

# “So, you want me to read for my degree?”: a Universal Design for Learning approach to reading

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# Today

- Where did this research come from?
- Theoretical background – what is UDL?
- The practical solution – accessibility tools in Resource Lists (Talis Aspire)
- Research with staff and students
- Implications for teachers, librarians and publishers/vendors



## Some of our assumptions

Students don't read

Students don't understand the need to read / are surprised they need to read

Students prefer print books



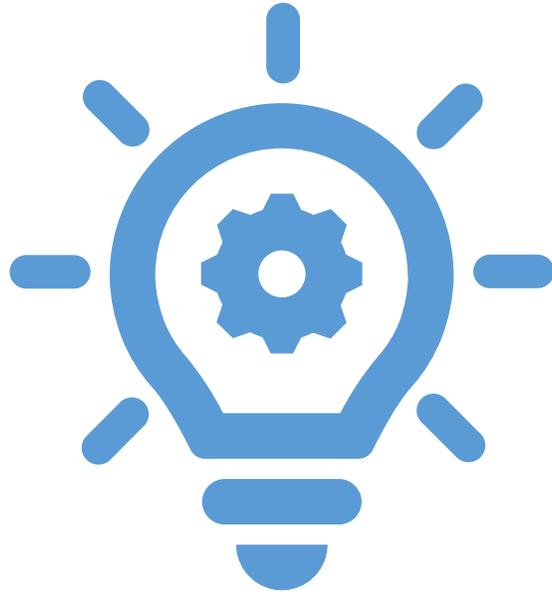
So, you want me to read for my degree?

Joliffe and Harl (2008) highlighted 12 years ago that patterns of students' reading did not reflect the expectations of the reading approach/skills need in Higher Education

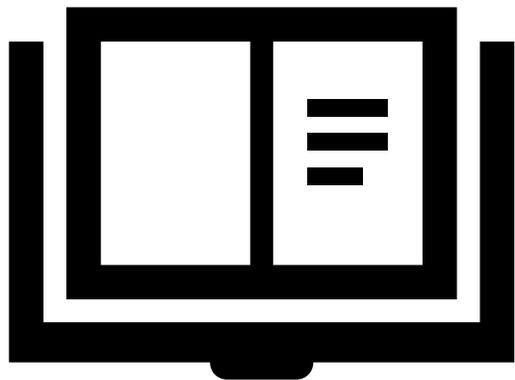
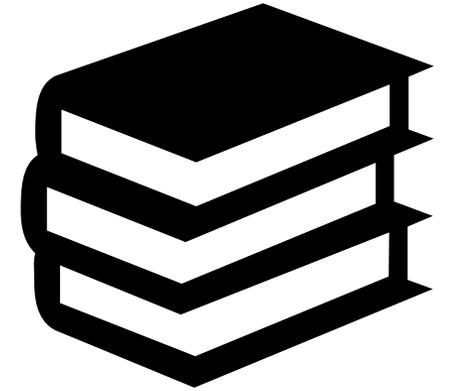
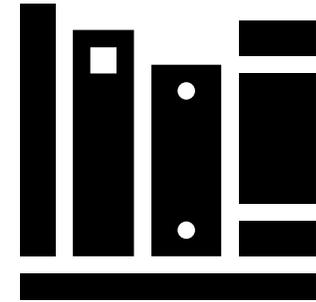
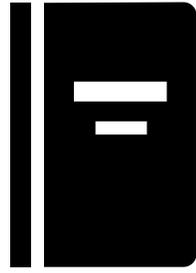
How and why  
was this  
research  
developed?

*Earlier research at the University of Worcester (Malomo, 2017) highlighted that students often:*

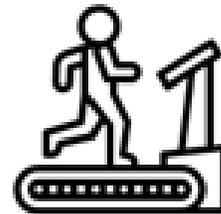
- perceive reading as a pleasurable, nostalgic activity of their childhood*
- Don't understand that "reading for your degree" means reading!*



**What are the barriers that students might experience around reading?**



ABC



STUDENT



## Demographics of student body within the research project

74% are mature students

97% are female

Qualifications on entry

- 29% entry with A levels

- 55% enter with a variety of vocational qualifications

45% of students have an IMD count 1-2 (25% in overall student body)

