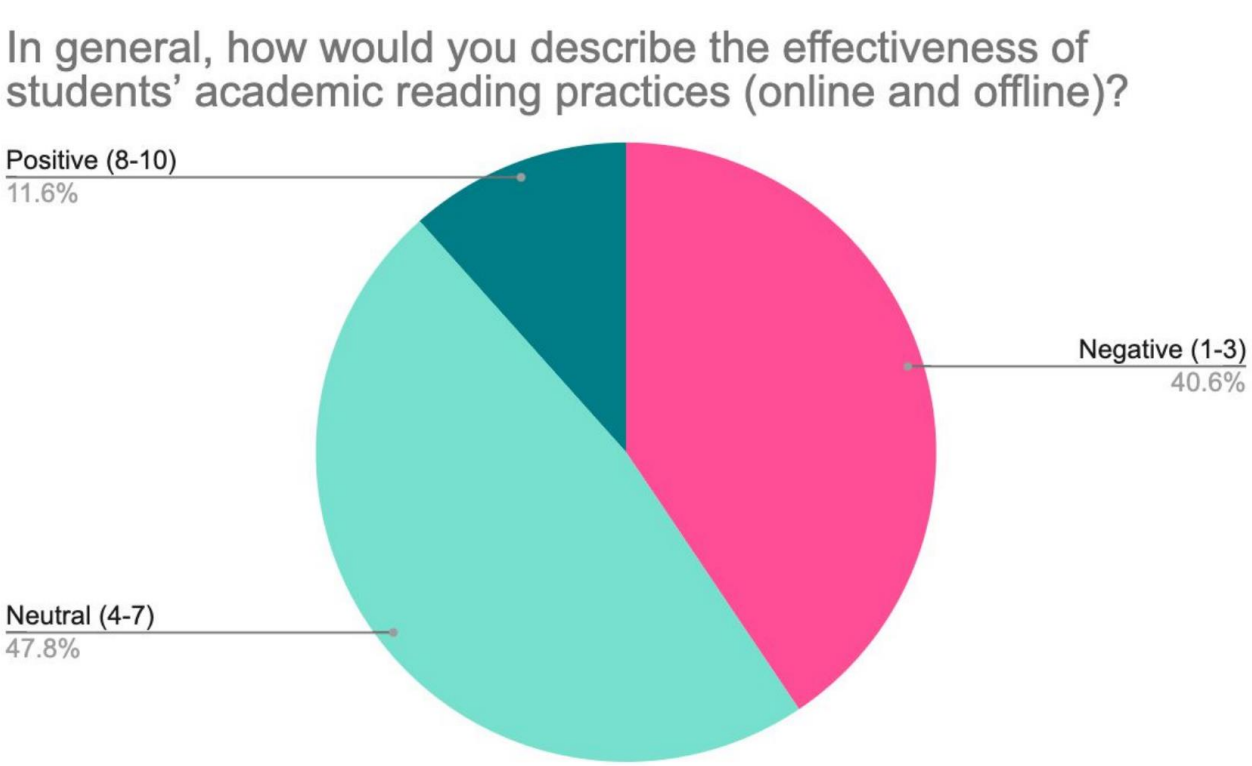
Staff


Discipline
Social Sciences
15.6%
15
Science
2.1%
2
Arts
9.4%
9
70
Humanities
72.9%


Role
Associate Lecturer
5.2%
5
Teacher (Secondary)
1.0%
4
Learning Developer
4.2%
5
Researcher
5.2%
Senior Academic
15.6%
15
Librarian
4.2%
4
62
Academic
64.6%

Which platforms/ devices/ technologies do you use for reading when studying and how beneficial have they been for your learning?





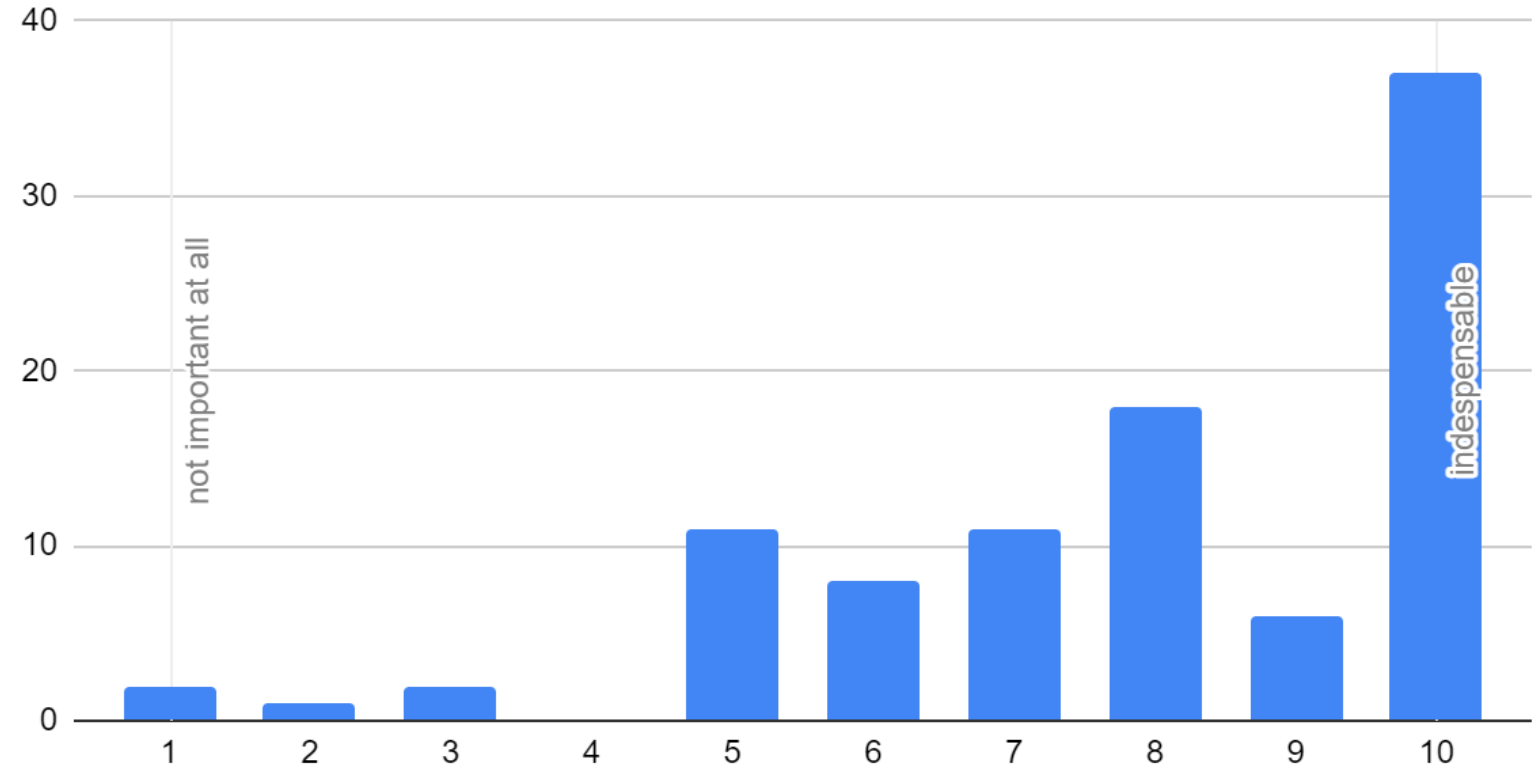
'Students often struggle with academic reading in particular, unfamiliar vocabulary or theories can be a big barrier for less confident students, who do not have the skill or confidence to get the gist of a work (or read around unfamiliar material) and then go back and tackle questions or issues with the reading.' (Librarian, UK)

In general, how would you describe the effectiveness of students' academic reading practices (online and offline)?

- Intrinsic motivation key
- Transition critical
- Improvement over time
- Digital distraction
- Social media perceived to have a negative impact
  - Attention span
  - Inability to read long texts

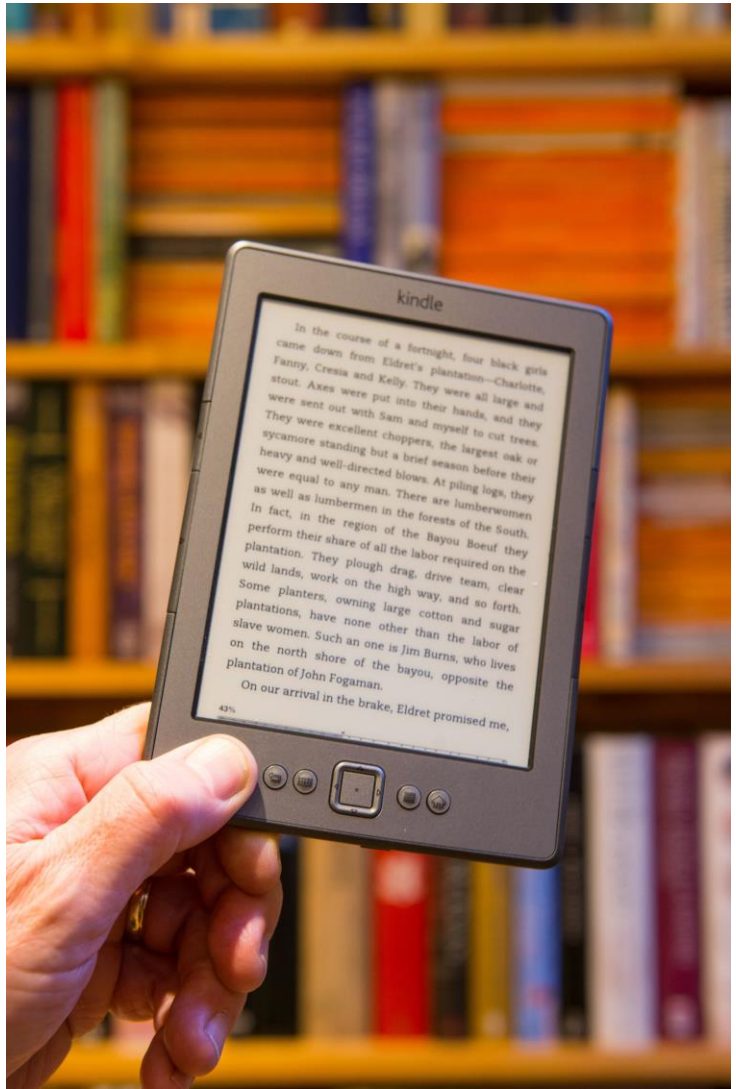
'Once students know what they are supposed to read, for when, and have been given some grounding of the different reading skills required at University, I've generally found a good rate of engagement for most, with the usual candidates not engaging. The biggest problems I encounter are that there seems to be very little tenacity or resourcefulness: if PDFs aren't emailed to them or precisely where they expect them to be, that is often used as an excuse for not having read it.' (Arts/Creative Industries, UK)

How important is online reading to students' learning in your discipline?



