



AI and reading academic texts

AI tools can support academic reading in different ways. This handout provides an overview of how you can use AI for reading academic texts in a targeted way and what you should consider.

AI tools can support academic reading

- Through (quick) **summaries** in comprehensible language or in your first language, through keywords or bullet points (e.g. ChatGPT). This may help to quickly assess whether a text is worth reading or not.
- Through the possibility to **'chat' with the text itself** and ask comprehension questions (e.g. Explainpaper, ChatPDF). This can be especially useful when reading complex texts. Especially in this regard, you will have to learn more about writing prompts, which can be useful for any use of AI. Recommendation: Write a prompt for a text on a subject you are familiar with to assess the quality of the tool's output before you delve into new topics.
- Through the **recommendation of further reading** based on a text (e.g. Elicit).
- Through providing **information about the context of the text**. Please note: AI may generate biased, unclear and incorrect information that seems plausible. Therefore, you should always be careful when using the output and check the output in any case.

What do I miss when I use an AI tool for reading or summarising texts?

- **Academic disciplines differ in how they analyse texts** and what types of texts they use. In the natural sciences, illustrations and bibliographies can sometimes be more important than the manuscript. AI does not extract a line of arguments, i.e. it focuses on the facts.
Although you may learn about a certain topic from texts in the humanities when using AI, AI does not replace *close reading*.
- You miss opportunities to expand your **reading competence and practice text comprehension**. These are crucial skills for not remaining at a summarising, descriptive level for your paraphrases but for analytically evaluating and interpreting the original text in more detail.
- You have to read and create excerpts from key texts yourself, especially with regard to the (seminar) paper or lecture exams you have to write or take. This is important since thinking about the lines of argument in the discourse is a prerequisite for **developing your own position and for raising comprehension questions**.
- AI-based tools for summarising texts often only work well with texts in **English** (at least in summer 2024).
- With most free tools, **only a certain number** of texts can be uploaded. If you want to upload more texts, you either have to wait, create an account (and thus give away your own data) or pay. **Please also adhere to the data protection regulations** (see handout [AI and research data](#), in German).

Which decisions do I have to take?

- Why do you have to/want to read a text? The **reading purpose** determines your **reading style**.
 - Do you have to fully understand the text in detail? If you really have to understand the text, e.g. for an exam, you should definitely (also) read and create an excerpt from the text yourself ([see the handouts on reading](#), in German). AI can support you in this regard.
 - Do you only have to skim the text to be able to assess whether it is worth having a closer look (e.g. for your research project)? AI can save you time when skimming many texts.



- Do you *really* need an AI-generated summary? Most specialist articles have an **abstract** that summarises the most important key points of the text and thus enables you to make a quick assessment.

What should I consider?

- Are you infringing **data protection provisions** by uploading the text?
- Are you infringing **copyright** by uploading another person's text?
- Are you breaching **confidentiality** by uploading another person's text?
- **Functional principles:** Generative AI tools are language models with no consciousness. They are based on linguistic data and thus simulate human language. This is why AI may generate biased, unclear and incorrect information that seems plausible. Therefore, you should always be careful when using the output and check the output in any case.
- **The requirements of the course apply:** The teacher decides on (non-)permitted materials in the course. Everything that is not explicitly permitted is forbidden. If you use generative tools, the following applies in any case: You are responsible for the text. AI cannot take the load of understanding texts off your shoulders. Especially, if you are reading to acquire and study new knowledge.
- **Acquire a new competence:** The ability to understand and to use AI is a competence that you can learn. Therefore, you should engage in continuous learning to ensure the best possible use of this technology.