50% have a POLAR score of 1-2 on entry (27% in overall student body)



# Universal Design for Learning

# Anticipatory Adjustments – DMU Universal Design for Learning

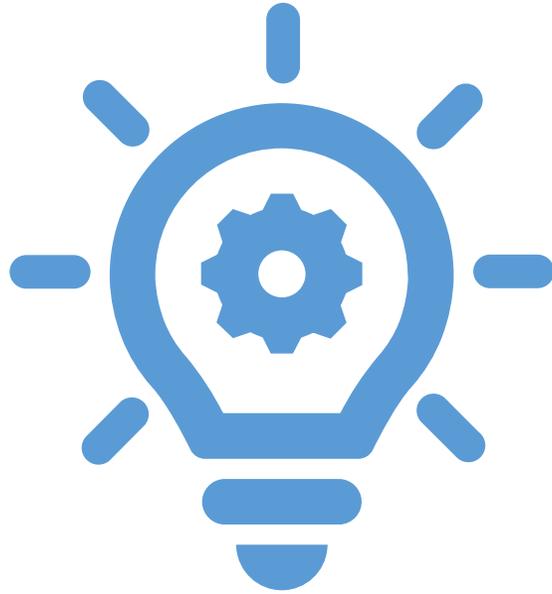
**Equal**



**Equitable**



**This is making reasonable adjustments to barriers to learning**



**How did we try to  
remove barriers to  
reading?**



We wanted to link audiobooks in our Resource (reading) Lists.

This is not without its problems!



**NV Access**

Empowering lives through  
non-visual access to technology



Spreed - speed read the web

Offered by: [spreed.launchrock.com](https://spreed.launchrock.com)

★★★★★ 713 | Productivity | 82,883 users

**ZAP** READER  
by the Center for ITCC Service, LLC

Instead we added  
accessibility tools to our  
Resource Lists

**ATbar**

# What does this look like in practice?

## Top tools to support you in completing your reading

There are lots of strategies and methods to engage with literature. You may prefer to curl up with a print book in the library, scroll through an ebook on your laptop in a cafe, or set up a Text to Speech player while you cook at home. You may find that you want to read different items in different ways at different times - there is no one way of reading, so feel free to experiment to find what works for you.