How important is online reading to students' learning in your discipline?

- Consensus on importance of online reading
- Many set all readings in digital formats
- Accessibility and cost common factors in this choice



'Online reading ensures accessibility for all and can be specific in terms of the texts selected.' (Education, UK)

'It's fundamental to finding information and engaging with it within the discipline, from navigating virtual learning environments and timetables to conducting research and producing assessments. Nowadays, it underpins most student work and this is only likely to increase in future.' (History, UK)

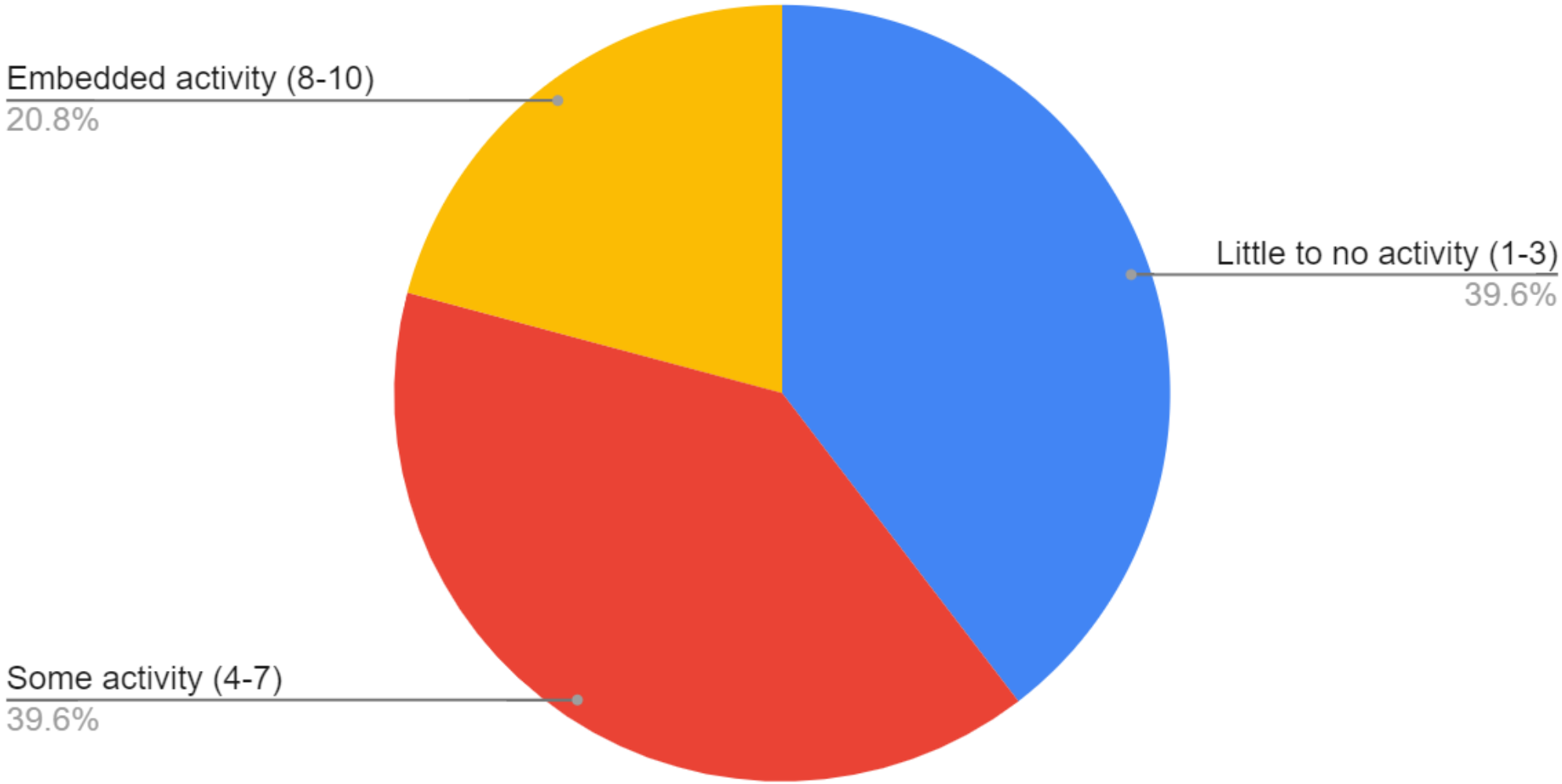
'Campus-Based reading is increasingly done online (esp since 2020). All readings are available electronically, and I suspect that only a minority of students download readings or print them out. The library collection still gets used though, especially for assignments (which is when much of the reading gets done).' (History, UK)

Challenges of online reading

1. Lack of core skills (information/ digital/ critical thinking)
2. Distraction/ lack of concentration
3. Lack of support/ guidance
4. Screen fatigue
5. Social media
6. Device ownership/ digital poverty
7. Time management
8. Access/ availability of resources
9. Preference over print
10. Learning disabilities

Deficit approach
Students not understanding texts and arguments
Relationship to general study habits/ skills?
Minimal focus on pedagogy

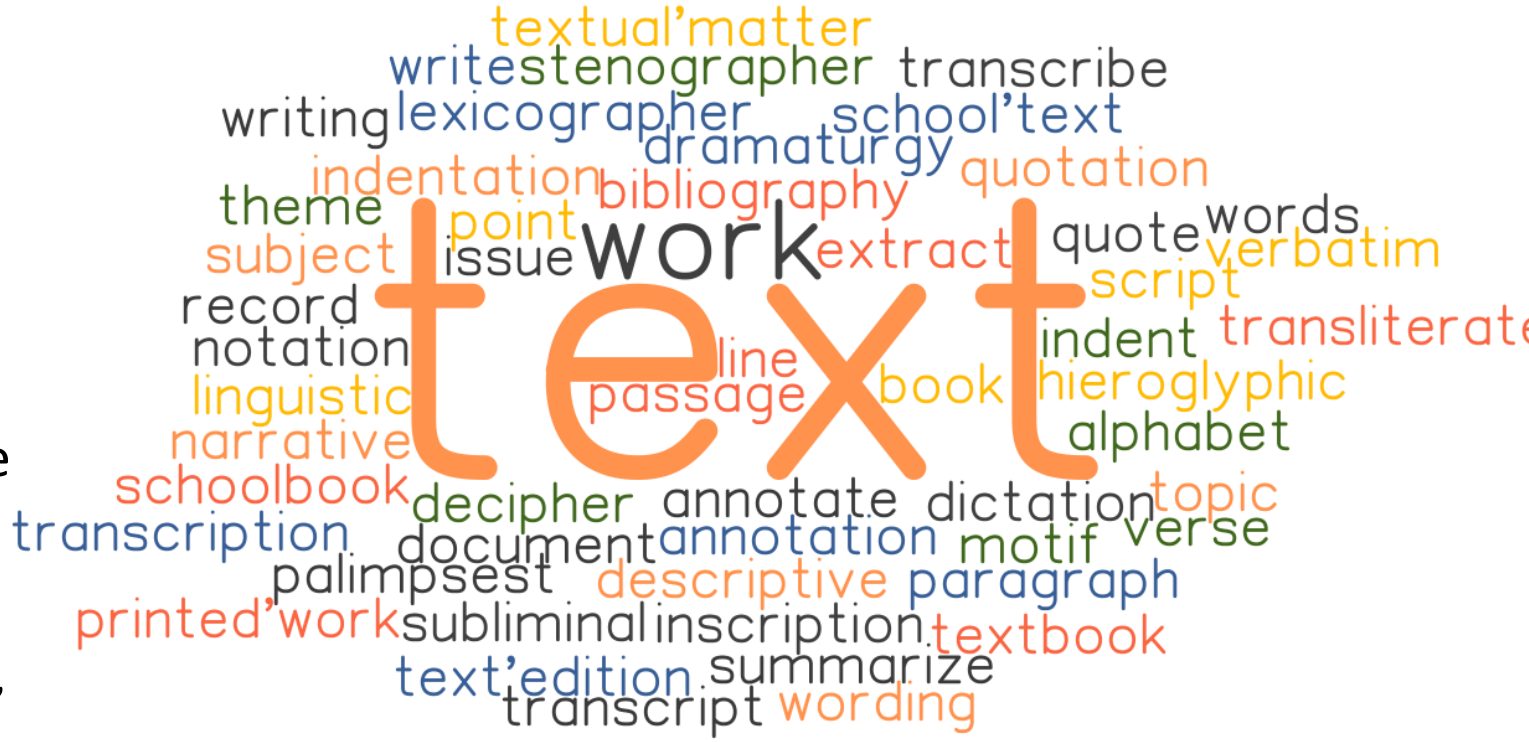
In general, how much attention do you devote in your own modules to developing students' ability to read online?



How do you encourage students to engage in reading (online and offline) in your discipline?

