



# Student Perspectives on the Academic Workflow

## Methodology

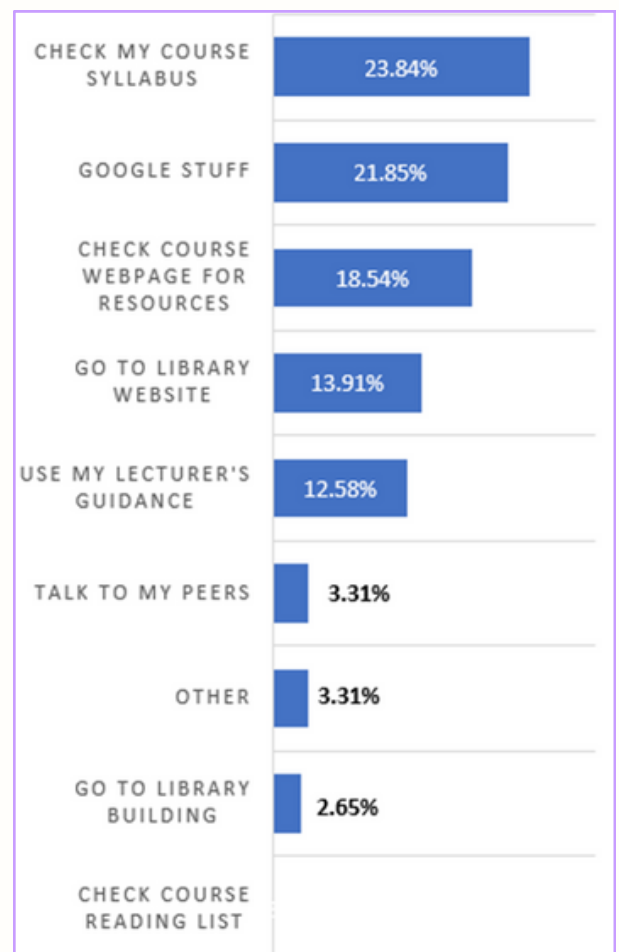
- 159 respondents to a survey on student habits, predominantly from the United States (62%) and the United Kingdom (14%)
- 49% of respondents were undergraduates, 46% postgraduates
- Additional data was collected via focus groups with 11 UK-based students

## Results

### Resource Discovery

We asked students to identify **all** the ways they find resources to use in their assignments to gain insights into their research process (Figure 1). The responses clearly indicate that students are largely by-passing the library building in their discovery process, with only 24% selecting this option. This emphasises a trend in the student research process – they favour online discovery.

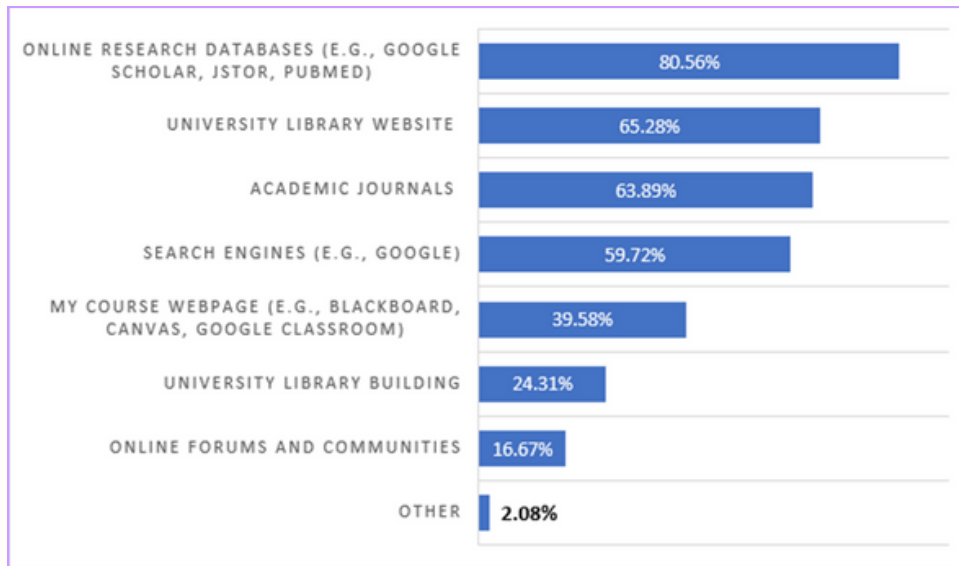
When students were asked to identify what they're most likely to do **first** when looking for resources, responses changed drastically, as can be seen in Figure 2. The most popular answer, with 24% of respondents choosing this, was 'check course syllabus', closely followed by 'Google stuff' forming 22% of responses.



