I, Janine Morris, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English & Comparative Literature.

It is entitled:

Contexts of Digital Reading: How Genres Affect Reading Practices

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Contexts of Digital Reading:
How Genres Affect Reading Practices

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Abstract

Abstract

Contexts of Digital Reading: How Genres Affect Reading Practices is a study of the different ways university students use digital devices to read. Many mainstream representations of digital reading fail to distinguish between different contexts or genres of reading, making digital reading appear transparent rather than mediated by device or purpose. Furthermore, research on student reading deficiencies often locates reading problems in the textual medium (linking digital technologies to greater reading problems than print) rather than in the situations where reading takes place. Contrary to that line of thinking, my dissertation demonstrates that reading is a complex process shaped by material conditions and by shifting variables. Readers’ practices are constantly changing depending on the different situations where they read; the available technologies; and emotional and environmental factors like energy, mood, their physical location, and time of day. This project seeks to further explore the different ways students use their digital technologies depending on these variables and complicate existing pictures of digital readers.

Drawing on new media, genre, and reading studies scholarship, Contexts of Digital Reading uses surveys and interviews to examine how students’ reading practices change with different devices and situations. The participants reveal that they rely heavily on laptops and smartphones in their daily communications; that their practices change along with different contexts; and that reading instruction is performed in varying ways. To account for the inconsistencies with reading instruction, I offer instructors assignments that can help students become aware of the practices they perform in different situations and provide opportunities for using digital annotation technologies. Within composition and rhetoric, the ability to read well (and accompanying practices like mindfulness and purposeful engagement with texts) can help
students to produce more effective writing. My study reinvigorates reading as a necessary, yet often taken for granted, part of the composing process by calling attention to the materiality of reading.
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# Contexts of Digital Reading: How Genres Affect Reading Practices

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Introduction

Contexts of Digital Reading

Sure, those with ironclad discipline can read, think, and analyze regardless of the reading medium. For the rest of us mortals—like over 90% of the college students I surveyed—concentration and digital screens don't generally mix.

–Naomi Baron, “Why Reading on a Screen is Bad for Critical Thinking”

There is much for contemporary literacy scholars to contest in the evidence presented for claims about declining literacy. From the idea that first drafts lacking transitions represent a widespread literacy scare to the idea that professors’ memories of writing over the decades represent a valid or reliable measure of decline, there is plenty of room for debate.

–Stacey Pigg, “Distracted By Digital Writing”

Educational debates over reading instruction and the physical form of students’ texts have been a recurrent theme since post-World War II America. Books like Rudolf Flesch’s 1955 *Why Johnny Can’t Read* point to inefficiencies with American education and argue the need for widespread curricular change. Within pedagogical literature, arguments related to education change with shifting forms of texts. For instance, in a brief 1964 article for *The English Journal*, Kenneth L. Donelson offers instructors eight reasons for using paperback novels in the classroom. In the opening paragraph, Donelson writes: “While there are undoubtedly some teachers who view the revolution and accompanying trend with apathy or active defiance, more teachers are likely to view all of this with uncertainty. . . ” (191). Because the use of paperbacks moved students away from anthologies or “hardbacks” in the classroom, Donelson’s article attempts to quell teachers’ fears that came with adopting this different textual form. In 1969, Alice Cohen further reflects on the increasing use of paperback books in the classroom, stating, “Having served its fifty years in educational purgatory, the paperback is becoming an acceptable ‘innovation’. . . ” (295). The limited status once attributed to the paperback in educational settings, and eventual acceptance after “50 years in educational purgatory,” resonates with contemporary attitudes towards the use of digital technologies in the classroom.
The reasons Donelson provides for using paperbacks echo contemporary rationales that have been offered for bringing digital technologies into the classroom. Donelson states, “students do like paperbacks, and they will read them; [. . .] Paperbacks encourage reading and help to breathe life into the literature classroom” (191). Similar arguments could be made for digital technologies today—they encourage reading (and writing) and provide ample material for analysis both in and out of the classroom. As Kathleen Blake Yancey stated in 2004, “Never before has the proliferation of writing outside the academy so counterpointed the compositions inside” (298). Through digital technologies, people spend their days reading and writing. While Blake Yancey’s focus is mainly on online composing practices, reading is an unmentioned process bound up by the digital writing we do. To effectively respond to Facebook posts, comment on a *New York Times* article, or build on a tweet, you need to have had appropriately read the original message. Brought into the classroom, the self-motivated (reading and) writing digital users perform can “breathe life” into the writing classroom, and help students cultivate a range of literacies essential to their successful participation in society.

To help compositionists and educators become more aware of the ways in which reading practices intersect in and outside of the classroom, I examine the practices students perform daily using their digital devices. In this dissertation, I broaden conceptions of digital reading and challenge simplistic and overdetermined views of what engagement and digital reading look like. This research is necessary for literacy educators and those wishing to help students communicate in more effective ways using digital technologies. Justifying the need for this research, in this chapter I describe changes to our definitions of literacy, look at existing problems with digital reading research, address the impact of different genres and types of texts, and discuss the importance of context—largely neglected in published reports of digital reading. This chapter
provides a foundation for studying digital reading and outlines the challenges current literacy educators face in studying this subject.

Since Donelson’s 1964 contribution to the debate over novels and anthologies, our understanding of literacy has expanded to account for the emergence of new technologies, informal learning environments, and growth of cultural diversity. Daniel Keller, in *Chasing Literacy*, writes, “literacies include diversity of language and culture as well as the range of expressive modes offered by various media” (32-33). Literacy today is multimodal and requires a global awareness of other customs and cultures. Also arguing for a broader view of literacy with new media use, Stuart Selber describes the need for equal functional, critical, and rhetorical approaches to literacy instruction. Being multiliterate for Selber means being “skilled at moving among [different kinds of computer literacies] in strategic ways” (24), which can ultimately “help students learn to exploit the different subjectivities that have become associated with computer literacies” (25). Students need to go beyond just using computer technologies to question the assumptions built into those technologies, and ultimately become technological producers themselves. More than being able to use digital technologies or recognize that being literate involves multiple modes of meaning making, there are literacy theorists who wish to move students beyond the classroom space to account for the literacies used in everyday practices. Highlighting the multiple literacies that get used in a variety of activities and learning environments, for example, James Paul Gee examines the learning that takes place through playing video games. He writes, “Language is not the only important communication system. Today images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols are particularly significant” (13). For Keller, Selber, and Gee, studying literacy involves looking beyond print-based reading and writing and includes a wide range of activities, modalities, and
dispositions towards technology. Literacy today, then, necessitates interpreting communication systems in a number of modes, which we come to experience in multiple contexts through many forms of media. Taken together, it is necessary for those interested in student learning to recognize the importance of activities, technologies, and ways of making meaning outside print- and text-based reading and traditional classroom settings.

One of the challenges of enacting 21st century literacy education is knowing how to combine the functional ("users of technology") literacy Selber describes with critical ("questioners of technology") and rhetorical ("producers of technology") literacies (25). The problem with ignoring any of these components of literacy education is that "students who are not adequately exposed to all three literacy categories will find it difficult to participate fully and meaningfully in technological activities" (24). Selber’s framework necessitates literacy education in context, as the values of multiple educational and social forces on student learning cannot “be understood in isolation from others” (28). As such, teaching students effective computer and technological literacy requires an approach to learning that has them question and recognize the importance of their practices in multiple contexts that go beyond the lessons taught in individual classrooms. As Keller notes, “Even when students are familiar and proficient [with particular technologies], the educational context creates expectations and perceptions in their minds that can block the transfer of out-of-school practices to classroom literacy situations. . .” (40). The difficulty with transferring activities or ways of reading and writing between contexts is one challenge literacy instructors face. As students work to negotiate the requirements of a course, within a department, and throughout a degree, the expectations placed on them will continue to change along with social pressures on their abilities to navigate communication situations. For this reason, situating literacy education within particular contexts and helping students become
more aware of the practices they employ can assist them in transferring necessary skills to new situations.

An additional challenge for both students and literacy educators is combatting the perception of digital technologies in popular media and quelling the fears expressed over the competing role of technology in our lives. Radio shows like WNYC’s Note to Self’s specially themed reading episodes (“The ‘Bi-Literate’ Brain,” “There’s Just Something”) and articles like “Why Reading on a Screen is Bad for Critical Thinking” published in the Huffington Post (Baron); “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” in The Atlantic (Carr); and “The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom” in The New Yorker (Rockmore) are just a few examples of the circulating reports lamenting the effects of our technological use on our ability to think critically and arguing for a return to print-based technologies and ways of engaging with texts. And new reports continue to emerge daily. In many of these reports, technology is seen as encouraging distraction and detrimental to critical thinking, whereas print-based texts encourage prolonged attention and greater learning. The problem with this line of thinking about digital technologies is that digital reading is often seen in binary opposition to print-based reading, which ignores the many ways our reading practices overlap, regardless of the device we are using.

More positively however are research reports applauding new literacies and recognizing the increasing numbers of digital readers that have resulted from digital technology use. The 2008 National Endowment for the Art’s “Reading on the Rise” reports the growth of readers’ literacy rates compared to its earlier 2004 study that reported a decline of students’ reading abilities (“Reading at Risk”). The PEW Research Center also reports an increase in e-reader populations connected to growths in device ownership (Zickuhr and Rainie). Yet despite these
reported growths in reading, what readers are actually doing with their technology is still underdeveloped in both the positive and negative reading reports.

