Adapting to emerging student behaviours in an AI age

Perlego

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Leveraging new digital technology to drive reading engagement

In Higher Education, the rise of new technologies is leading to rapidly changing student learning behaviours. A "Netflix-style experience for education" was reported as an increasing expectation during a recent Times Higher Education and Perlego Roundtable for UK HE senior leaders. Students expect easy, on demand access to course materials.

The proliferation of artificial intelligence usage makes it a strategic priority for institutions to ensure students are supported to use these tools effectively, both in their studies and for future employment. Yet universities report feeling unprepared to meet these evolving needs in the age of AI.

How can institutions deliver in this area and embrace the opportunities presented by new technology, whilst ensuring academic integrity is upheld? In this case study, Perlego ("Spotify for textbooks") and voices from HE will explore how AI can be leveraged to diversify learning material, increase reading, and improve student engagement.

88%
of students use Gen AI for assessments*

"Students coming in today might be digitally capable, but it doesn't mean they're competent in all the digital skills they need to enter the workforce. So we have two issues that need addressing: catering to students' needs and expectations, given the kind of digital use that they are accustomed to; and ensuring they have the digital and employability skills that prepare them for the world of work."

'Shaping the future of higher education in an AI-driven world'
a Perlego & Times Higher Education Roundtable for UK HE senior leaders

* Source: HEPI (2025)

A key challenge in preparing students to become independent learners is guiding them to critically evaluate resources and seek diverse perspectives. The number of different systems and tools can be overwhelming, and a risk of using AI to speed up this process can be a lack of academically rigorous material:

"When you ask the LLM 'can you give me the reference' it's not a real journal or real book."

University of Sussex Physiology Masters student and Perlego User

"The issue with Google Scholar, for example, is you're going to get titles and abstracts, not chapters. It has potential to be overwhelming as well, because if you did search in text through books, that's going to get too much. Who knows if that would be useful."

University of Leicester 2nd Year PHD student and Perlego user

How Perlego is harnessing AI to adapt to changing student learning behaviours

Perlego ("Spotify for textbooks") explored ways to address these challenges and support learners to find trusted sources. We launched our first artificial intelligence tool, Smart Search, in April 2024, followed by Research Assistant. Turn the page to discover how these AI tools have supercharged learners' reading engagement and boosted insights for universities one year on...

+50%
increase in reading for students who use Perlego's AI tools*

* Source: Perlego platform data, 2024

Harnessing AI to boost reading with diverse material

When preparing students to become independent learners against a backdrop of AI, it's essential to ensure they're supported to critically evaluate resources and access diverse perspectives. How can institutions enable students to use these tools effectively to source learning material, and can AI provide valuable data around reading engagement?

To address these challenges, Perlego launched the Smart Search tool in 2024, developed in consultation with HE and publisher partners. It enables deep search within a text beyond titles and synopsis, surfacing only the most relevant extracts from 1 million+ quality books. Natural language support means students can phrase questions in a way that makes sense to them, widening participation. Discover more insights below on how AI is diversifying reading for learners.

Smart Search ✦

Supercharge your students' research

"The Smart Search function is my favourite. You don't have to get the keyword exactly right [...] what it does as well is bring up other things that you might not have seen that you think 'actually that looks quite interesting I might just have a little look at that'."

University of Arden, psychology Masters student and Perlego user.