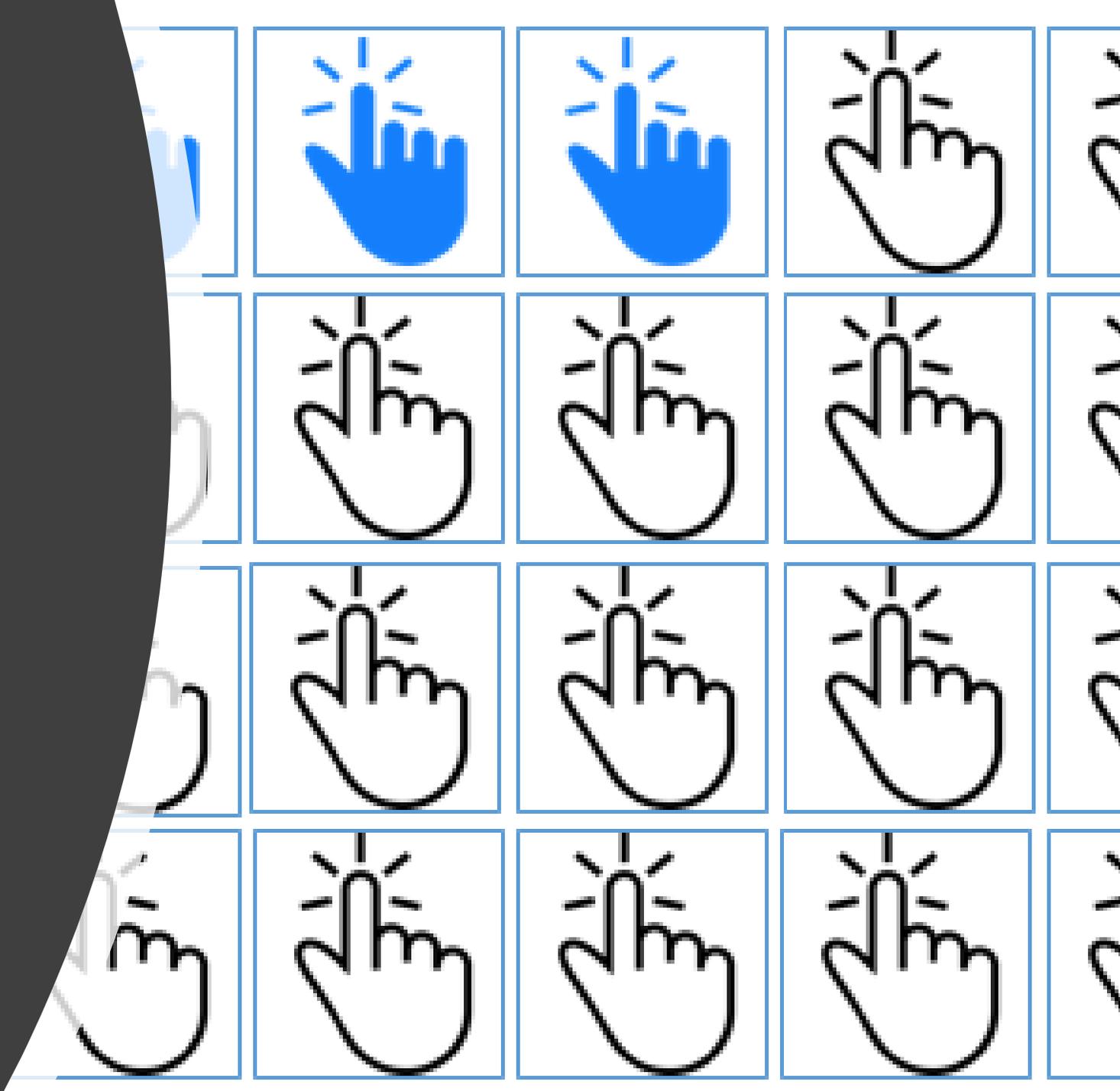
Here you will find a short list of recommended tools that can enhance your use of electronic books, journals and other resources. These specific tools generally work best using smart browsers like Google Chrome, but all browsers will have a range of options available. This list is far from exhaustive! You are encouraged to explore other options and feedback what works well (and less well) for you to help this list develop.

**Do you find reading from a screen to be difficult or uncomfortable?** Use 'ATBar' to adjust your settings. ATBar is a free toolbar you can add to any web browser, and has lots to offer for everyone. You can change font style and size, add a colour overlay to reduce screen glare, and use the Text to Speech function to listen to your reading, as well as a dictionary and spellchecker, both handily embedded. Click on the links below for more about how this tool could support you alongside easy to use instructions.

-  [ATbar \(download\)](#)  
Webpage [VIEW ONLINE](#)  ⋮
-  [ATbar \(instructions\)](#)  
Webpage [VIEW ONLINE](#)  ⋮

# Did it work?

We had 30 clicks on these tools in 2018/19 out of a cohort of around 200



# Methods that were used within the research

Focus group made up of academics who teach on the programme, capturing responses on a Padlet

Online survey for students



# Who were the focus group ?



Group of lecturers who teach on the  
FdA Early Years (0-8)

Both experienced and new lecturers

All teaching on the course in  
Partnership Colleges in the West  
Midlands, Herefordshire, Worcester and  
through our flexible and distributed  
route



# Voice of the focus group

Themes that emerged

- Accessibility tools
- Reading plans
- Embedding reading expectations within teaching

# Voices of the academics - *accessibility tools*

- The need to be a super user
- Perceived problems with the tools
- Lack of confidence around use especially within the resource list - more training needed



Voices of  
academics –  
accessibility tools  
& audiobooks

*"the spoken word is a  
different set of skills  
to following a novel being  
read aloud - is there any  
research on this?"*

Voices of  
academics –  
accessibility tools  
&  
eBooks

*“Students are developing a different approach to reading as ebooks and pdfs enable the identification of specific words in texts, therefore they can 'speed read' for references rather than reading sections or chapters”*

*“Most of the time students think they have to read every book from cover to cover”*

”

*"Considering my current students, I think curiosity is the key; I can see students whose curiosity lead [sic] them to read a whole article and follow it up with further research - they are 'thirsty for knowledge' rather than just reading for assignments"*