Along with reporting rises in digital literacy and reading within educational contexts, researchers have generally been more willing to see the potential of digital devices in classrooms, and have studied their different uses. For example, building on their desire to see how students’ interactions with narrative change in print and digital forms, Ellen Evans and Jeanne Po “designed a class to explore the changing nature of narrative in the digital age” (n. pag). Using print-based texts in combination with CD-ROM and web-based texts, they worked with students in a composition course to gather impressions of how those students read and interact with digital devices. Another example of technology studied within the classroom is Alyson Simpson, Maureen Walsh, and Jennifer Rowsell’s look at “how meaning making occur[s]” in literacy lessons using iPads (123). Their findings call attention to the importance of gesture and touch in relation to digital technologies, a focus that necessitates further research. Both examples of education-based studies put students in classroom contexts at the centre of their research and more fully explore ways that digital devices are being adopted in education and to what effect.

Within many digital reading studies, the texts students read are often linear, print-based texts translated to the screen. Especially with long-form texts, many comparisons have been made between how students read those texts on screens compared to print (Mangen et.al; Rosenwald). Studies that look at digital reading also consider the significant physical and embodied differences between print and digital texts (Evans and Po; Jabr), along with how recall and comprehension of linear texts read on a screen are less accurate than when read in print (Tanner). While much of our screen reading does involve text-based posts, websites, tweets, and
articles, these above-mentioned reports fail to fully capture just how many multimodal components make up our digital content, or the ways that “digital reading” is not descriptive enough to encompass the many modalities or ways of reading we might use.

Accordingly, as has been extensively argued, digital reading is not limited to PDFs, text-based websites, or e-books. Edited books like Lynn C. Lewis’s *Strategic Discourse* and Heidi McKee and Danielle Nicole DeVoss *Digital Writing Assessment and Evaluation* by Computers and Composition Digital Press, journals like *Kairos*, and theorists like Cheryl Ball; Anne Wysocki, Cindy Selfe, Johndan Johnson-Eiola, and Geoffry Sirc; Jason Palmeri; and Jody Shipka, just to name a few, have all dealt with the implications of multimodal compositions in and outside of the classroom. The affordances of multiple modalities mean that videos, audio, design and layout, links, and images are all integral parts of the reading experience. Think of the necessary interplay of text, image, and video on a Buzzfeed list, for instance. These components all add to the reading experience. Furthermore, print-based mediums like comics and graphic novels (Jacobs), historically and culturally laden artifacts like wampums (Haas “Wampum”), or interactive texts like video games (Gee) have always included multimodal elements (see Palmeri; Wysocki et. al). Our reading practices have always been multimodal as we rely on more than just our sight to make meaning. Ignoring the modes and physicality of digital reading—whatever its form may be—fails to fully describe our ways of interacting with texts.

Along with the multimodal components of reading, context and different ways of reading are not fully considered in the literature on reading. As Gee notes, “there are many different ways of reading and writing. . . . We don’t read or write newspapers, legal tracts, essays in literary criticism, poetry, rap songs, and on through a nearly endless list in the same way. Each of these domains has its own rules and requirements. Each is a culturally and historically separate
way of reading and writing. . . “ (14). Even beyond the different literacies needed to engage with all these different texts, the ways we read them shift along with the context, purpose, and environment where we are reading. Especially within popular media reports on digital reading, the affordances of print and digital texts are often decontextualized, making the reading we do always appear the same, regardless of the genre or situation. The medium of reading is often emphasized in these instances, and the different ways of reading is diminished to universalize acts in one particular situation. For instance, American University professor Naomi Barron, in *The Huffington Post*, describes the differences she sees between print and digital reading:

Like all technologies, print books and digital screens come with their own affordances, that is, things they're particularly well suited to do. Print is easy to annotate, gives readers a physical sense of place in a book, and has aesthetic properties that even teenagers and young adults continue to value. Digital screens are excellent tools for skimming rapidly or zeroing in on just the passage you're looking for. (Bless whoever created CTRL+F.). This brief passage demonstrates some of the assumptions that are often paired with print and digital reading that ignore the different types of texts being read or contexts of reading. Print-based reading, in Baron’s account, is assumed to be more critical and natural to readers, with even “teenagers and young adults” recognizing its worth. In contrast, Baron associates digital reading with the hyper-reading qualities it has. While skimming and quickly finding information is certainly a feature of digital texts, so too is it a feature of print-based texts (think of the function of the Index section of a book). Baron here essentializes the qualities of print and digital mediums without looking at the differences between the texts themselves. Regardless of the similarities or differences between print-based or digital reading, characterizations of reading
like Barron’s ignore what readers are reading or the reasons why readers approach print and digital texts in the different ways that they do.

Greater scholarly attention is needed in this exact area: What kinds of texts are people reading? Why do readers approach texts in the ways they do? What situations call for different ways of reading? How do readers know how to read a text? What role does the context (place, time, emotions, purpose) of reading have on a reader’s practices? Looking more closely at what readers are doing with their devices and considering the contexts of reading, this dissertation aims to fill a void in digital reading research. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that we need a better understanding of how context and genre impact the reading process and a better idea of the actual practices readers have. In addition, I believe we need to complicate our definitions of what digital reading means, especially given the prevalence of digital devices used for reading multiple texts on a daily basis.

**Digital Reading and Cognitive Decline: A Depressing Picture of Readers**

One of the main problems of our current technological moment is the binary that we create between print and digital technologies. Instead of looking at the additive potentials of digital technologies, or the ways both print and digital technologies intersect in our lives in often complementary ways, much reading research places print and digital reading as opposing one another. For example, Ziming Liu’s *Paper to Digital* summarizes research from the 1990s and early 2000s that demonstrates both the benefits and negative effects of reading digitally (53-54). Here, the affordances of print and digital mediums are constantly described in binary terms—with one technology more likely to encourage certain behaviours of readers. Liu writes: “Print and digital media have their own advantages and limitations. The challenge is to determine the
applicability of a particular medium in a given context or process. For example, electronic media tend to be more useful for searching, while paper-based media are preferred for actual consumption of information” (Paper 54). The tendency to attribute print’s usefulness for certain behaviours, and digital for others continues to appear. In much of the research he cites, users overwhelmingly prefer to read printed texts over those on screens, citing some usability issues (like resolution) and difficulty navigating a digital text as some of the reasons for these reported preferences (55). What is not mentioned in the reports he cites are the ages of the users in question, their comfort around digital technologies, or early experiences with printed texts. It seems unlikely that readers would prefer one device 100% of the time, or even for the same task in varying situations. I believe that how we choose what we use to read or how we read has much to do with the situations in which we read and the different social, environmental, and material conditions we face in that given situation.

Beyond placing digital reading at the negative end of the binary, the pictures painted of digital readers in popular media are often depressing ones. Perpetually distracted, digital readers are presented as responding negatively to the cognitive, technological, and environmental processes of digital reading. While summarizing the results of a number of digital reading studies, Anne Niccoli notes the negative associations given to students multitasking and switching tasks while reading digitally (n. pag). A common feature of the studies Niccoli cites is that students take longer to read digitally, get more distracted, and become fatigued more easily when reading on a screen compared to reading in print. But it’s not just our students who tend to suffer from the distracting potentials of digital technologies. Oftentimes though, and in many opinion-based representations of the problems of digital reading, it is more the writer him or herself who laments the negative qualities of their distracted reading processes. For example,
Tony Schwartz opens his *New York Times* article by writing: “One evening early this summer I opened a book and found myself reading the same paragraph over and over half a dozen times before concluding that it was hopeless to continue. I simply couldn’t marshal the necessary focus” (n. pag). For Schwartz and others like him, the ability to concentrate is diminished, apparently because he spends “too many hours online, checking the traffic numbers for my company’s website, shopping for more colorful socks on Gilt and Rue La La, even though I had more than I needed, and even guiltily clicking through pictures with irresistible headlines such as ‘Awkward Child Stars Who Grew Up to Be Attractive.’” These writers notice changes to their own behavior and automatically conclude that it is because of their digital devices without considering what other lifestyle or environmental factors might be leading to the changed behaviors. What these writers describe and the perceptions they impose on their students may not accurately reflect the entire picture of what our students are doing as they read and write using digital technologies.

Recent research by Stacey Pigg on student concentration and digital use is particularly important for challenging overly negative pictures of distracted readers. Pigg’s digitally born e-chapter, “Distracted By Digital Writing,” looks at what “is negotiated with respects to literacy when we portray students as pervasively distracted” (n. pag). Using the 2010 Frontline documentary *Digital Nation: Life on the Virtual Frontier* as the central text of analysis, Pigg’s chapter examines the rhetorical effects of the “attention crisis” on students’ literacy practices, particularly how this rhetoric “supposes that digital literacy causes distraction, and [. . .], it proposes that this inability to focus leads to decreased reading and writing abilities in non-digital contexts” (n. pag). She argues that vernacular and non-academic literacies are not being valued and the time spent reading and writing digitally is problematically viewed as a cause of student
decline in reading and writing abilities. Moving beyond “the framework of either decline or progression,” Pigg contends that we need to pay greater attention to the discourses that create both of these views and the larger literacy crisis rhetoric. She challenges the ways that students are positioned passively in relation to technology and looks at how they are actively implicated in their own orientations toward reading and writing. Problematizing the crisis rhetoric to give students more autonomy and agency with what they do is one way to work against views of passivity. Building on Pigg’s view that “[o]ur notions of literacy are being radically fragmented and reassembled by the continued empowerment of unschooled digital literacies,” my dissertation seeks to adopt a more holistic and reflective picture of what it means to read and engage with digital devices. Instead of focusing specifically on one area of study (like reading for pleasure or school-based reading), my dissertation aims to acknowledge the many ways that readers interact with their devices daily.