**Figure 1.** Student Responses to the Question "Typically, where do you search for resources to use in assignments? (Select all that apply)"

Postgraduate students reported using Google initially to find resources significantly more (28%) than undergraduate students (18%). In contrast, undergraduate students reported finding resources primarily by checking their course webpage (30%) compared to a minority of postgraduate students (10%).

Another key finding is that only a small group of students identified the library website as a starting point in their research. In a focus group discussion, some reasons for this overlook of the library emerged. Participants described the university library website as “clunky” and mentioned advanced search filters as a particular problem due its common failure to produce desired results.



**Figure 2.** Student Responses to the question "What are you most likely to do first when starting research for an assignment?"



## Librarian Futures



Maizie’s findings fit in with our own. In Librarian Futures Part II: The Knowledge Gap, we similarly found that students are choosing to find their own way, rather than using the resources and support available to them through the academic library. That said, there were slight differences in our data – possibly as a consequence of the different wording we used in the available answers we provided.

It’s encouraging in this data that most students report that they’re likely to start their research with the course syllabus. Our own data suggests that Google is the natural starting point for a plurality of students. The demographic make-up of our two surveys was very different – our own comprising of a roughly even split of students based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Our different findings may simply reflect alternative approaches to research assignments across territories – and if that is the case, this highlights the importance of meeting any such challenges with appropriate, tailored solutions.

When asked to identify problem areas in their academic workflow, the most popular response was 'finding good information and relevant resources', with 33% of students answering they found this either somewhat or very difficult. In addition, when asked to rate the effectiveness of search engines when searching for resources, 43% of students answered only somewhat effective.

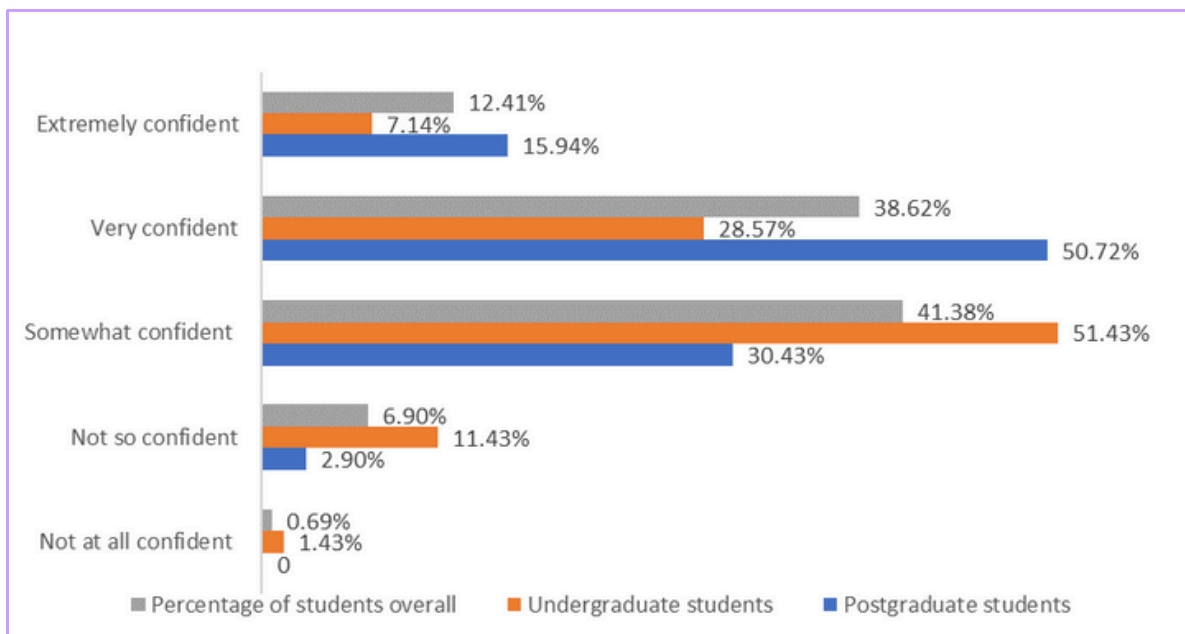
This topic was touched upon in focus groups, with students discussing how improvements could be made to enhance the research process. They came up with the following ideas:

- A browser extension that filters resources and ranks through relevancy to your topic, to make discovery quicker and more effective.
- The combination of search engines with university library website to make online resources more accessible and discoverable, making discovery more efficient and convenient.