1. **The text**: Selection of appropriate mandatory reading, sometimes with scaffolding to support engagement
2. **The pedagogy**: teaching methods/ workshops/ in-class activities
3. **The teacher**: emphasising, verbally or in writing, the value and necessity of reading to achieve success

Also: accessibility (length, difficulty, online) crucial for student engagement

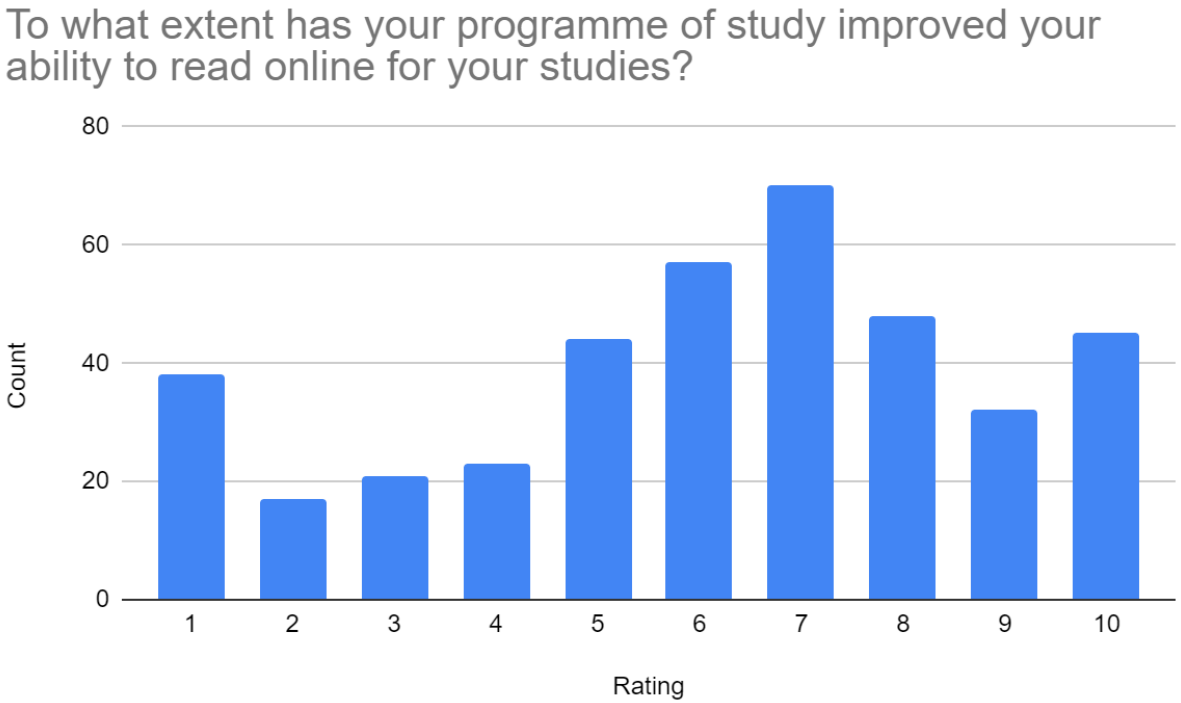


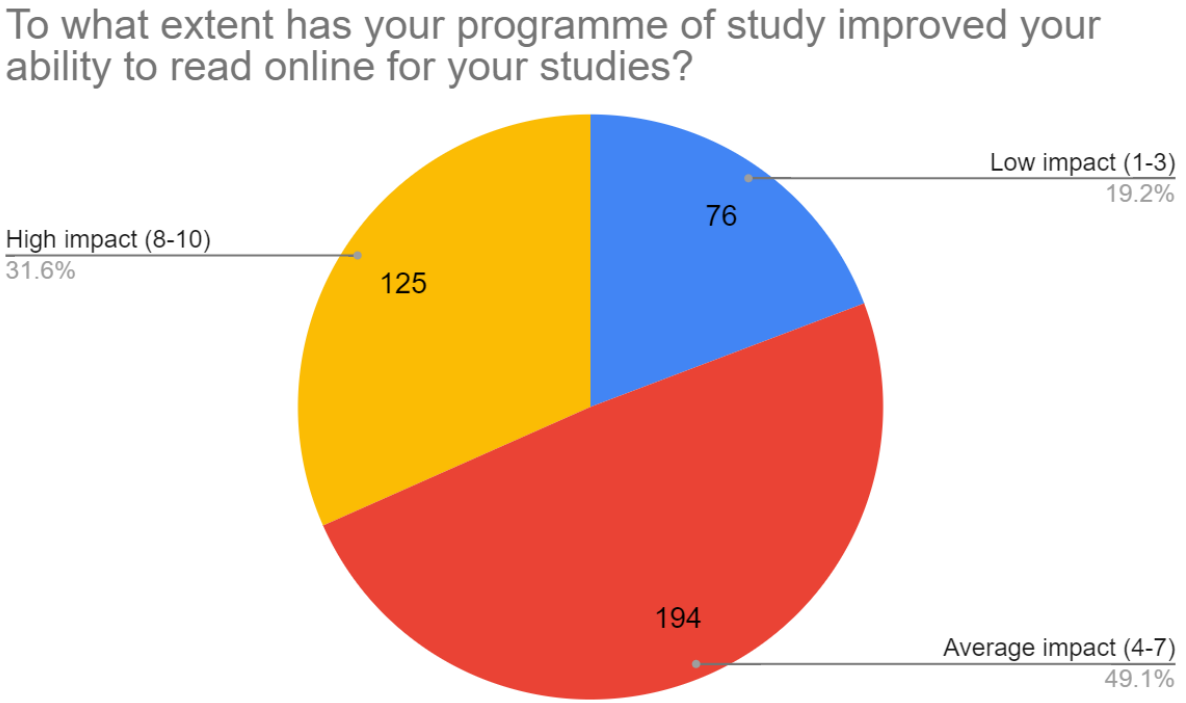
‘It’s simply their responsibility as students. ***It's entirely up to them****, frankly. Their marks will reflect their reading.’* (History, UK)

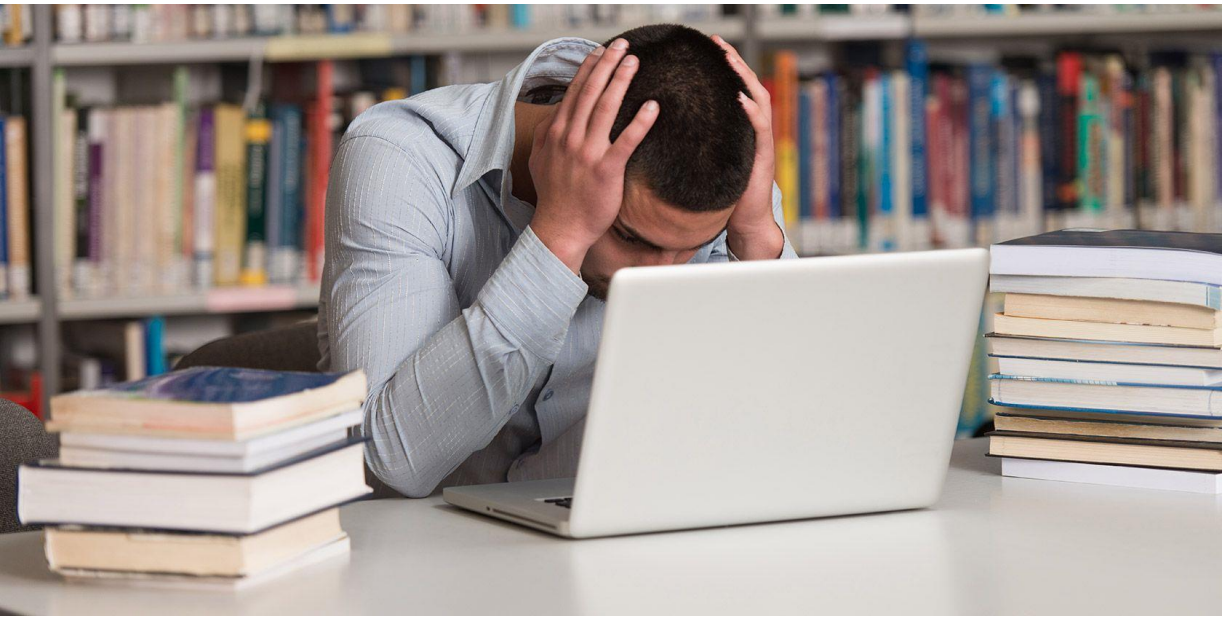
‘I outline the set reading for the following week at the end of the seminar, and email again midway through the week to remind them. ***For broader, curiosity-driven reading outside of summative assessments, I confess I don't see much evidence.’*** (Media, UK)

‘Endless exhortation that they need to do independent reading to get a First, descriptions of the assessment criteria showing how importantly reading is, etc. This motivates maybe a third of the class. Another third to a half have decided they are happy with whatever grade they will get with minimal reading as we do not see their reading practices change from year to year. ***The remaining third feel perpetually overwhelmed and often disengage. Without transitioning to a non-reading subject, I don't know what we can do.’*** (History, unknown)

