

Big Idea

Across 37 experimental studies, **there is no overall significant difference** in reading comprehension between digital and paper reading.

However, **important differences appear** depending on *who* is reading, *what* they are reading, and *the conditions under which they read*.

Digital and print each show advantages; they **complement rather than replace each other**.

Key Takeaways

1. Overall comprehension is similar.

- o The average effect size was very small and not significant.
- o Neither medium is universally “better.”

2. Paper reading performs better in certain conditions.

- o **University students** performed significantly better with paper.
- o **Informational texts** favored paper.
- o **Medium and long texts (1000+ words)**—especially under **time limits**—showed better comprehension on paper.
- o Digital reading can lead to **scrolling fatigue, distraction, and shallower processing**.

3. Digital reading performs better when certain supports are present.

- o **Interactive digital features** (e.g., clickable elements, feedback, AR) improved reading outcomes.
- o **Using reading strategies** (e.g., highlighting, notes, guidance) significantly improved digital reading performance.
- o **Younger learners (K–8)** often showed small advantages or no disadvantages with digital reading.

4. Text type matters.

- o **Literary texts** showed a significant advantage for digital reading.
- o **Informational texts** showed the opposite—paper reading produced better comprehension.

5. Reading conditions (how students read) change the outcome.

- o With **strategy use**, digital reading was significantly better.
- o Without strategy use, paper was better.
- o Under **time pressure**, paper outperformed digital.
- o With **free reading time**, digital had a slight advantage (not significant).

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