One of the recurring complaints within reports of distracted readership is the difficulty of interacting with the digital interface. Readers in Evans and Po’s digital versus print literacy reading indicated that reading on the computer was “hard on their eyes, they got headaches, and they couldn’t curl up in a comfy chair or lie down in bed. . . “ (n. pag). However, just as cellphone, laptop, and tablet technologies continue undergoing major changes to improve readability, so too are digitally born texts and e-books. Jennifer Pearson, George Buchanan, and Harold Thimbleby’s Designing for Digital Reading discusses the physical differences between print texts and digital texts and offers suggestions that would make digital texts easier to read and would increase active reading processes. After comparing print and digital technologies from cognitive and experiential perspectives, the authors write: “In short, there are benefits and drawbacks to both paper and digital texts. It is our intention, therefore, to combine some of the
lightweight properties of paper with digital enhancements to improve the overall usability of electronic documents and hopefully identify what can be considered digitally lightweight” (39). Taking a more complementary approach, Pearson, Buchanan, and Thimbley describe ways to make digital reading platforms easier to navigate and to encourage more opportunities to interact and follow along with linear digital texts, including improvements with place-holding, annotating, note taking, and visual indexing of digital documents. Digital annotation technologies, too, continue to improve and function in ways that increase user engagement. By splitting the screen between an article and Word document, or by using the note-taking functions available through Adobe or apps like iAnnotate, users can engage with digital texts easier than ever before. As I will discuss in chapter four, there are a number of tools that readers can use to amplify their reading processes and begin engaging with digital reading in more useful ways. We currently exist at an interesting moment when technology is rapidly changing and readers have barely had time to catch up. As young readers grow up interacting more and more with digital technologies from a young age, and reading functionality of digital technologies continue to improve, it will be interesting to see whether critiques of digital reading are upheld.

It becomes important for educators, then, to become aware of what they assign their students, how that material gets contextualized, potential barriers students may face, and what they mean when they ask students to read. Giving students strategies to respond to unfamiliar texts in a number of mediums in effective ways is key if we want to encourage the kinds of critical reading and literacy skills necessary to make meaningful connections in the world. Getting students to think critically about the different genres they read and contexts in which they read is furthermore necessary. As Debra Journet, Cheryl Ball, and Ryan Trauman explain in their introduction to *The New Work of Composing*,
We know how to use the technology of the book because we have learned how to respond to the genre conventions it employs. That is, books are recognizable as books because they share not only formal conventions but also substantive agreements about what books are, what they do, and what kinds of interactions they foster. . . . As books evolved, they taught their readers how to understand and respond to them (n. pag).

When scholars and students discuss the affordances of print-based texts, there is already a history of engagement and interaction with those texts. There is a comfort associated with analyzing print-based books and linear texts because of the legacy of print-based literacy instruction in schools. This comfort is disrupted when we ask students within an educational context to analyze a text they had not previously. It is natural that readers would experience discomfort when asked to engage with any text in a new way. For instance, the first time I kept a double entry notebook, I found the practice very alienating until I became accustomed to that different way of thinking and note-taking. It is important for instructors to discuss the conventions of digitally born texts (as Journet, Ball, and Trauman do in their introductory video), model proper reading, and create an environment where the behaviours that are seemingly naturally occurring with print-based technologies can develop and be sustained. Furthermore, even with print texts, the generic affordances of those texts can lead to different ways of engaging or reading them. Print-based texts, too, are not always read in the same way each time a reader sits down to read:

Different kinds of books, of course, instantiate different sets of generic agreements. Novels, for example, are meant to be read continuously, from the first to the last page, and their meaning is understood as building cumulatively through the temporal experience of that reading. Encyclopaedias or dictionaries, on the other hand, are meant to be read piecemeal; the meaning of a particular section does not depend on its
sequential relation to other parts of the book. These agreements reach back into the book’s early history. As books evolved, they taught their readers how to understand and respond to them (Journet, Ball, Trauman).

Knowledge of the different genres we assign and how we expect readers to interact with them (and ways that that might differ from their normal practices) can aid in a rhetorical education that teaches students that different ways of reading and writing are tied up in effective communication.

When it comes time to sit down and read, along with the different types of texts we are reading, different environments and habits certainly take on key functions. How I read an article on my phone in fragments while shopping with my mother-in-law is quite different from reading that same article on my phone in a quiet space with a notebook or blank computer page on hand. The different situations, moods, and environments of our reading are key forces in determining how we read. In an article for Pedagogy, Ira Allen discusses the different scenes of reading his study participants described. Within the different reading habitats of his participants, material objects and environmental descriptions emerged: “Perhaps surprisingly, this environment and its accompanying sense of place often involved television, music, or both—though one respondent was careful to note that he does not recommend to others that they listen to music, as he recognized that what works for him might not be the best scenario for all people” (103). Our practices within different reading environments impact our productivity and what we are able to accomplish in those spaces. Those practices furthermore vary from person to person. Yet, much of the research on reading neglects the role the environment plays in the ways people read.

All of this generic, literacy, and technological awareness is understandably asking a lot of compositionists already charged with negotiating these facets of writing. Yet, reading within the
field of composition, in particular, is an incredibly important area of study—especially as reading is an integral part of digital writing. As Ellen Carillo writes, “[t]o neglect reading altogether [. . .] is problematic because composition loses the opportunity to increase its knowledge about writing’s counterpart in the construction of meaning and to imagine the implications of this knowledge for the teaching of writing” (Securing 7). It is not possible to write without reading, and, emphasizing the connections between both tasks is important for helping students develop their reading and writing abilities. As Michael Bunn concludes in “Motivation and Connection,” “[t]eaching reading in terms of its connections to writing can motivate students to read and increase the likelihood that they find success in both activities. It can lead students to value reading as an integral aspect of learning to write. It can help students develop their understanding of writerly strategies and techniques” (512). Furthermore, as we teach different approaches to reading, compositionists need to be actively involved in creating definitions of what it means to read because, “[t]o leave the work of defining reading to other fields, even related fields like literary studies and education, means that composition is forfeiting the right to define reading and its relationship to writing” (Carillo, Securing 11). As digital technologies change and adapt, so should compositionists’ roles in relation to those technologies. If we are to be at the forefront of digital literacy instruction, looking at the relationship between reading and writing instruction is necessary work for our field.

**Contexts of Digital Reading: Project Overview**

My research will broaden our understanding of digital reading practices and explore the different ways students use technology on a daily basis, paying attention to the contexts of reading. As described above, current research on digital reading often collapses the context and
genre of reading, making all reading experiences appear the same all the time. Research identifying student reading deficiencies often locates the problem in the textual medium (whereby digital technologies are associated with greater reading problems than print) rather than with the context in which the reading takes place. This approach to reading is unsatisfactory because it ignores the multiple ways that we read and engage with texts in different contexts, using different technologies. This dissertation is an attempt to gather a broader understanding of what readers do with their digital devices, how reading is taught or instructed in the classroom, and what role contexts and genre play in the ways people read. By getting a broader picture of digital readers and their practices, both researchers and instructors can begin to challenge simplistic views of readers and frame assignments that capitalize on effective digital communication and purposeful digital reading. To study these broad topics, my dissertation focuses on the following research questions:

1. How do students use their digital devices on a daily basis?

2. In what contexts do students read digitally? Do their reading practices (what they read on various devices or how they use digital devices) vary in different situations? If so, how?

3. How often are students reading digitally in the classroom? What types of reading instruction do students receive?

This study adopted a sequential multi-method approach to explore these research questions. Sequential mixed-methods procedures “are those in which the researcher seeks to elaborate or expand on the findings of one method with another” (Creswell 14). As such, I began with surveys followed by interviews to develop both a broad and narrow understanding of the perceptions and practices readers today perform. Fifty-six students from first-year and intermediate composition completed a survey addressing the above research questions.
Following that, I interviewed four of the survey participants, looking more closely at their individual reading practices.

Guiding my approach to research are contextual, situational, and feminist methodologies. These approaches to research share similarities in emphasizing the need for researcher self-awareness and reflection, putting participants and their voices at the centre of the research process, and being willing to embrace fluidity throughout the process. Self-aware research “means opening up the research agenda to subjects, listening to their stories, and allowing them to actively participate as much as possible, in the design, development, and reporting of research” (Kirsch 257). I strongly value the knowledge and experience my participants brought to the research process and believe that their input is essential to accurately represent the practices they perform. In addition to valuing the voices of my participants, I am also aware of the role I play in the research situation and the impact I have on my participants. Reflecting critically on my own biases and influence on the research process is a key component of feminist and situational research methods. In particular, I went into this research project with the view that students are engaging in critical and significant ways with their digital devices and that their practices are more complicated than the ones presented in much of the research on student readers. To guard against positioning respondents in a more favorable light, I provided them many opportunities in the survey to explain their responses and use their own words to describe their views in subsequent chapters. The interview questions were purposefully open-ended to encourage similar self-reporting. I drew extensively in the results chapter from the respondents’ own words as well as quoted extensively from the interview participants.