Voices of academics  
–curiosity  
seemed the  
solution



# Ideas and suggestions from the focus group

*"Time for all tutors to read for themselves specific chapters and then discuss with other tutors teaching the same modules as to how a piece could support certain topics, thus spreading the load"*

*"The purpose is to help students recognise that reading needs to be planned in the same way as assignment writing"*

# Voice of the students

Themes that emerged:

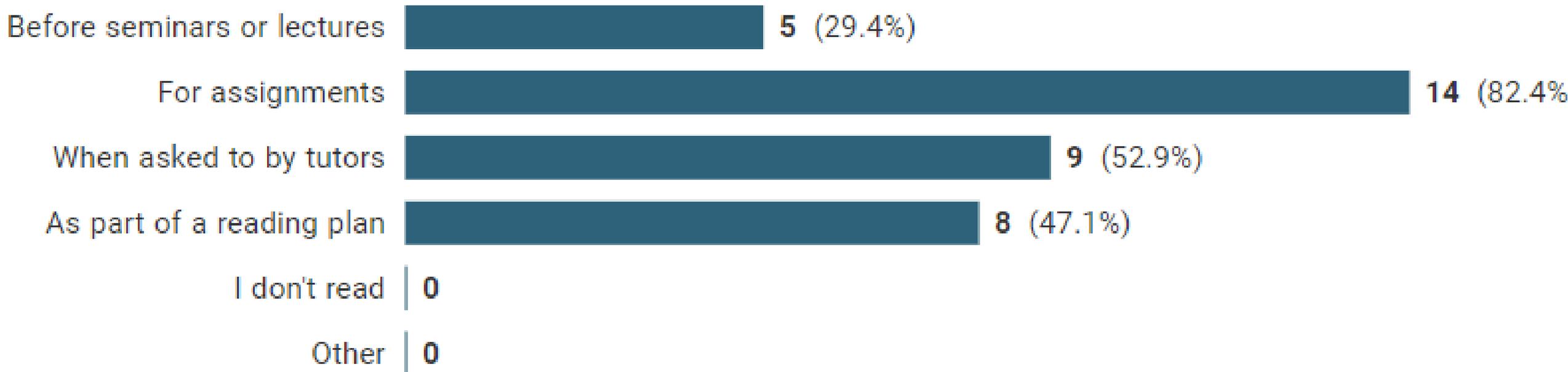
- Reading & learning
- Accessibility tools
- Barriers & constraints