205,225
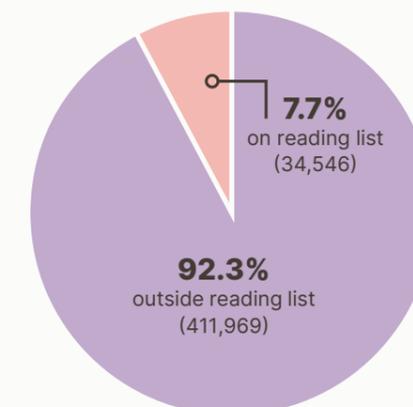### Smart Searches on Perlego since launch
Data from April 2024–March 2025

"I definitely have read a lot around the reading list. I think I must have looked at about 25 textbooks on Perlego in the last month whilst I was doing assignments, so that's definitely more than I would have done if I was using a traditional library. I just wouldn't have been able to access a lot of those books, especially such recent editions."
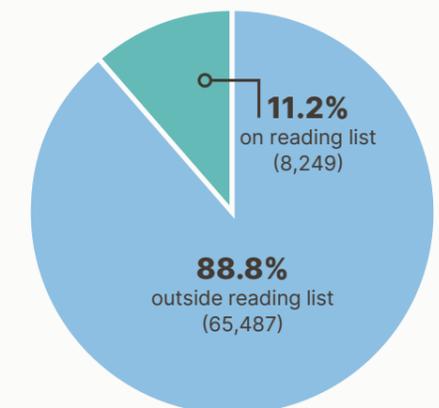
University of Wolverhampton, doctorate student in counselling and Perlego user

Our unlimited access model, combined with the Smart Search tool's ability to surface a range of diverse extracts, allows students to search beyond their reading lists without barriers. Data from two recent flagship partnerships in the UK reveals around 90% of books opened and hours read are beyond the reading list:

Total number of books opened

- 7.7% on reading list (34,546)
- 92.3% outside reading list (411,969)

Total hours read

- 11.2% on reading list (8,249)
- 88.8% outside reading list (65,487)

Since Smart Search launched in April 2024, Perlego has also noticed a steady increase in the weekly share of users reading 3+ books per week

Curious how Smart Search can rapidly discover a range of sources? **Try it out now!**

www.perlego.com/smart-search

Increasing student reading engagement by surfacing quality sources

Learners often contend with multiple different systems and logins to open books, presenting accessibility challenges. Emerging technology provides opportunities for institutions to remove these barriers to students' reading engagement: how can AI be used to increase the efficiency of identifying and accessing reliable sources?

Perlego's Research Assistant delivers cited and relevant overviews to learners' research questions, supported by verifiable academic titles on Perlego. Excerpts are a click away, and related questions point toward new directions. Research Assistant is available to both institutional partnerships and individual users: Perlego has a unique industry position, as students can subscribe themselves. Find out below how students and faculty alike are harnessing this tool to read more, and enhance critical thinking around sources.

> I immediately know that what it's given me is more trustworthy than other AI

> I feel like it's helped me find books that typically I wouldn't have found before at all

89,285

Research questions asked on Perlego

Data from October 2024-March 2025

Your Research Assistant

Find what's relevant faster and cut through information overload. From search to insight in one place.

| Ask a research question | Search |

By using this AI-powered feature, you agree to the terms of our limited license. While in Beta, Research Assistant is only available in English.

Need some examples to get you going?   ↻ Show more examples

What is the impact of climate change?

What is the relationship between climate change and food security in developing countries?

Students are opening and reading more titles when discovered through Research Assistant

Data from October 2024–March 2025

38.8%

of Research Assistant searches since launch resulted in a book interaction.

Rather than artificial intelligence being exclusively viewed as a tool that challenges academic integrity, it is also a means of expanding critical thinking around resources. Educators can use AI tools in the classroom to improve students' literacy skills, whilst helping to equip them with new research methods:

> "AI Researcher is something that when I demonstrate it to students, they always think it's quite amazing. We're using that in a lot of the classes. I'll use it as a study example, and imagine we're trying to build information for our essay assessment. [...] I would use the AI researcher to ask a direct question, and then I show students the type of materials coming out. I think that's a great tool that's been very useful to a lot of my students, in order to amass information quite quickly and effectively."

Senior lecturer, University of East London, Perlego pilot

AI tools can also be a powerful way to supply data insights to institutions, allowing you to see what students are searching for and highlighting areas they may need additional support.

This word cloud shows the most popular Research Assistant search terms since launch.