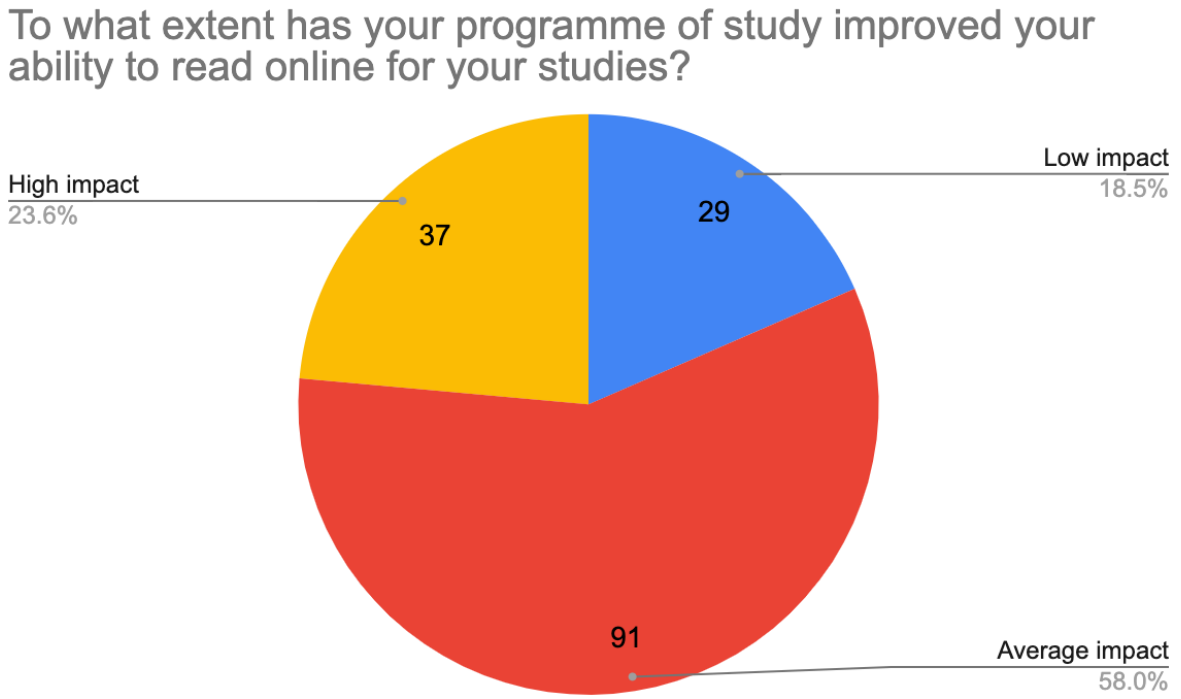
Student perceptions: impact of teaching on online reading skills





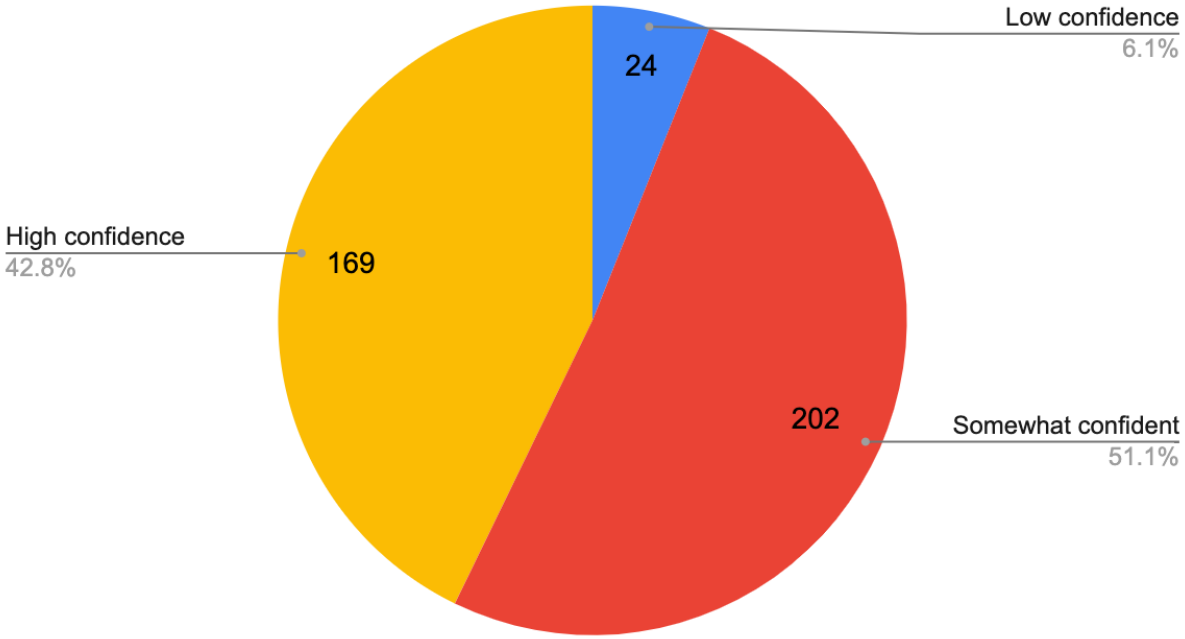


First-years

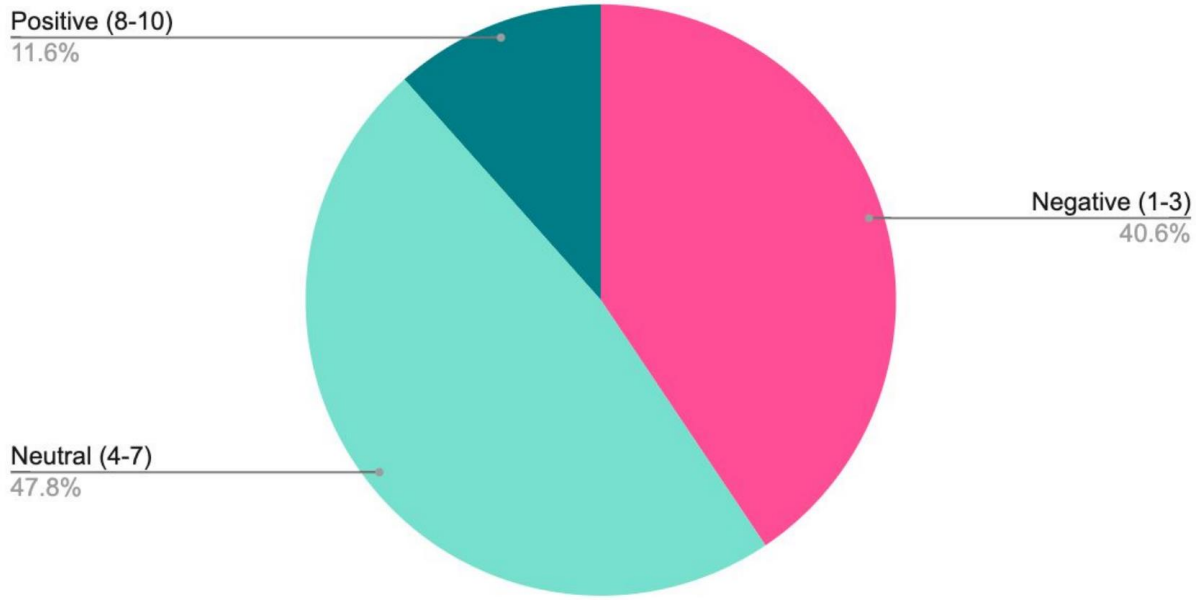

To what extent has your programme of study improved your ability to read online for your studies?
High impact
23.6%
37
Low impact
18.5%
29
91
Average impact
58.0%

Student vs. staff ratings of skills

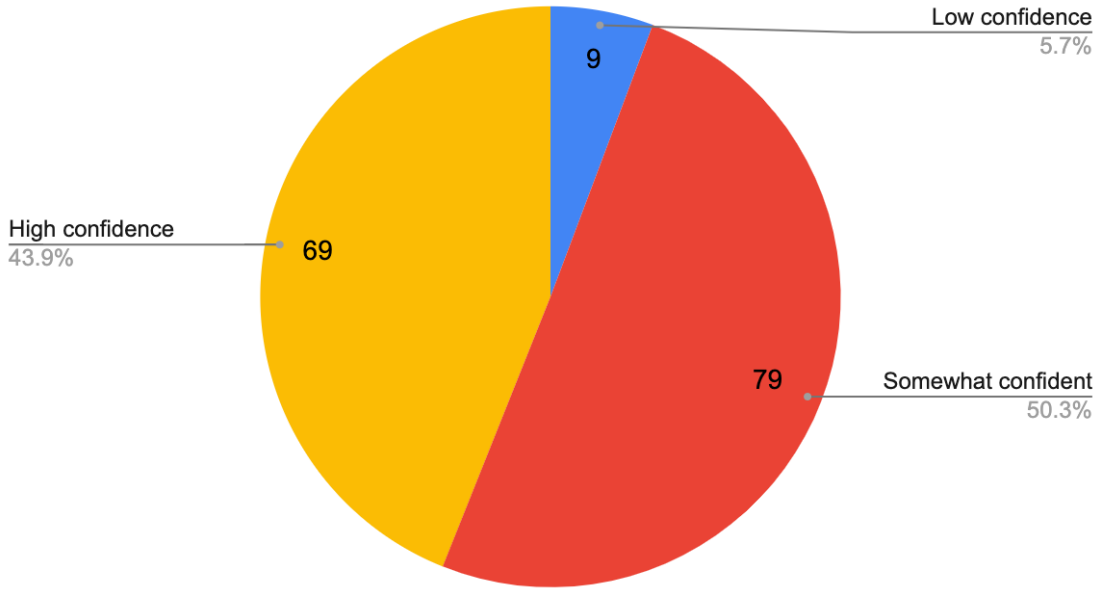
Student confidence in reading for studies (online and offline)



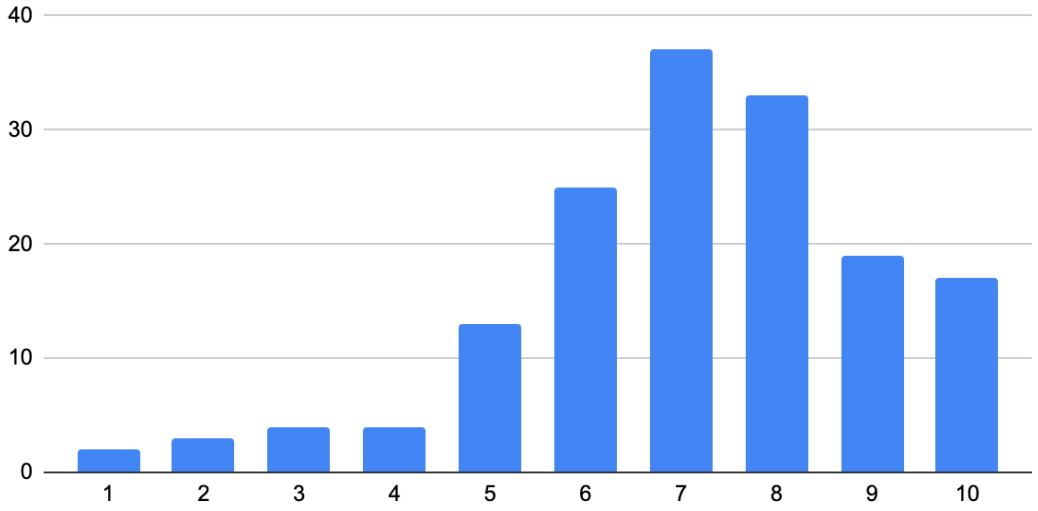
Staff ratings of students' academic reading (online and offline)