What emerged from the survey and interviews, and will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters are: (1) that students use their digital devices in multiple, and complex
ways on a daily basis. How students approach their technologies often changes depending on the situations where reading takes place. Though I believe there needs to be more research on this area, my participants also revealed how they (2) display context-specific behaviors that reoccur and influence their interactions with digital devices. Similar to ways that individuals are guided by social contexts and reoccurring situations, so too are readers’ choices guided by the contexts where they read. Some participants were quite purposeful and aware of the contexts where they read—knowing that certain habits are useful for accomplishing certain tasks—while other participants were more strongly motivated by situational factors like available technology, time, and cost. It is important for researchers and instructors to become aware of these environmental factors on their students’ reading, as these are important determinants of how students use digital technologies and the extent to which they are able to engage with them. (3) Finally, this research demonstrated inconsistencies with the level of reading instruction participants received. While the survey participants may have been limited by not remembering instances of reading instruction, close to one quarter of participants reported not receiving any reading instruction at all. Despite receiving inconsistent amounts of reading instruction, the survey participants indicated frequently being assigned digital texts, and often used digital devices to read them. Because of the extent to which students are being asked to read digitally, it is particularly important that instructors spend time coaching students on effective digital reading, paying attention to the material and mental challenges students identify when engaging with difficult texts (like fatigue, trouble with annotation, or generic unfamiliarity).

Ultimately, this dissertation illustrates the different ways students interact with digital devices in multiple situations, which complicates simplistic presentations of readers today. Building on the results, the final chapters of this dissertation will offer instructors assignments
and activities that capitalize on the affordances of digital technologies, and can help students use them in more effective ways. These activities can make students more self-aware of their role as readers, give them greater practice using digital reading tools, and help them extend their understanding of context and genre to look at the different ways they approach digital texts.

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, “The Difficulty with Digital: A Literature Review of Reading and Genre,” explores reading and genre scholarship in composition studies, demonstrating that while the field has explored both theories of genre and pedagogies of reading, we can learn more about readers by pairing these two lines of scholarship. There is a considerable amount of reading and digital reading research, yet as outlined above, this research often collapses or minimizes what readers do. Locating reading within the realm of genre theory complicates the act of reading. Recognizing reading as an integral part of generic situations can help explain why readers approach digital texts in ways that might be deemed problematic. The contribution of genre to understanding reading practices puts equal weight on the situational components of reading that move beyond the solitary reader. The situation and context thus become equally impactful forces determining how we read.

Chapter two, “A Methodology of Digital Reading,” argues for the necessity of adopting a mixed-methods approach to studying digital readers. The chapter details the methodological framework of this study, including the influence of contextualist, feminist, and situated research practices as well as explores the procedures used. This study employed both survey and interview methods and the second chapter justifies the use of these methods, as well as discusses the student population in question. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that a mixed-methods
approach offers both a broad and narrow look at what readers do, complicating the existing presentation of digital readers.

Chapter three, “Examining Digital Readers: Survey and Interview Results” outlines the results of the survey and follow-up interview data, returning to the initial research questions. The chapter begins by examining the demographics of the research participants in relation to the larger University of Cincinnati undergraduate student population. Drawing extensively from the surveys and interviews, this chapter focuses on (1) participants’ use of devices on a daily basis; (2) their description of contexts of reading; and (3) their reports on reading instruction. The chapter discusses how students use digital devices for both academic and non-academic purposes, highlighting the ways device use overlaps in different scenarios. Laptops emerge as a key device for many participants and their use in academic situations is particularly important. When talking about the contexts of student reading, this section of the chapter reports on the reading practices of the interview participants, drawing connections between their unique approaches to reading. Finally, the chapter describes participants’ experiences with digital reading in the classroom, looking at what types of texts are most frequently assigned, how students read those texts, and the barriers they face with digital reading.

Chapter four, “Tools for a Pedagogy of Digital Reading,” uses the results of the study to make recommendations for what a digital reading pedagogy looks like in practice. Here, I return to genre theory to further examine the role of context within the reading process and argue for a genre-based approach to reading instruction. Using the results of the study, this chapter makes a case for classroom activities and assignments that enhance digital reading skills in the composition classroom. I argue for greater instructor awareness of digital reading and annotation tools and more purposeful digital reading instruction within the writing classroom. The chapter
concludes with three assignments that instructors can adopt as they integrate digital reading into their classrooms.

The concluding chapter, “Conclusions on the Material/Embodied Contexts of Digital Reading” further emphasizes the importance of studying digital reading for compositionists and describes how future researchers might approach studying digital reading, including looking at the physical environments of reading, or taking advantage of technology-enhanced research methods (like eye tracking or photographic ethnographies). This chapter also turns towards materialist, affective, and disability research as being of potential significance for researchers wanting to look at the contexts of reading in more depth. Here I return to the initial research questions, discuss the benefits and limitations of my study, and offer alternative approaches for reading research.
Chapter One

The Difficulty with Digital: A Literature Review of Reading and Genre

…students don’t come to college knowing how to read carefully and critically. They seem to think that reading consists of putting their eyes on the first word, moving over each line, and then stopping when they reach the last word. They skim. They glance. They don’t connect.

-David A. Jolliffe

If the popular media reports I outlined in the first chapter indicate that students have trouble reading (both print and digital texts), then it is necessary to understand why readers approach texts in the ways they do in different situations. It is also necessary to consider the role instructors play in helping their students read and engage with texts more effectively. As David Jolliffe’s quote above indicates, students are not predisposed with the knowledge of college-level reading expectations, and often come to college without knowing what types of reading their instructors expect of them. The actions students perform are not the “careful” and “critical” reading instructors want. Challenging this view of student ability, I believe that it is not until students have been taught and behaviors reinforced that they will know how to read in these more critical ways. Accordingly, this chapter draws from reading research and genre studies to claim that reading is a complicated, context-specific process that is influenced by multiple situational factors. Combined, reading scholarship and genre studies can broaden our understanding of what readers do as they read a variety of texts. Theorists concerned with how students read should pay closer attention to the influence of generic situations and contexts—particularly how different contexts affect digital reading. If current reports suggest that students are less successful and more distracted when reading digitally (Herold), instead of assuming that the medium itself is the cause of the declined ability, it is necessary to consider the larger contexts in which their readings take place.
Before examining the digital reading practices students are currently undertaking, this chapter will review reading theory and genre scholarship and discuss how these theories problematize representations of digital readers as disengaged and distracted. I maintain that genre theory is a useful lens for explaining digital reading because of its emphasis on the social elements of situations that influence and shape an individual’s behavior, an area not fully considered with existing digital reading research. Drawing on genre theory, this chapter examines how genres relate to acts of reading and how genre scholarship can be used to alter reading pedagogies in the writing classroom. Through this literature review, I will examine the problematic binaries presented in reading research (e.g., between home and school or print and digital) and suggest that these binaries oversimplify reading practices. To better account for the ways people read, I argue we need to move beyond either/or pictures of readers and reading to instead look at the shifting contexts where we read and how situational elements influence our practices. Because genre studies acknowledges the ways individuals change according to situations, when applied to reading, genre can allow theorists to recognize the multiplicity of actions readers perform in different contexts. I also consider how, when applied to the classroom, genre studies can reinforce the importance of teaching reading and can be used to support instructor knowledge of students’ digital literacies. Especially because of the fluidity of digital genres themselves, moving beyond a binary approach to reading is particularly important for having a more generous and broader picture of what students do when they read.

**Reading Research in Composition: Moving Beyond Binaries**

In this section, I will examine the binaries that are often used to explain reading practices and consider why those approaches fail to adequately theorize reading. In composition studies,
and within the multidisciplinary landscape of reading research, acts of reading are often placed in binaries—home vs. school, deep vs. shallow, print vs. digital—whereas, I maintain that our understanding of reading is better served on a continuum, recognizing that a multitude of factors influence how we read. This section will examine reading and digital reading scholarship to suggest that we need more research of university-aged digital readers within composition and that this research needs to go beyond binaries in order to fully account for the complexities of reading.

One of the challenges of reading at a university level is for students to understand what is expected of them as readers and understand what it means to read for a course. There are many ways of reading that change along with the situations where the reading takes place, even while reading the same type of text. For example, the way I read a grocery list at the store necessitates a different level of attention compared to a list of documents I need to include with a work visa application. The consequences of misreading one are much more severe than the other and each list necessitates different levels of attention on the part of the reader. Within reading and composition scholarship, there are multiple definitions of what it means to read. Alice S. Horning and Elizabeth W. Kraemer define reading as “getting meaning from print, whether the print is viewed on paper or on a screen” (10). This definition, however, does not entirely encompass what instructors mean when they ask students to read within the context of a classroom. In addition, these authors maintain that when we ask students to read in a course, “reading must go beyond just getting meaning: Readers must be able to analyze texts to see how

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1 Debrah Huffman’s “Towards Modes of Reading in Composition” argues that “[t]he field of composition studies has yet to develop a model of reading that distinguishes its complexities and depth of practice” (164). By describing the multiple approaches compositionists have taken to understanding reading and by looking at a number of textbooks and readers, Huffman demonstrates how challenging defining reading is, even within a particular field of study.
parts fit together. They must also be able to synthesize different readings on the same topic or issue so they can see a range of perspectives and/or research on the topic or issue” (10). Their definition illustrates the complicated cognitive tasks students are asked to perform as they read a text.