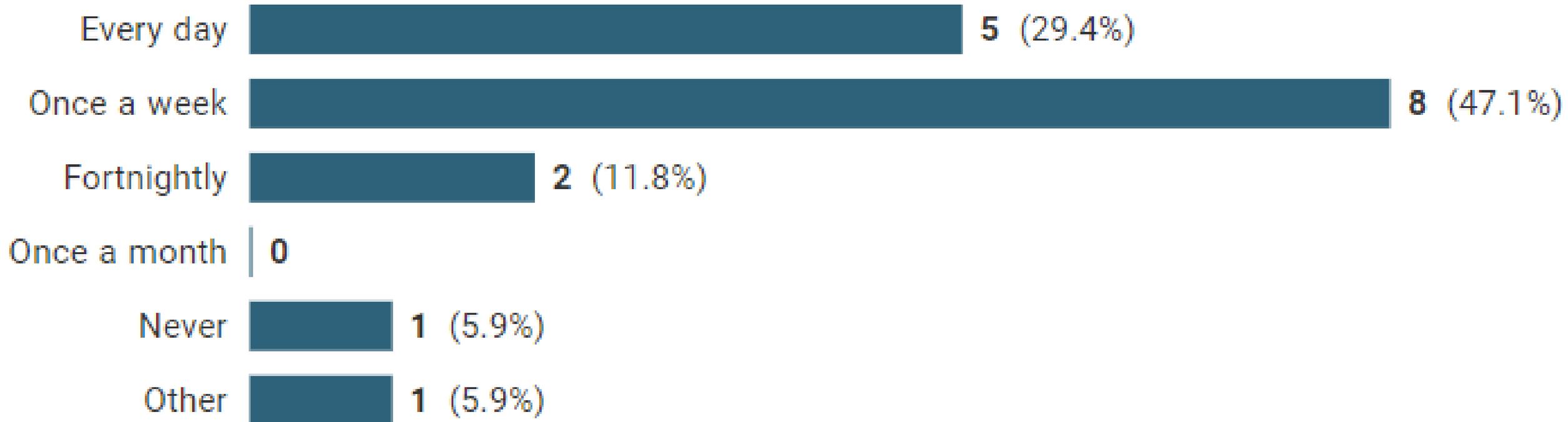


# Reading & learning

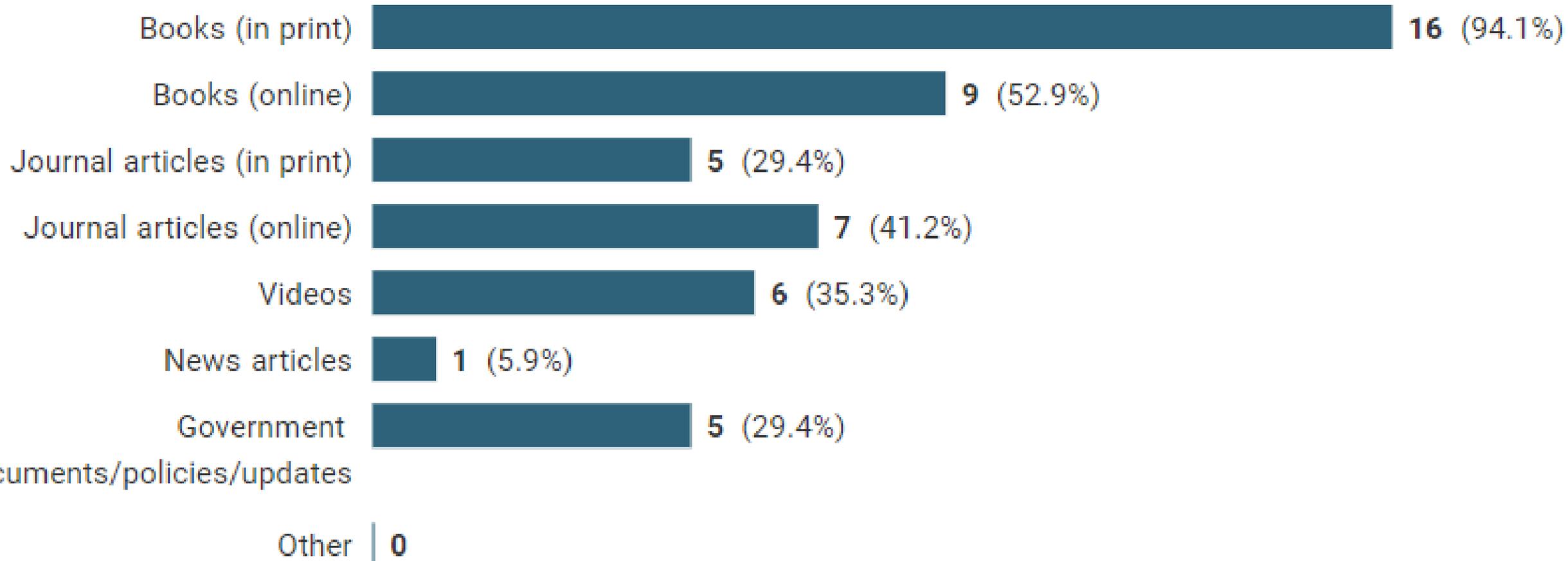
# When do you use your Resource List?



# How often do you use your Resource List?



# Which are your top 3 resource types to use?



# Accessibility tools



24% said they'd definitely noticed accessibility tools in their Resource Lists; 24% weren't sure



One student used NV Access and said **“It has helped me to gain more knowledge for the uni [sic] that I was reading up on”**



52% would definitely try audiobooks if they were available and another 18% might

Barriers & constraints:  
“how do you feel about reading for your course?”