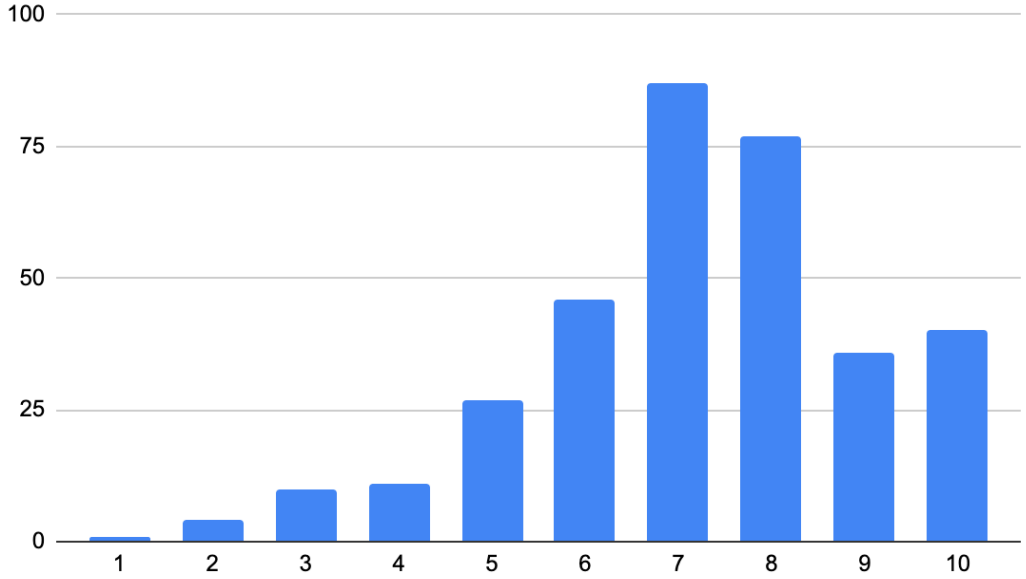
First years' confidence



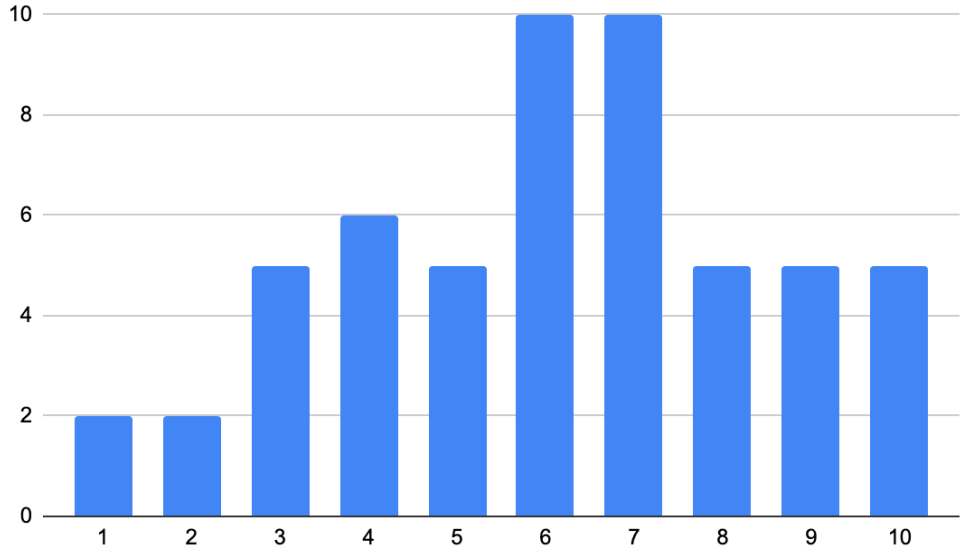
First years



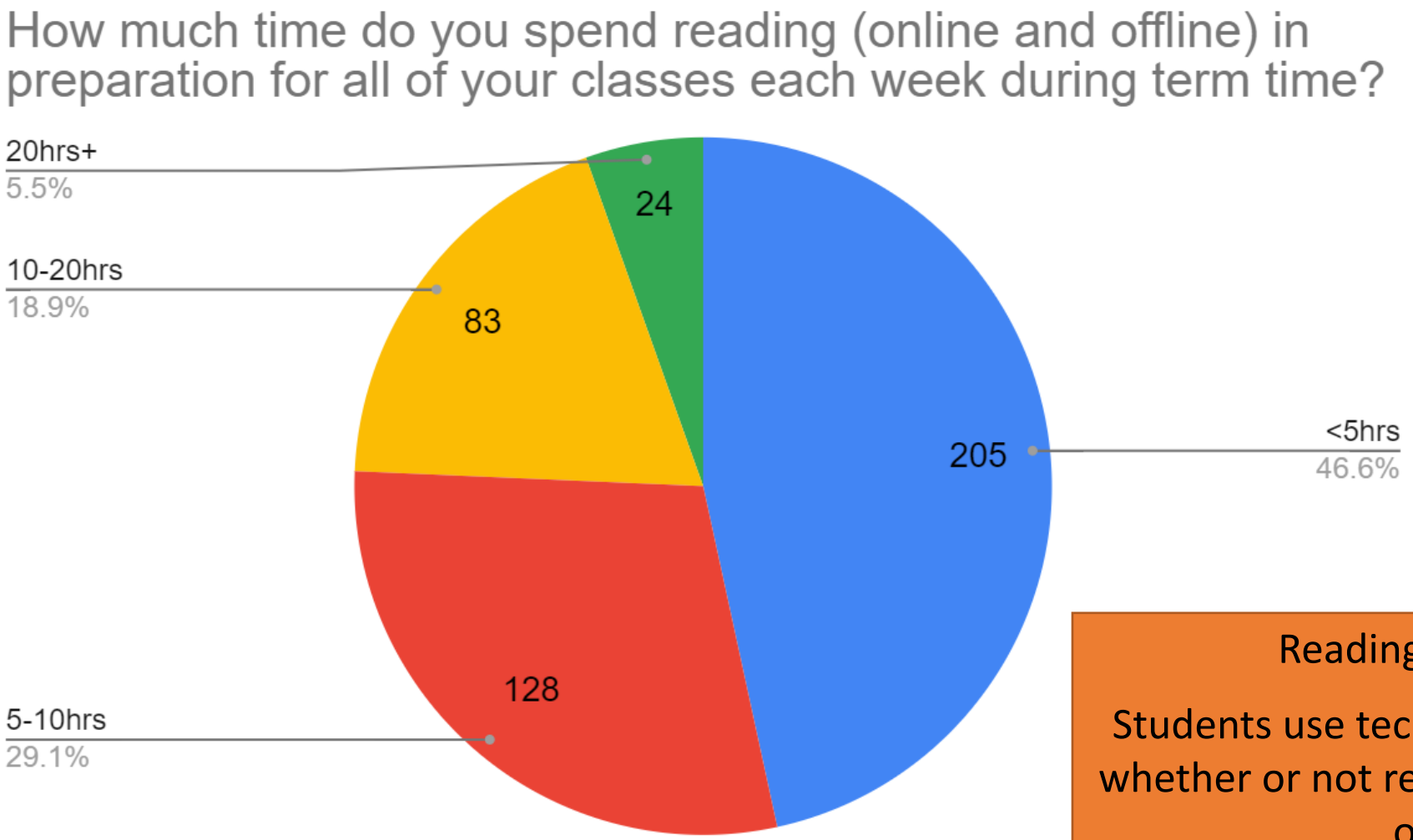
No disability (overall)



Disability (overall)



Q: how many hours do you think students typically spend reading for all their modules in a week?