When we ask students to read, rarely do we want them to just understand what words on a page mean. Jolliffe terms this expanded view of reading “critical reading,” which he takes to mean “experiencing and interacting with texts and images in order to acquire information, analyze perspectives, generate questions, and interrogate one’s own knowledge and positions” (128). His definition encourages readers to go beyond their own personal feelings and responses to a reading and look instead at how others might see and respond to what it says and the types of questions it raises (130). Jolliffe sees critical reading as a process—much like that of writing—and offers strategies for helping writing instructors teach students components of that process (like asking questions and using schemata for organizing knowledge), which move away from the personalized responses to readings that students tend to use (140). Without offering students an explanation of critical reading or a guide for how to read, students will not automatically read in ‘critical’ ways, especially if they do not in other situations. These brief definitions highlight the ways students are expected to read, yet instructors do not always articulate these tasks when they ask students to complete reading assignments.

Within digital landscapes, we can further add on to the types of ‘texts’ that students are asked to read critically, and consequently must consider what we mean when we ask them to interpret audio, visual, web-based, and multimodal texts in our classrooms. Many theorists view digital texts as considerably different from print-based ones, and as a result call for new pedagogical approaches. There are many different situations where we read digital texts—
including e-mails, videos, tweets, articles—and digital readers have to rely even further on
different interpretive strategies when it comes to understanding the huge variety of digital texts
they encounter. Erik D. Drake, for instance writes: “digital texts afford many benefits that print
documents do not, including searchability, hypertextuality, multimedia formats, and even the
ability to magnify the text from the reading device” (234). Because of the different affordances
of digital texts, and because of their proliferation in our lives, he believes that reading-based
classroom pedagogies cannot rely only on text-based strategies nor can we avoid teaching
reading altogether. Further supporting Drake’s view, Cheryl Ball and James Kalmbach, in their
introduction to *RAW (Reading and Writing) New Media*, call for readers to look more closely at
how we read and engage with new media, given that we live in “a time when we have outgrown
literary hypertext, moved outwards from the confines of print-based traditions and are beginning
to theorize what comes next” (5). Acknowledging that reading is not just limited to words on a
page, they write: “Reading is constructed as an act of interpretation applicable to text-objects
such as databases and informational Web sites as well as to situations, people, definitions, and
the act of reading itself” (7). What Ball and Kalmbach, and Drake allude to here is that our ways
of engaging with texts needs to shift along with new technologies. While I agree with the need to
teach students critical reading strategies, I also believe that these ways of reading need to be
revisited when considering our interactions with new media. What does it mean to ‘critically’
watch a video or listen to a podcast? Can we transfer the same strategies we use with print-based
texts? Our schemas and ways of teaching reading should reflect the affordances of the different
types of texts we assign and recognize the different ways these texts can be read.

One of the challenges of reading and digital reading instruction is to not fall into the trap
of valuing one medium over another or putting one higher on a pedestal when both mediums are
being assigned. As I outlined in the introduction, the tendency to equate print texts with more effective reading practices is still strong. This view, however, ignores the many overlapping ways readers use print and digital devices in different situations. Supporting a binary view of reading, Robert Samuels determines that “reading in new media environments often results in a concentration of the fast and efficient retrieval of information” (204). The students he examines in his chapter note the ways they read differently for pleasure while at home compared to assigned readings for school. Home reading is often linked to pleasure and leisurely reading whereas school reading often requires the critical reading approaches outlined above. He determines that “[b]y creating a dialogue over home and school notions of reading, we can help students […] to become more consciously aware of how they use texts inside and outside of educational settings” (202). While I value Samuels’ distinction of different ways of reading, I believe that his categorization of “home” vs. “school” reading is oversimplified and ignores that varied ways that we read within those two scenarios. For instance, although I may be reading a blog post in my spare time at home, my interest in the topic might be a better determinant of whether I am skimming the material or am paying close attention, rather than which device I am using or whether or not the reading was an assignment. Samuels furthermore fails to consider the ways that our reading practices are not so easily compartmentalized. Especially with digital technologies, the boundaries of home and school are often blurred as we use digital devices to complete a number of tasks throughout the day.

When theorists create binaries between reading situations, they blur the different ways those situations overlap. A similar kind of erasure takes place when theorists attribute certain characteristics to the medium of reading, which assumes that certain devices are better suited for particular tasks. For example, N. Katherine Hayles defines ‘close,’ ‘hyper,’ and ‘machine’
reading as different ways readers engage with texts, associating them with certain mediums: close reading is often associated with the attention given to print texts, hyper reading aligns with inattentive skimming activities used when browsing websites, and machine reading involves the big data reading that Google aggregates, for example, create. Although Hayles tends to link these reading styles with particular *devices* (print for close reading; digital devices for hyper and machine), we often use these strategies when reading in different *contexts*. For instance, as a researcher, I often employ hyper reading techniques of skimming an index for keywords and scanning through parts of a chapter rather than reading the entire thing deeply or closely when deciding whether I want to use a work. The context here is what influences my actions.

Along with Hayles, Nicholas Burbules discusses hypertextual reading, which he characterizes by the connections made with links in webtexts. Rather than encouraging distraction, links for Burbules are central to “associative relations that change, redefine, and enhance or restrict access to the information they comprise” (103). Hypertextual reading, then, highlights the connections that a reader can make across texts—something both print-based and digital readers use. Burbules’ view of hypertextual reading, while focusing on webtexts, encourages a more social approach to reading as a shifting practice. He writes,“[r]eading is a practice, and as such it partakes of the contexts and social relations in which it takes place; significant differences in those contexts and relations alter the practice” (102). Burbules’ emphasis on shifting contexts and practices aligns with the approach to reading I advocate for throughout this dissertation: that is, the context shapes our actions more than a particular device.

The binaries created with print and digital reading also tends to focus on user preference in extreme ways. These reports indicate that users seemingly prefer different devices over others without considering the larger contexts surrounding those preferences, or that those preferences
could easily change. Naomi Barron, for instance, in “Redefining Reading,” looks at the
differences between print and digital reading and surveys students on their preferences and ways
of engaging with texts. Her results indicate that students prefer reading in hard copy over screen
reading and she identifies cognitive advantages to print reading (197). She concludes that even if
students are reading more on digital devices, they continue to report easier concentration with
print forms (197). Although Baron’s research makes a case for print preferences, her discussion
of student concentration collapses by not considering the types of texts her participants are
thinking of or mentioning the specific situations where they are reading (196). Simply saying
that students report concentrating better when reading print texts ignores how their reading
changes as they move locations or read different types of texts. Furthermore, just because a
student prefers print in one moment, does not mean they will in others. By looking to the device
itself without considering when and what people are reading, this data distorts the view that it is
the device that causes the preference and makes concentration more/less difficult and not the
larger context of when or what is being read.

The problems created by reading binaries exist beyond the individual reader and extend
into larger field conversations. Even the history of reading within composition grows out of a
literature\(^2\) vs. writing binary. Field histories, like those by Robert Connors and Joseph Harris
illustrate the separation of literature and composition, and expand on the debates over reading
and writing between the two fields. In his chapter “Locating Reading in Composition Studies,”
Daniel Keller discusses the history of reading within composition and determines that the

\(^2\) The history of reading within literary studies is an incredible enterprise to chart and is beyond
the scope of this chapter. Anthologies like and Shafquat Towheed, Rosalind Crone, and Katie
Hasley (eds)’s The History of Reading offers an expansive overview of the history of reading
beginning in antiquity, as well chapters focusing on literacy, literary theory, as well as cross-
culturally.
teaching of reading was often found in literature, education, and psychology, rather than composition (24). Jolliffe further supports this point by stating that “the topic usually is almost off our radar screen” in composition scholarship³ (128). Jolliffe identifies three reasons why reading was not often a major focus in composition classrooms, which include denial of instructional responsibility, a lack of understanding of student ability, and consternation about the state of reading today. As a consequence of these reasons, Jolliffe discusses why reading moved away from the writing classroom curriculum. Offering a complementary perspective, Keller’s historicization of reading in the field demonstrates that reading as a disciplinary focus came and went, with its most prominent period during the 1980s and early 1990s, influenced by reader response theories (26). The expectation created by binary views of the field—that writing is meant for composition while other disciplines focus on reading—ignores how necessary reading is for effective writing and meaning-making. Even within a writing classroom, much discussion and peer review is based off a careful reading and analysis of other students’ work. To assume that reading is not important for writers, reduces the role of audience in the reception and interpretation of written work.