47% don't have enough time to read



30% said reading is hard



35% felt nervous about understanding



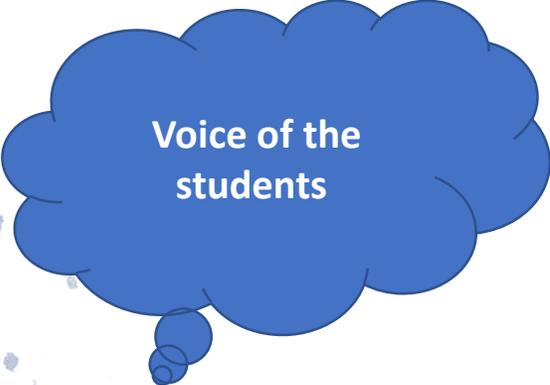
18% felt unsure about what to read



30% felt unsure about how much to read



**BUT** 47% also said they enjoy reading



Voice of the  
students



*“Sometimes it is enjoyable but other times I don't know the purpose of why I am reading something and/or exactly what I am supposed to get from the reading”*



Reflections and  
implications

so  
what?

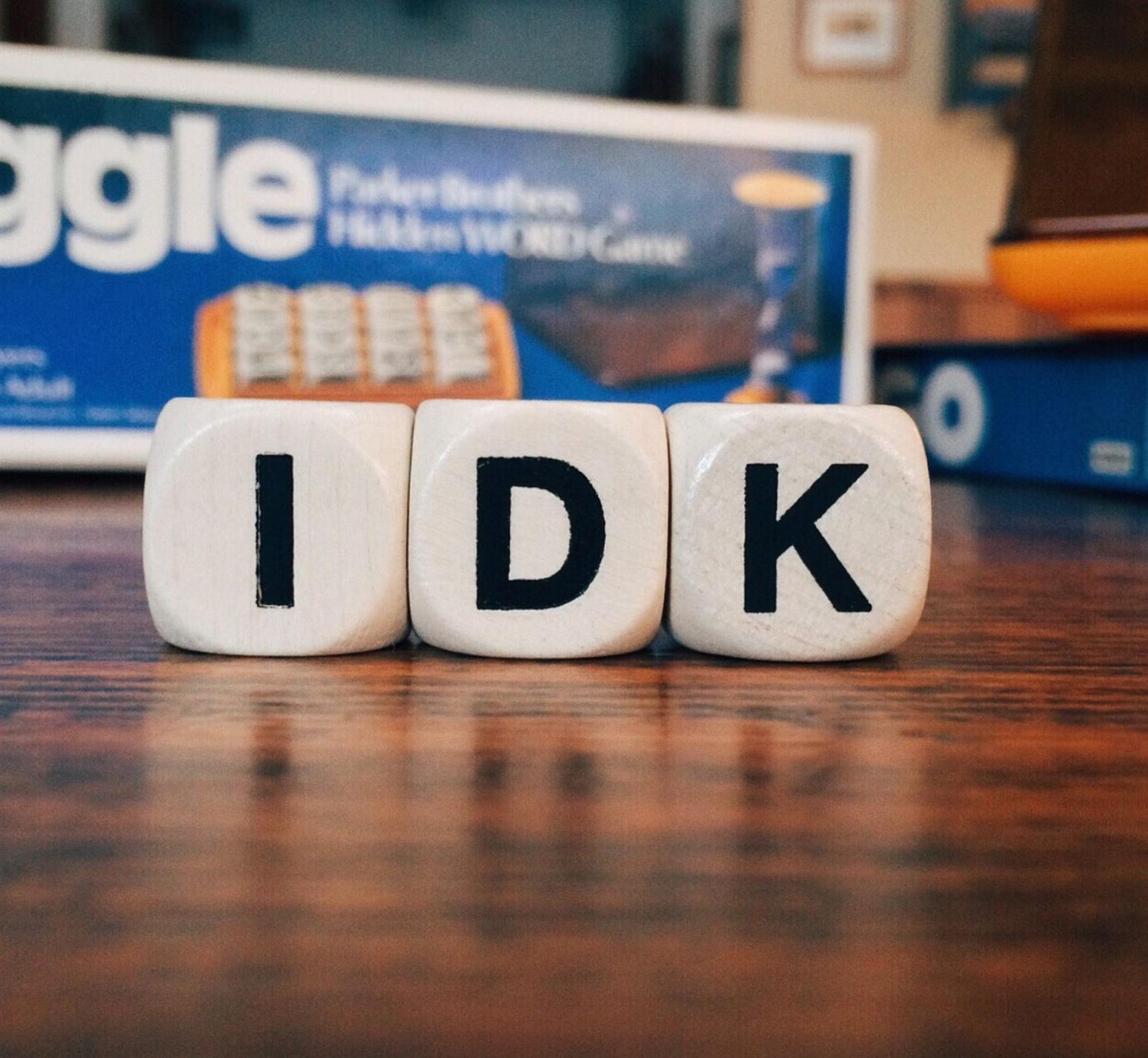
# Implications for the teaching team - the insider