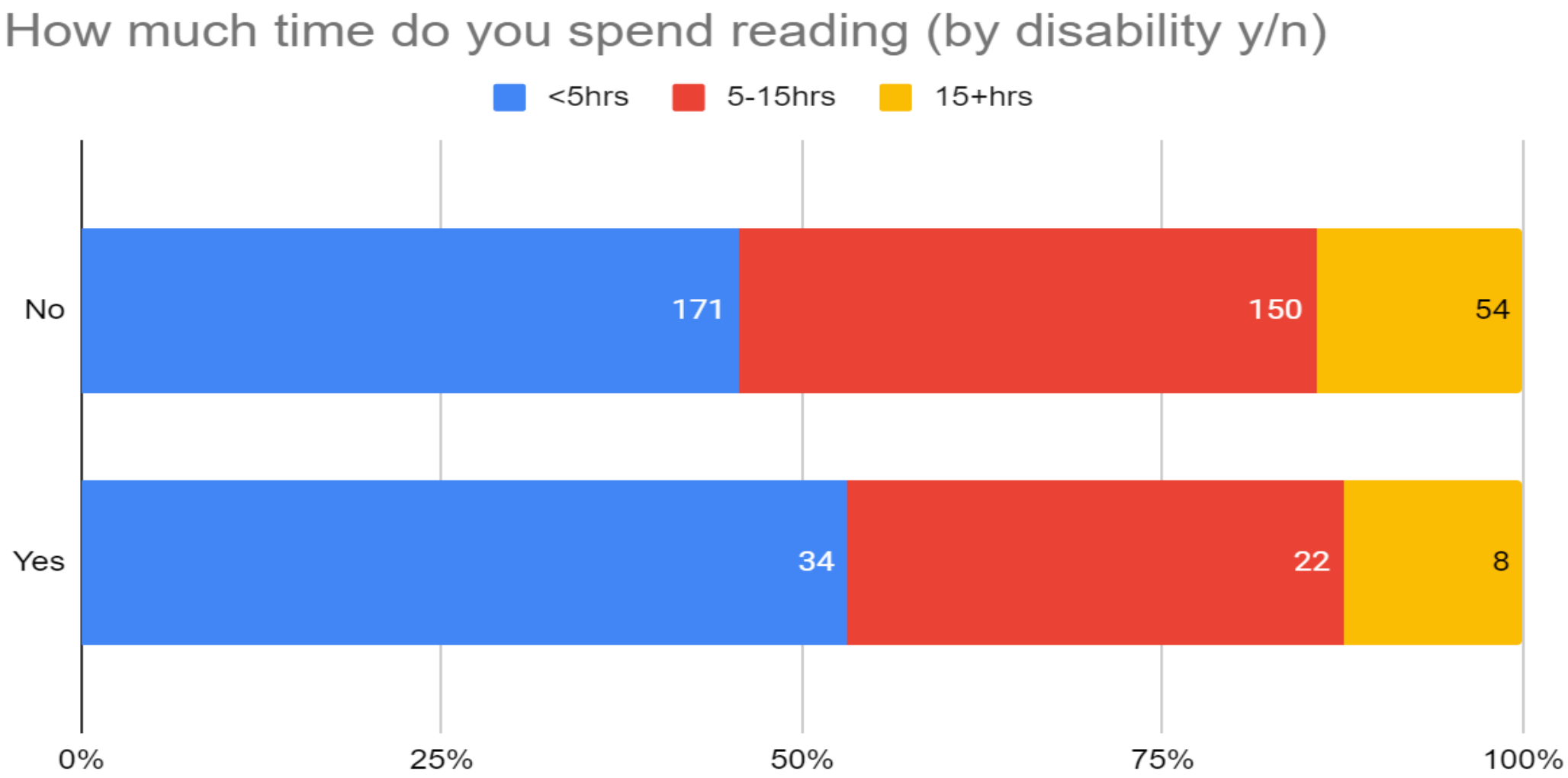
Reading = note-taking

Students use technology to access texts, whether or not reading takes place online or offline

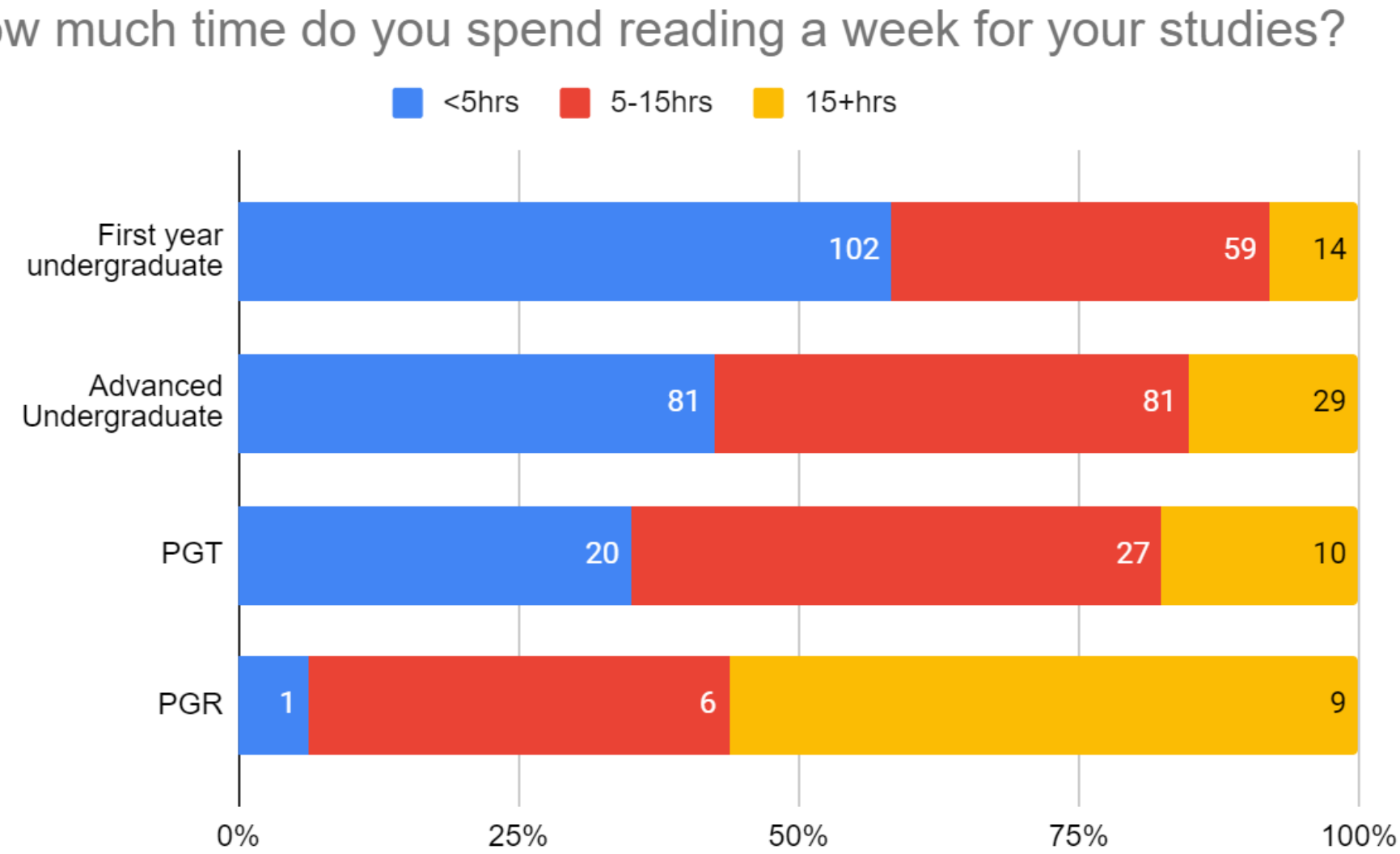
Many students mention preferring hard copy, struggling with eye strain

Many mention reading while travelling

By disability



By level of study



Student Q: Can you tell us a little bit about how you read for your study on a weekly basis?

Themes from L1 responses

- Reading done in preparation for class rather than reviewing afterwards
- Don’t alter reading methods, whereas L2/L3 students mention skim reading vs. deep reading, depending on task, e.g.:
  - *‘I skim read the vast majority of texts, unless it's an important text (for assessments etc.).’* (Classical Studies, UK)
  - *'[I] read more densely when preparing essays’* (History and Politics, UK)
- Relying more on lecture notes and pre-recorded lecture material
- More specific reference to set readings
- Minimal reference to difficulty of reading

Quotes from L1 students

- *‘I write hand-written notes whilst reading predominantly online material; although online works are easier to access, I tend to engage better with a physical book if I have a copy, which unfortunately is rare.’* (History, UK)
- *‘I tend to print resources out if I can as reading online strains my eyes. But can't do this all the time.’* (English and History, UK)
- *'Do recommended background reading. Read lecture notes before lecture and look up unfamiliar terminology to be able to follow the lecture more easily.’* (Conservation, UK)
- *‘I find the reading too complex to understand’* (Fine Art, UK)

Advantages for L1 students

Similarities to advanced UG and staff

1. Accessibility and cost
2. ‘Ease’ (easier to access, easier to use, easier to locate stuff)
3. Direct annotation a benefit (when available)