During the periods of composition’s history that did emphasize reading scholarship, reading was examined as a literacy practice (Bartholomae); one with social, economic, and institutional implications (Rose). Theorists exploring reading in composition have also

³ Despite Keller’s view, the topic of reading has not been completely absent from either composition pedagogy or scholarship (Carillo). Recently, there have been journal articles discussing students reading and writing in College English (Jolliffe and Harl; Salvatori and Donahue “What is”), Pedagogy (Allen; Manarin; and the January 2016 issue on reading), Reader (Bastian; Salvatori and Donahue “Tracing”), CCC (Bunn) as well as in collections like Helmers (ed)’ Intertexts: Reading Pedagogy in College Writing Classrooms, Horning and Kraemer (eds)’s Reconnecting Reading and Writing, Keller’s Chasing Literacy, and Carillo’s Securing a Place for Reading in Composition.
considered the gendered (Gabriel and Smithson, eds) and embodied (Friere; Fleckenstein) practices involved with textual interpretation. Along with the material presence of readers, scholars have noted the ways instructors subjectively read student texts, which complicates the notion of a fair and objective evaluator (Tobin). Within the college classroom, research on readers has focused on ways to get them to engage in the critical reading that Jolliffe, and Horning and Kraemer call for. For example, Horning’s “Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum” reviews existing scholarship on the connection between reading and writing in the composition classroom, and offers specific strategies for first year and writing across the curriculum courses, such as having students “understand the nature of reading in both print and digital contexts” before providing them with material to read (81). This brief survey of reading within composition highlights the various avenues reading research has taken and showcases some of the complexities of understanding reading. Contemporary digital reading research would benefit from considering the embodied and contextual consequences of digital reading environments in similar ways that reading research has already considered in the past.

Digital reading research today is a multidisciplinary enterprise and scholarship coming from multiple disciplines can inform what we know about how people approach and read digital texts. Within composition studies, the topic of digital reading has included a focus on digital reading in online writing classrooms (Griffin and Minter); how students respond to digital narratives or e-literature (Evans and Po); how they use Kindles (Acheson, Barratt, and Balthazor) or iPads (Simpson, Walsh, and Rowsell) in the classroom; as well as peer review sessions employing eye tracking software (Anson and Schwegler). This research is classroom-based and emphasizes the affordances of digital technologies in educational contexts. We also see digital reading research coming from disciplines including second language acquisition (Hirvela),
literacy studies (Biancarosa and Griffiths; Keller; Sutherland-Smith), citation and research practices (Reilley and Eyman; Ziming), and human-computer interaction (Dyson and Haselgrove). Much of this research on student digital reading focuses on primary and secondary school readers and their interaction with devices. By examining classroom-based practices, the current digital reading research isolates that particular context. What is needed within the reading research landscape is research that considers the multiple contexts where students read, and the different ways they engage with digital technologies outside of school settings.

In much of the research I have surveyed, what is often missing from these binary-filled reports is attention to how reading practices (regardless of the medium used to read) shift in different contexts. Although the classroom-based research I highlight above is particularly important for composition researchers and pedagogues, this focus de-emphasizes the reading that takes place in other contexts or the ways those practices intersect with what takes place in the classroom. My research aims to broaden our understanding of what digital reading looks like by emphasizing the importance of the context and genre in determining the way readers approach and understand the texts they read. Genre studies, with its emphasis on the role of context in shaping action, can provide a useful lens that more fully accounts for ways readers act in different situations.

What Genres Teach Us About Reading

Genre scholarship can provide scholars interested in reading with a useful approach for understanding the actions readers perform in a number of contexts. Yet, within genre studies, reading has not traditionally been a specific area of concern. Often within composition and genre, writing and composing are the acts in question when theorists analyze or try to understand
genres. What this dissertation considers is how reading itself is an action that is influenced by recurring conditions within a social situation. Within rhetorical views of genre, the emphasis on the fluidity of genres and how they work in social situations has important resonance for understanding communication practices in digital realms. Within the overview of genre that I illustrate below, the act of reading or understanding genres is often subsumed within communication processes. Properly ‘reading’ or interpreting various situations leads to appropriate communication in social encounters and in the classroom. If we understand how to act in particular settings, we have appropriately “read” and responded to the needs of a given genre. Reading, in this view, is often the assumed first step in responding to the situation or genre. While I acknowledge the difficulty of separating reading from the communicative acts that follow—tied up in reading are the acts of thinking, interpreting, responding, acting—understanding the initial process of how someone reads and what follows from that reading is not heavily considered in genre theory. In this section, I will discuss how genre theory applied to reading can help theorists see the shifting ways people read, ultimately moving scholars beyond binary approaches to readers, mediums, and texts.

Like reading, genre studies within the field of composition grew out of literary understandings of the term. According to Amy Devitt, “[g]enre is a relatively trivial concept, a classification system deriving from literary criticism that names types of texts according to their forms” (“Generalizing About Genre” 85). In this initial view, genres were seen as formulaic and static, and were used to constrain the writer. The literary definition of genre often focuses on how one reads the final written product, which is separate from the process of writing or creating

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4 More generously, Tzvetan Todorov questions the literary definition of genre as “classes of text” (161), expanding it to “codification of discursive properties” both abstract and observable (162). He explores the discursive, institutionalized ways that genres become codified and understood.
that text. For example, a theorist might explore what makes a prose poem different from a piece of flash fiction. The emphasis is on classifying and understanding the completed text rather than understanding the factors that account for its production. This dichotomized view of genre involves “dividing form from content, with genre as the form in which the content is put” (Devitt, *Writing Genres* 5). The forms of genre being tied to literary reading and criticism is one way that genre theory has accounted for the role of the reader. However, because this view of reading eliminates the process of reading (focusing only on the final product being read), it does not align with rhetorical and social views of genre that have come since.

Theorists working beyond a formalist definition challenge the static view of genres to look at how genres function socially. As one of the key figures of this approach, Carolyn Miller situates her view of genre within the rhetorical tradition, building on Aristotle’s formal categories (using epideictic rhetoric as an example) and drawing on Lloyd Bitzer and Kenneth Burke. She writes that in the past, genres were defined “by similarities in strategies or forms in the discourse, by similarities in audience, by similarities in modes of thinking, by similarities in rhetorical situations” (151). Instead of looking for similarities in form, Miller’s definition of genre emphasizes the action that is accomplished—focusing on the pragmatic application of a genre. Miller defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations,” emphasizing the importance of everyday and recurring texts that accomplish some purpose (159). Genres are no longer just static categories used for naming and organizing, but instead

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Kathleen Jamieson’s “Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint” also examines the role genres play within rhetorical situations, revising Bitzer’s model. She writes that it is experience with genres and not situations that lead one to action (406). To demonstrate this, she looks at how the “papal encyclical, the early state of the union address, and their congressional replies” actually are generic offspring of antecedent genres like “Roman empirical document,” “the ‘King’s Speech’ from the throne,” and replies to the king (406).
explain why people respond the way they do in particular contexts. Miller further aligns her theory of genre with that of rhetoric: “In sum, what I am proposing so far is that in rhetoric the term ‘genre’ be limited to a particular type of discourse classification, a classification based in rhetorical practice and consequently open rather than closed and organized around situated actions (that is, pragmatic, rather than syntactic or semantic)” (155). Miller’s definition here is significant because of her emphasis on open systems related to particular, pragmatic, and situated rhetorical actions. Because of the incredible variation within and among internet and digital genres, being able to see them as “open,” and our particular actions as “situated” is more helpful for understanding how communication takes place rather than trying to categorize them based on particular defining features—as might happen with a more literary focuses on genre.

Miller’s impact on genre and writing and rhetoric is widely felt as many theorists since her writing emphasize the social and rhetorical components of genre. Although the evolution of genre theory within composition has been well-documented (for e.g., Devitt’s Writing Genres; Bawarshi’s Genre & The Invention of the Writer; and Swales’ Genre Analysis), there are a number of perspectives from this history that have important implications for not only reading but also for digital communication. Amongst the various perspectives on genre, determining a singular definition of genre has remained a key challenge for theorists as the definitions build and grow from one another. Genre is a complex term—like reading—that has come to include a number of different elements. For instance, John M. Swales aligns with a social view of genres when he says, “the work of genre is to mediate between social situations and the texts that respond strategically to the exigencies of those situations” (“Worlds of Genre” 14). Swales highlights how genres help individuals successfully navigate between the necessary social requirements and texts that appear in various situations. Drawing on the language of rhetorical
history, Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi define genre as “the typical rhetorical way of responding to a repeated situation within a scene. As situations within a scene repeat themselves, participants develop rhetorical conventions for interacting and getting things done within them—typical ways of using language to accomplish certain actions in a situation. Genres are these typified rhetorical actions” (25). Key from their definition is that individuals develop repeated ways of acting in different situations. Their experiences successfully navigating those scenes encourages them to continue doing so in future instances of that situation. Bringing multiple definitions together⁶, Devitt outlines the following common elements that often define genre:

“that genre is action, that genre is typified action, that typification comes from recurring conditions, and that those conditions involve a social context” (Writing Genres 13). All of these definitions share an emphasis on repeated, purposeful, rhetorical actions that respond to the needs of a particular situation. Actions are repeated so that they become normalized and help influence what one does in a given situation. Students, for example, learn how to act within a classroom from repeatedly experiencing being in a classroom environment. The ways they read and engage with texts have been shaped by the recurring conditions where they acted that way in the past. If there has been no shaping of reading practices—and no reinforcement of different reading strategies—genre theory suggests that students will not likely know how to act when

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⁶ In the introduction of Writing Genres, Devitt synthesizes various theories and histories of genre within composition, arguing that many of our definitions respond to Miller’s work on the subject. Beyond Miller’s definition, Devitt also offers David Russell’s definition of genre as “typified ways of purposefully interacting in and among some activity systems”; Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin’s view of genre as “dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning”; as well as her own definition of genre as “a dynamic response to and construction of recurrent situation” (all qtd. in Writing Genres 13).
asked to do so differently. Drawing from past experiences of reading, students will fail to read in the ways we want unless we help shape their behaviors in reoccurring situations.