- A change is needed in the pedagogical approach to ensure that reading is explicit
- An understanding of UDL principles and how they can support the removal of barriers
- Developing staff skills in using all online platforms that support all students to access materials
- Further engagement with librarians to support and develop an intrinsic approach to reading





# Implications for librarians



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There is a challenge  
for UDL  
practitioners  
around student  
preferences for  
print vs ebooks

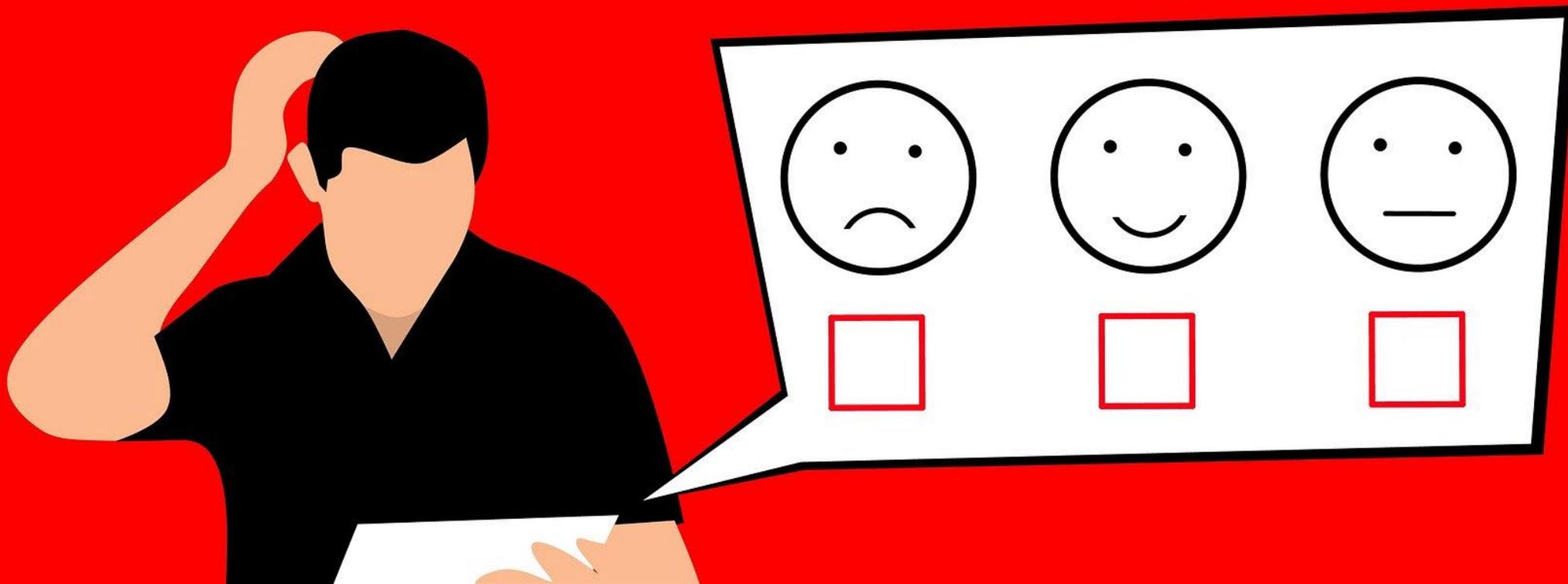
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We need to add  
to or change our  
teaching

But who teaches  
academic staff?

# Implications for publishers & systems vendors



Make systems  
easy and  
intuitive to use

I.e. make them work with third party tools like  
screen-readers and/or have in-built tools to do  
the same job



We're still interested in the idea of audiobooks – but we'd need a publishing partner to run a pilot...



But what  
about the  
students?

# Want to know more? Get in touch!

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