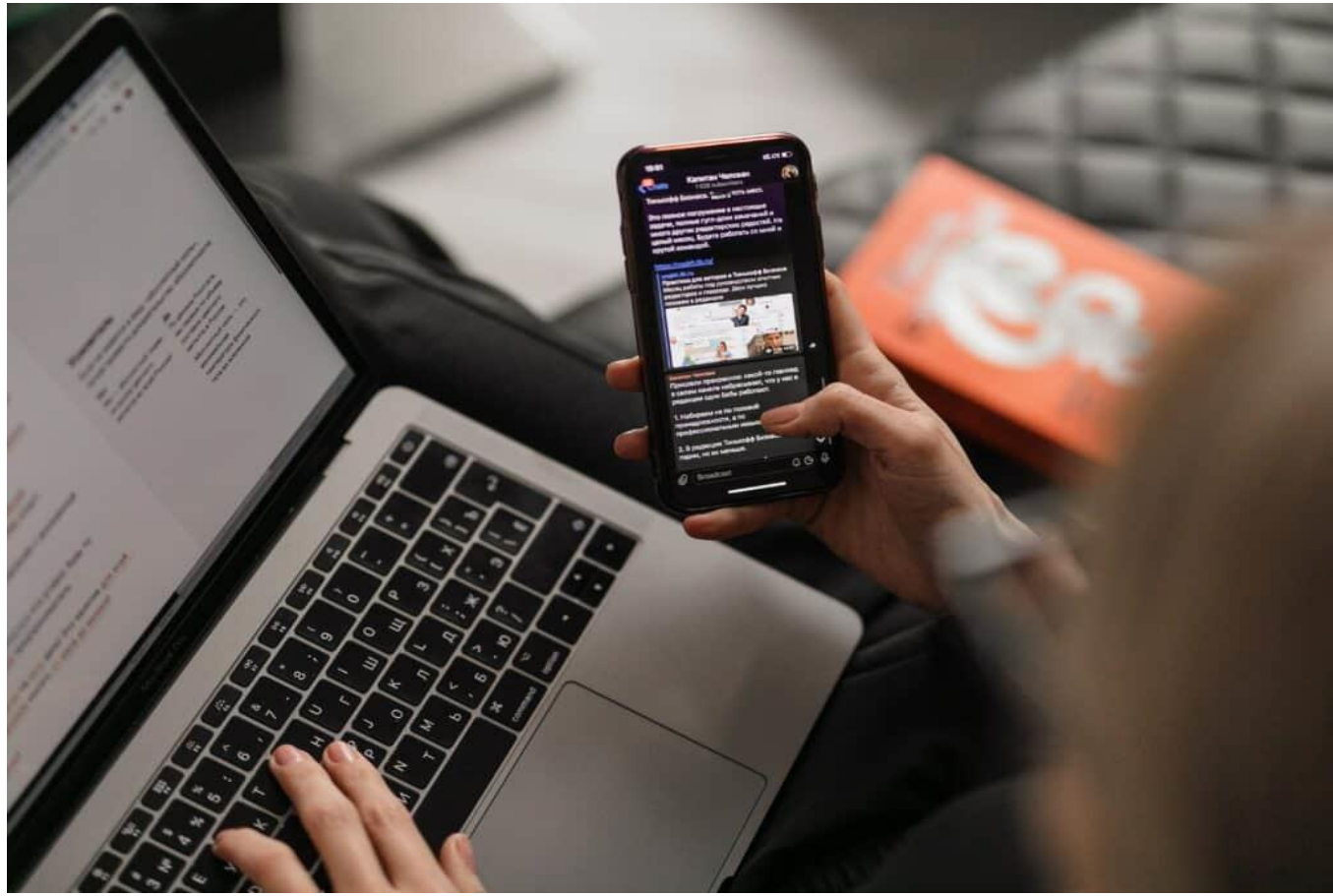
Differences

1. ~~Distractions and maintaining attention~~
2. ~~Physical side-effects~~
3. ~~Technical difficulties~~
4. Use of additional tools (beyond web searching) less than for advanced UGs

Technical skills and digital literacy
Preparedness in terms of skills and dispositions

Challenges of reading online for L1 students

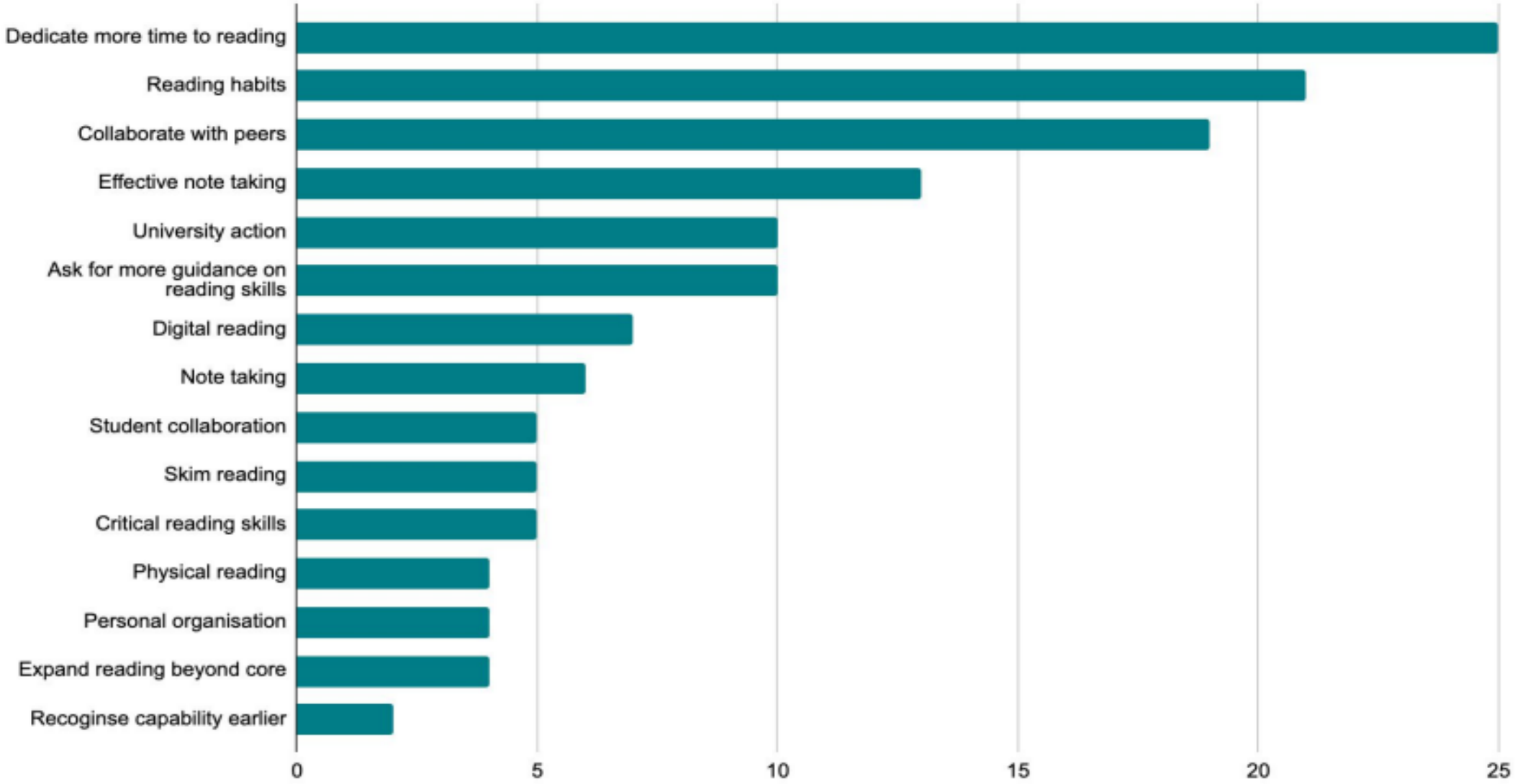
- Not knowing what to look for or how to look for it
- Digital literacy? Multiple, readily-available sources accessible through a multiplicity of platforms
- Research skills? Bridging the gap to more independent working
- Similarities to L2/L3s:
  - concentration and distraction
  - headaches and eye strain
  - connection issues
  - lack of interaction with the text (highlighting, underlining, etc.)

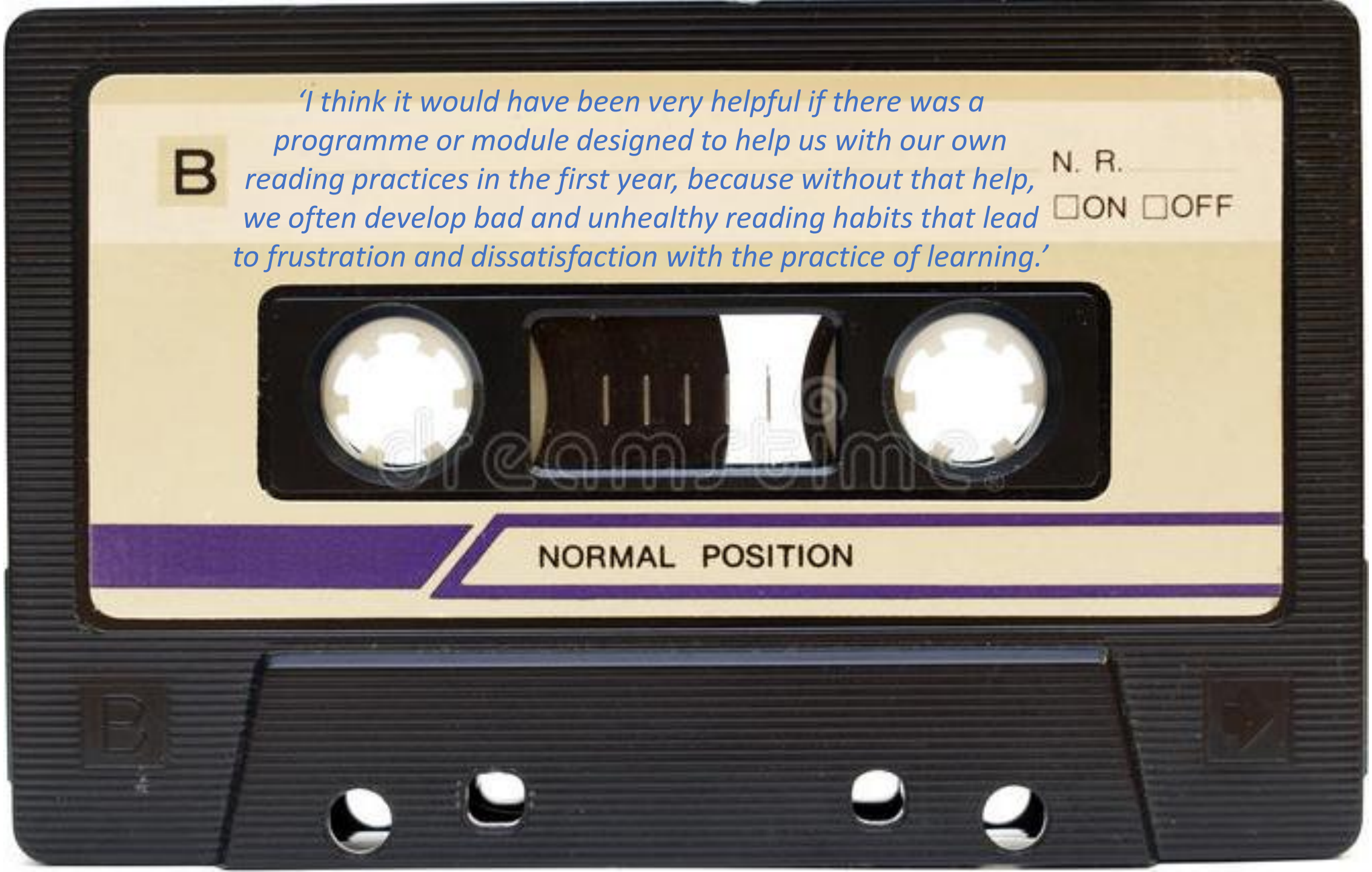


Is this ‘reading’?