See how this tool helps learners find quality sources with natural language. **Try it out now!**

www.perlego.com/research-assistant

Perlego's AI principles:
using technology responsibly

As we continue harnessing artificial intelligence to achieve our mission of making education accessible to all, we've outlined the values that will guide us. These 4 principles are designed to ensure we embrace AI thoughtfully, responsibly and collaboratively with the education and publishing community.

Support rather than replace

We implement AI to support and enhance, not replace, the learning experience.

Collaboration & trust

We create trust by consulting our HigherEd & publishing partners on AI

Mitigate against bias

We work hard to prevent the introduction of unfair bias through AI on Perlego.

Privacy as the standard

We respect the privacy and intellectual property of our users and partners.

Curious about our AI Values?
Read our latest blog to learn more today!

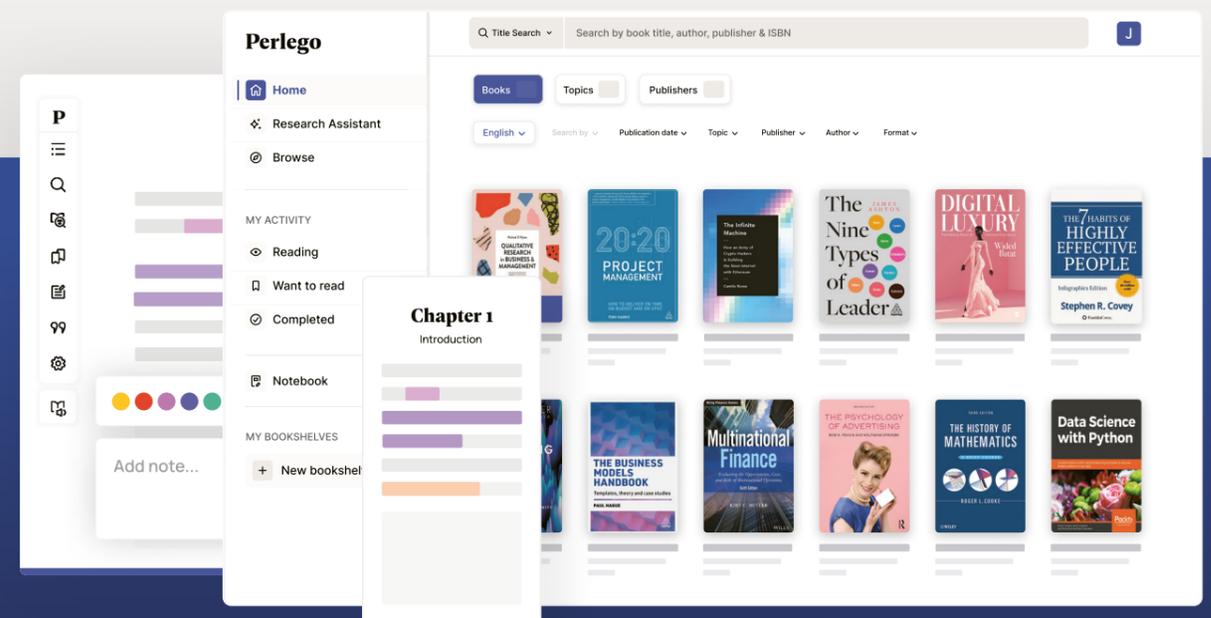organisations.perlego.com/en/blog/our-ai-principles

"We wanted to document and share our AI values to foster trust and clarity, and feel that this offers a clear vision of how we want to work with and empower learners, publishers and educators. Thank you to all of our partners who helped shape our AI principles."

Charlotte Upchurch, Perlego, Director of Product

Learn how Perlego can support your institution's strategic initiatives

Get in touch

www.perlego.com/institutions

Perlego is a digital learning platform that improves the learning experience for students and empowers educators with unlimited access to over 1.3 million academic and professional books from leading publishers.

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