Within genre scholarship, the emphasis on repetition, evolution, and change is particularly important for considering the actions of readers, especially digitally. For Miller, genres are constantly changing and “the number of genres current in any society is indeterminate and depends upon the complexity and diversity of the society” (163). Devitt’s “Generalizing About Genre” further builds on the fluidity of genres, as she writes that genre “is a dynamic response to and construction of recurring situation, one that changes historically and in different social groups, that adapts and grows as the social context changes” (93). Both Miller and Devitt emphasize that genres are never completely static—they change along with evolving social actions. The fluidity within a recurring situation is what allows individuals to respond accordingly while still encouraging larger cultural growth. Devitt uses the example of presidential speech genres to suggest that “[w]hat makes genres functional in the midst of contextual changes and individual choices is their ability to balance both flexibility and stability” (Writing Genres 115). Here she demonstrates the stability of presidential speech genres (used to maintain tradition) while still allowing room for individual differences (such as different political leanings of the president or the necessity of particular cultural moments). Both Miller and Devitt’s emphasis on stability, fluidity, and the eventual evolution of genre is particularly important when considering the genres that appear online. Since digital genres grow not only from print-based texts but are also now digitally born and constantly evolving, a generic taxonomy does not adequately serve to describe the role of those genres or the actions that exist as a result. As Kathleen Blake Yancey describes in her 2004 CCCC’s chair’s address, “never
before have the technologies of writing contributed so quickly to the creation of new genres” (298). Technologies have influenced the kinds of writing taking place both in and out of academia and as a result the stability of digital genres is even less certain. Because of the incredible variety within and among genres and because of the different conventions necessitated in context-specific situations, knowing the features that define a particular digital genre are not enough. What we need instead is to consider Miller’s approach toward understanding situated activities in combination with Devitt’s emphasis on individual choice to look at particular situations where digital communications take place.

To illustrate the situational influence of individual choice in communication settings, Mikhail Bakhtin’s “The Problems of Speech Genres” looks at how genres are used in communication between individuals to guide social situations beyond written or literary forms. In communication situations, “[t]he speaker’s speech will is manifested primarily in the choice of a particular speech genre. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants, and so on” (1238). Thus, we move between speech genres as particular situations dictate. How we choose to act depends on our familiarity with the situation. We are furthermore influenced by the actions of those around us and our success in the situation depends on making the right choice. For example, Bakhtin describes how a misunderstanding of a particular speech genre might result in awkwardness in a given encounter: “Many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel quite

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7 Even Yancey’s reprinted address in CCC highlights the fluidity of generic forms. In a sidebar, Yancey writes: “In planning this address—what some called a script, others a transcript—I designed a multi-genred and mediated text that would embody and illustrate the claims of the talk” (1999). Using sidebars, blocked and highlighted quotes, and images Yancey’s printed address offers an illustration of individual flexibility and evolution of the chair’s address form.
helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres” (1239). Although Bakhtin is talking about speech conversations, we often see similar misunderstandings of genre as our students read and write. For instance, when students are asked to read websites as part of a course, they may read them using strategies like skimming or scanning that they would in other contexts. Such misunderstanding of the genre then leaves them “helpless” in that particular course. Furthermore, students in this scene, influenced by prior experience, are lacking the knowledge of what ‘reading’ a site means in the context of a course, or when they have never looked at a website in that way before.

Bakhtin’s emphasis on the social influences of these exchanges is particularly important to consider when it comes to digital communication, especially when individuals misread the larger situations or fail to see how different actions within a situation necessitate different means of response. For instance, when e-mailing, our level of formality and the e-mails’ subject matter changes depending on the recipient. What I send to a professor to ask for a different grade on an assignment is not necessarily the same thing as what I’d e-mail a friend about that situation. We often see students misread the communicative requirements of e-mail when they misaddress their professor or write the e-mail as if it were a text message. One of the difficulties students face in their reading and writing is that there are multiple ways to read and respond to different situations. Consider the many definitions of reading I outlined above as evidence of this.

According to Bakhtin, “[t]he wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex” (1227). Like with our options for reading and responding,
speech genres are always in flux and change along with changes in human activity and in different contexts or situations.

To better understand the complexities of the social contexts surrounding different genres, theorists have explored the role of genre sets and consequently, genre systems. Genre systems build off the ‘genre sets’ that Devitt developed in her study of tax accountants as she discusses how a single textual genre is often not enough for a group to accomplish its purposes (*Writing Genres* 54). Genre sets encompass all of the different genres used by a particular group in a certain situation. Devitt draws on Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality and Bakhtin’s dialogic theories to demonstrate that genre sets “allow us to see the inherent relatedness of genres within the same social group and its actions” (55). Within a genre set, the various genres are intertextually related and dialogic because of the series of responses often initiated. To illustrate, Devitt details the genre sets involved within a trial, highlighting how certain texts (like a legal memo or court transcript) exist together in order to carry a court case forward. To act successfully within a situation means knowing how to use and respond to different texts within it. Genre sets also function within a classroom setting when we consider how students might use and navigate syllabi, online course management systems, assignment prompts, and assigned readings all in order to produce a written response of their own.

Taking genre sets a step further, genre systems incorporate all of the genres used in a particular society. Devitt writes that genre systems involve a “tighter, more static structure” than does the more broad contextual approach to genres (*Writing Genres* 54). Devitt uses Tzvetan Todorov’s work to suggest that genre systems are determined by “the choice a society makes among all the possible codifications of discourse” (qtd in *Writing Genres* 54). Because our societies and networks always change, so do the genres that exist within them. Charles Bazerman
defines systems of genre as “interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings” (“Systems of Genre” 97). These genres are interconnected in the sense that within a given situation, there are only a limited number of possible actions or genres that one could use (98). Bazerman writes, “the system of genres would be the full set of genres that instantiate the participation of all the parties,” including all the possible social relations or interactions involved in a given exchange (83). Whereas the genre sets involve the possible generic texts or forms used in a situation, genre systems are greater and include knowledge of genres, speech acts, as well as individual and social responses to those situations (79). To illustrate, Bazerman gives the example of a classroom, where after receiving a written assignment prompt, students ask questions share ideas, and ultimately produce the assignment being asked for. The students’ interactions are not limited to the person producing the text (i.e., the student receiving the assignment prompt), but also involve the students’ use of textual forms and communications with others resulting from the situation, like e-mails to the instructor, Facebook posts, tweets about the assignment, or discussions with parents. For Bazerman, genre systems involve “the full interaction, the full event, the set of social relations as it has been enacted” (99). Genre systems recognize that it is not just the individual, alone, being prompted to act by a particular genre, but that within a particular encounter, the individual interacts and performs social actions that involve others.

Genre sets and systems are useful for considering digital reading and composing practices because of their emphasis on the social influences and interactions of a number of texts within a particular situation. When our students sit down to read and write a response in our classes, there are multiple textual, social, and situational influences that genre scholarship can make us aware of. To fully understand the choices one makes when composing a tweet, for example, we need to
be aware of the context of the tweet as well as how the user typically communicates and is impacted by others on Twitter. If a student uses Twitter only for social purposes, asking them to use Twitter in the classroom adds another layer to that communication system and requires that the student re-think their relationship with tweets and now their instructor and classmates on the site. The introduction of the new context of reading and writing tweets, as well as the addition of a new audience, alters the specific communicative setting. Thinking of these complexities as part of a larger, somewhat contained, system can further help students and instructors become more aware of why they read or compose in particular ways.

In summary, the lens offered by genre studies is important for moving beyond binaries of our reading. By paying attention to the demands of the larger situation, theorists can go beyond whether or not students always prefer print or digital devices, ways of reading at home or at school, and means of engagement with a text. Genre studies calls attention to the importance of prior experiences, social interactions, and the navigation of different texts and situations any time someone reads, writes, or acts in a particular setting. By keeping these factors in mind, genre studies also supports the view that behaviors can change and develop with new experiences. If instructors are concerned with how their students read and interact with texts, providing them with new strategies and new patterns of engaging with reading materials—and consequently reinforcing those behaviors—can help students develop more appropriate generic responses.