## Academic Skills

Almost half (41%) of responding students identify as only 'somewhat confident' in their reading ability of academic literature. Predictably, postgraduate students identify as very confident considerably more than undergraduate students do (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Student responses to the question "How confident do you feel in your academic reading ability?"

We also asked students to identify how confident they feel in their ability to accurately cite references. Overall, students identified mostly as being 'somewhat confident' (35%) or 'very confident' (35%) in their referencing ability, though again postgraduate students were more likely to identify as 'very confident'.

This divide in confidence levels is particularly interesting considering that there is a distinct difference in the method of referencing of undergraduate and postgraduate students. While the most popular way undergraduate students cite references is to manually write them, with over half (52%) answering this way, the majority of postgraduate students (54%) favour the use of a reference managers to help cite their references.

## Librarian Futures



This is a really remarkable finding – over half of undergraduate students would rather write out their references manually than use a reference manager designed to make this both easier and faster. Might this be related to student confidence in referencing, with over a third of students identifying as only “somewhat confident” with referencing?

How do we address this? Librarians seem the obvious people to advise students on this – and librarians, in the main, seem to agree. In Part III of Librarian Futures, we report that over half of librarians are very confident with advising patrons on citing and referencing academic works. We have previously shown in Part II however that students looking for help with citation and referencing are more likely to use their own knowledge when stuck, or that of their classmates or teachers, than they are librarians'. In The Knowledge Gap, we provide actionable data for librarians looking to improve their communication around the student training they provide.

## Engagement

Students were generally found to be satisfied with level of guidance and training offered by their universities, with 35% of respondents identifying as such. Again, there was discrepancy between the level of satisfaction between undergraduate and postgraduate students. While postgraduate students largely reported being satisfied (35%) or very satisfied (23%), most undergraduate students reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (43%). Are services offered to students inadequate, or are students simply not making use of available resources?



Students reported interacting more often with online services to find solutions to their problems than with their university librarians. Results revealed that in the last 12 months, 38% of students rarely sought guidance from librarians, and 35% answered that they never did. In contrast, 23% answered that they frequently utilised guidance found online, and 19% regularly did. 73% of students in their previous year of study did not see librarians as a point of contact for help when facing challenges in any aspect of their academic workflow.

We also wanted to learn if and how students engage with digital tools and applications in their approach to assignments, specifically relating to AI. Surprisingly, 79% of students reported to not using AI in their academic assignments, perhaps due to fears of plagiarism and inaccuracies.

## Librarian Futures



*“The results in this section are pretty stark – and really draw attention to the knowledge gap that we have discussed at length in Librarian Future Part II. The report delves more into this failure by students to identify the library as a resource they should make use of, and strategies to address this.*

*79% of students not having used generative AI in their academic assignments is also quite remarkable, given how ubiquitous this technology has seemingly become. There’s scarcely a conference, a webinar, a meeting, a report that hasn’t had ChatGPT as one of its focuses in the past year. Is the worry overblown?*

*Well – maybe, but I suspect not. Generative AI is transforming and will continue to transform the way students learn, the way they write, the way they are assessed, and so on. But this is a hopeful statistic – most of them are not yet using it. Librarians therefore have a fantastic opportunity to get ahead of the curve and upskill so that, as the number of students using AI grows, librarians will be ready to guide them to use it in an ethical, responsible, academically sound way.”*

**Matthew Weldon, Library Patron Consultant, Technology from Sage**

## Librarian Futures

Discover our Librarian Futures series of whitepaper reports that explore librarian-patron relationships in the digital age here: [www.technologyfromsage.com/whitepapers](http://www.technologyfromsage.com/whitepapers)