If there was one thing that you could change about your own reading habits, what would it be?

One thing I'd change





'I think it would have been very helpful if there was a programme or module designed to help us with our own reading practices in the first year, because without that help, we often develop bad and unhealthy reading habits that lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the practice of learning.'

EXPLICIT LIBER DECIMUS BEATI
GREGORII PAPE URBIS ROME
SECUNDE PARTIS DEO GRATIAS

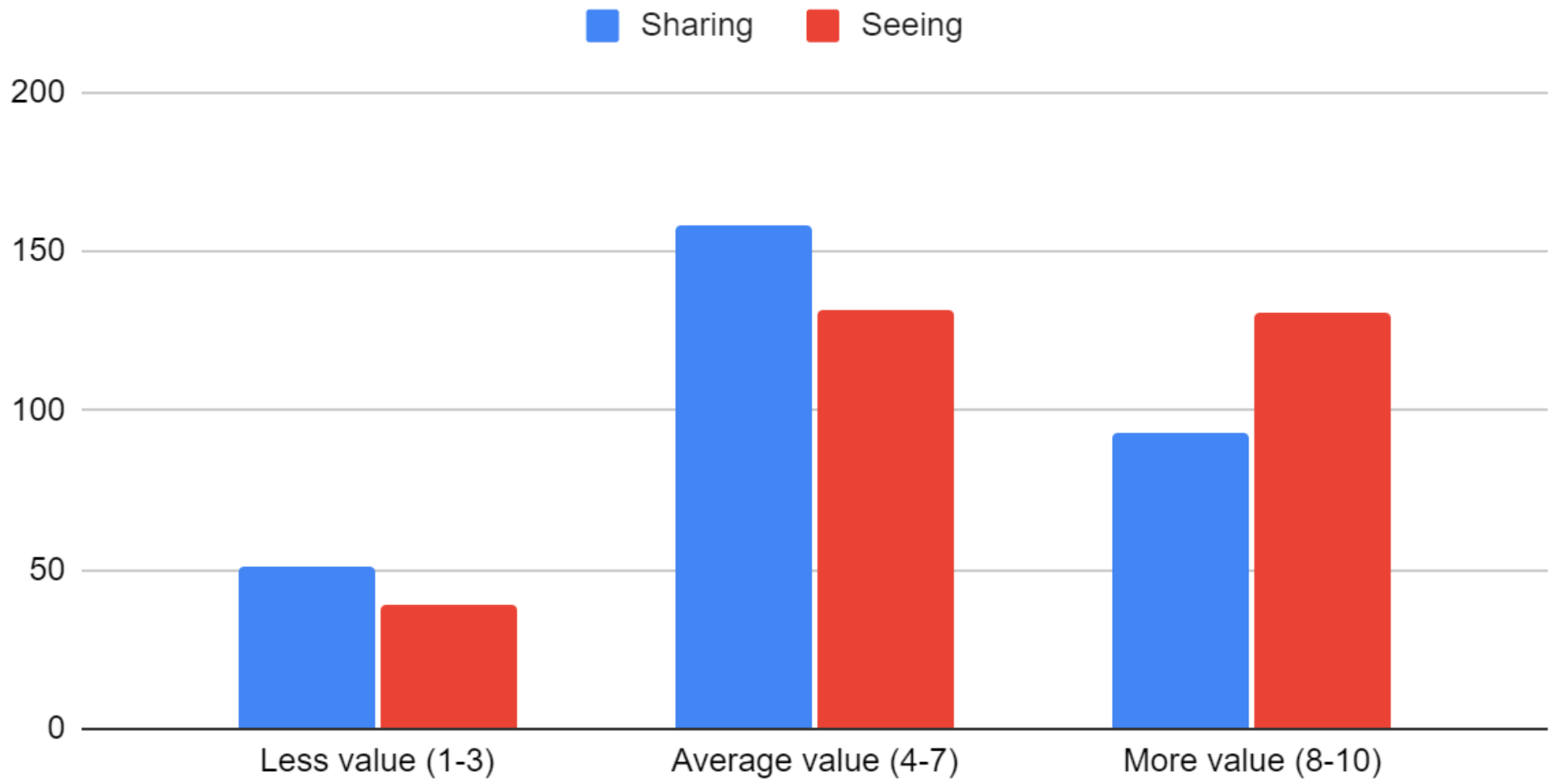
O bone lector lectrixque Comix peccatoris memento

INCIPIT EIUSDEM LIBER

UNDECIMUS PARTIS TERTIE

Quamuis in prolixo opere esse culpabilis
stili mutabilitas non debeat nequis
tamen me eloquentionis mee in mutatio
ne reprehendat in epistola libri premissa

How useful is it to share your thoughts about online reading with your fellow students? How useful is it to hear or see what your fellow students think about what they have read online?

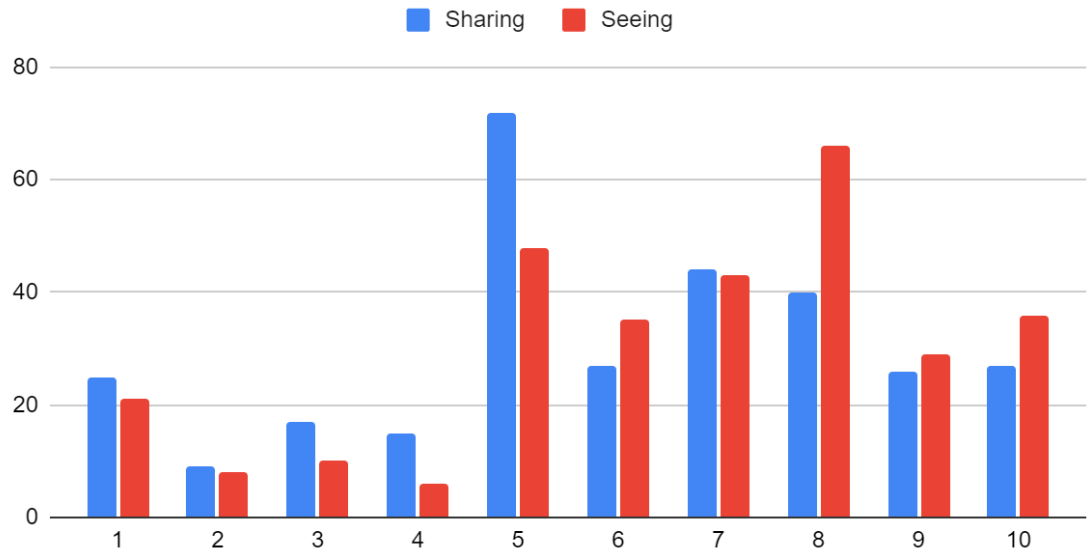


Usefulness of sharing thoughts on readings and seeing those of others (L1 responses)

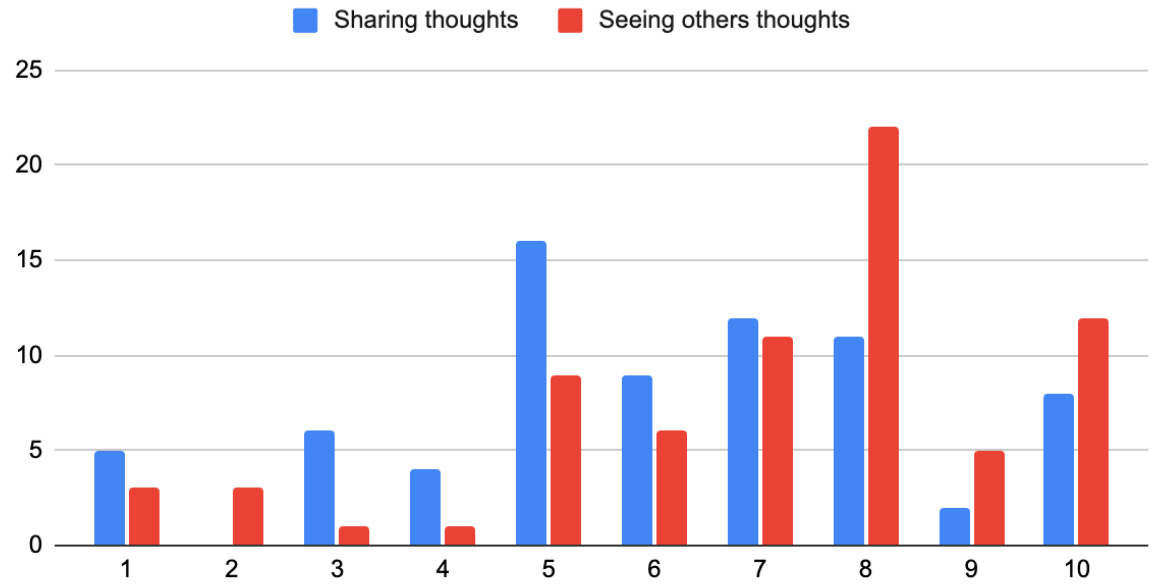
- Collaborative reading a significant aid to understanding
- Discussion improves confidence, making students feel ‘validated and verified’ by peers
- Diversity of opinion deepens understanding and engagement with the reading: *‘forces me to evaluate my opinions’*
- Engagement with peers enables sharing and development of skills
- Social benefits

By institution

Overall



Lincoln



Summing up

Caveats

- The pandemic effect
- A Humanities-heavy sample
- Relationship to more general skills-related challenges
- Relationship between online and offline reading
- What/ where is ‘reading’ in our data?

Conclusions

- Expectations vs. reality
- Required skills vs. taught skills
- Distraction, physical challenges
- Impact of collaborative reading and annotation
- Transition:
  - ‘readiness’ for academic reading in HE
  - what ‘good’ reading looks like
  - managing student transition
  - timing
  - preparedness
- Disciplinary vs. generic reading skills
- Where is the pedagogy for reading?

MAKING DIGITAL HISTORY

Thanks!

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