**Situating Genre in the Writing Classroom**

Within classroom scholarship, genre theory has been useful for understanding how students and their instructors are positioned and influenced by the textual genres of a course. For example, Bawarshi’s “Sites of Invention” as well as his *Genre and the Invention of the Writer,*
explore the genres contained in the first-year writing course and discuss how those genres come
to position the student and the teacher. For Bawarshi, “[g]enres are the conceptual realms within
which individuals recognize and experience situations at the same time as they are the rhetorical
instruments by and through which individuals participate within and enact situations” (“Sites of
Invention” 104). For Bawarshi, genre is both a situational construct and a cognitive
understanding and interpretation of the situation. Like Miller and Devitt argue, genres for
Bawarshi are how people come to know how to respond and act in a given situation. Throughout
“Sites of Invention,” Bawarshi looks at the classroom “not only as a material site; it is also a
discursive site, one mediated and reproduce by the various genres its participants use to perform
the desires, positions, relations, and activities that enact it” (108). He studies the syllabus as an
eample of a genre within the classroom space that organizes and dictates student behaviors and
ways of being. According to Bawarshi, “[g]enres function in the social practices that they help
generate and organize, in the unfolding of material, everyday exchanges of language practices,
activities, and relations by and between individuals in specific settings” (Genre 23). Genres are
both the texts people read as well as the sites of meaning that position people to act in particular
ways. Just as students in a course must learn to respond to textual genres and are situated by
them in a student role, they must also learn the ways they are positioned by their technology and
readings.

Especially for instructors wishing to combat the distracted position in which popular
media places students, increased attention to the ways people participate and interact with their
technologies can lead to a greater understanding and challenging of digital device use,
encouraging students to become more critical users themselves. As Bawarshi states, “[w]riters
invent within genres and are themselves invented by genres” (Genre 17). Genre studies can help
explain how genres and texts work on an ideological level, causing us to internalize certain responses so that our actions seem natural (8). Along with helping us question the ways individuals are positioned in particular situations, genre studies is additionally useful for increasing user participation and critical understanding of digital texts. Going beyond genres as influential to the process of writing, Reiff’s “Moving Writers, Shaping Motives, Motivating Critique and Change” adopts a genre-based approach to teaching writing and uses it as a way to enact social change. In her view, teaching students about genres (emphasizing their flexibility, moving away from classification or formalism) helps them write more purposefully in various contexts. “Rather,” she writes, “students learn how to recognize genres as rhetorical responses to and reflections of the situations in which they are used” (159). Her hope is that by getting students to critique genres, looking at how they are produced and reproduced, will motivate them to produce new genres, thus enacting in social change (163). Reading instructors can perform similar types of analysis by looking at the rhetorical components of digital device use. Students can look at the ways they read and write digitally and reflect critically on the choices they make on different social media and communication platforms. Mindfulness, as I explore in chapter four and the concluding chapter, can help students become more aware of the different situations they are a part of and adjust their responses to those settings accordingly.

While many theorists have explored the influence of genres on writing and in social situations, Devitt’s “Teaching Critical Genre Awareness” synthesizes the most useful components of a number of genre pedagogies. Her chapter argues for the importance of “a genre pedagogy that recognizes the limitations of explicit genre teaching and exploits the ideological nature of genre to enable students’ critical understanding” (337). Instead of teaching students how to work within specific genres, Devitt argues for the importance of teaching a broader genre
awareness (338). Similarly, the approach to teaching reading I describe in chapter four offers students and instructors a greater awareness of a number of approaches to reading, rather than advocating for a particular one. The first step in the genre pedagogy Devitt advocates for is encouraging instructor awareness of genre and acceptance that the instructor’s particular view of genres will shape the course and what gets taught (339). She explores strengths and limitations of (1) teaching particular genres; (2) teaching antecedent genre awareness; and (3) critiquing and challenging particular genres, ultimately arguing that she wants “students not only to add to their repertoire but also to learn to critique the genres they know and encounter, with an end possibility of changing the genres that need to change to better serve their needs” (347).

This broader attention to how genres work and how certain genres can be useful in certain situations is a necessary consideration for teaching students about their reading practices. If students had greater knowledge of the genre, purpose, and context of the types of texts they read; how their reading is influenced by past reading situations; and that the reading differs in various contexts, they, like Devitt’s students, might be better equipped to know how to read and approach texts as certain situations dictate. If students are aware that they make choices as they read, and that process becomes more visible, they might make choices more appropriate for the present situation going forward.

Although Devitt is not looking specifically at genre and reading, she, Reiff, and Bawarshi’s textbook *Scenes of Writing* does offer students strategies for ‘reading’ and analyzing various scenes, situations, and genres, and for using that knowledge to make rhetorical choices in their writing. “‘Reading’ in their textbook does involve the analytic moves often associated with making meaning of words on a page but focuses even-more so on the ways we socially ‘read’ environments around us. For the authors, “[r]eading is not just deciphering words on a page—the
typical definition of the activity—but also, in a larger sense, observing and making sense of a scene by examining its language, both oral and written” (48). Their expanded definition of reading calls on students to apply their skills of analysis to understand how to act in given situations. Reading thus becomes an active, meaning-making process, and “[t]his process of negotiation, of repositioning ourselves from one scene to the next and at times within multiple scenes at once, is not the result of guesswork; it is not a random process” (49). The reading described in *Scenes of Writing* involves looking at the use of language in communication (connotations, word choice, for instance) as important features of interacting in a scene and features that can help students make sense of what’s going on in different settings. The authors discuss ways to ‘read’ situations, like classrooms or doctors’ offices, making note that situational reading involves interacting with texts as well as people and discourses. In their textbook, they suggest that genre knowledge can offer students ways to properly interpret and act within a given scene. Not only does this approach to genre and reading bring the skills associated with reading to the forefront but it also expands our knowledge of the types of texts that students are able to ‘read.’ If reading is an act that can be applied to understanding a particular situation, it can just as well apply to making meaning of videos or podcasts. As increasingly fluid digital texts continue being produced, there is even further need for theorists to move beyond binaries to explain what individuals do as they read. This next section describes the malleability of digital genres and reasons why our current approach to categorizing them is insufficient.

**Digital Genres and their Impact on the Changing Generic Landscape**

While my interest in genres studies revolves primarily around what genres reveal about our social interactions, it is important to consider the various genres themselves that instructors
assign, especially as they increasingly include multimodal texts. In their overview of genre theory and the internet, Barbara Kwaśnik and Kevin Crowston determine that “[b]ecause a ‘genre’ is not any one thing, but rather an intersection of several phenomena in a context of use, its study has spanned many disciplines and areas of praxis, from the arts to metadata schemes” (76). Despite the widespread study of digital genres, determining a definition of genre that crosses these boundaries is harder to accomplish. Kwaśnik and Crowston identify the following features that are consistent among various definitions of genre: “consideration of the form of a document and sometimes of expected content”; and “notion of intended communicative purpose”; “notion of social acceptance; that is, a document is of a particular genre to the extent that it is recognized as such within a given discourse community” (77). These components involve not only the formal features of genres but also the way those formal features interact within a social purpose or situation.

Although print-based genres are not always easy to categorize, the internet offers a new set of difficulties, particularly with the multimodal and hypertext affordances of images, videos, links, sound, and other embedded content within a single text. Writing over a decade ago, Marcy Lassota Bauman simply defines internet genres as “. . . electronic texts which are implemented on the Internet—first appearing electronically, never appearing as stand alone texts” (273). Internet genres, for her, are not digitized print-based PDFs but are instead digitally-born podcasts, websites, and videos. Appearing in 1999, Lassota Bauman’s “The Evolution of Internet Genres” explores the ways that the Internet changes how writing takes place and how genres are used, suggesting that “old regimes of reading may not apply in the new territory and familiar assumptions about the relationships of readers and writers must be articulated, tested, and questioned lest they lead us to misunderstand the forms arising before us” (270). The
interactivity of digital texts, their non-linear form, and multimedia components are just some of the ways Lassota Bauman argues that digital-born texts differ from print-based ones. Throughout her article, Lassota Bauman describes how because Internet writing is not fixed—or final—in the same way that many print-based texts are when published, that the way we teach and understand digitally-born texts needs to shift accordingly. She writes, “[t]here are new writing (and reading) environments emerging on the Internet that differ in significant, far-reaching ways from their print analogues (where such analogues even exist)” (270). Her article looks at what characterizes the different forms of Internet writing and discusses the important role professors’ play in learning and teaching others about these emergent genres. As we teach our students to navigate the creation of multimodal texts, we also need to help with ways of reading those texts.

Lassota Bauman outlines three ways that Internet texts and genres differ from those of print: (1) The texts created online are easily accessible by those looking for them and are not limited in their copies; (2) The time constraints that exist with print-based texts (in terms of a text’s production and dissemination) are removed; (3) The internet is much more collaborative than any other writing environment (273). Because of these factors, she believes we cannot categorize or evaluate digitally-born texts using the same criteria we would with print. An example she gives of a collaborative hypertext created out of immediate needs is that of a discussion board forum. As the conversation grows on a forum, so does the shape of the text, changing immediately and never remaining in a fixed or final version. She writes, “people writing hypertexts literally cannot decide to shape them, because the shape is not within anyone’s control” (277). The shape of the text grows as more people contribute to it. While the widely available and collaborative nature of textual creations online continue to exist, the problem with Bauman’s definition is that with the widespread nature and ease with which print-
based texts (like pages from books, handwritten notes, or images) can be digitally altered and created, is that internet genres are no longer just digitally born. To characterize internet genres as those that solely appear online ignores a large number of the material made available for readers in a given day. Digital texts certainly include ones that are digitally-born, but they also encompass PDFs and other print-based texts read using digital devices. Furthermore, such a definition does not account for textually based communications like text messages that are created over wireless networks going beyond the internet specifically. All of these different types of texts fall into the realm of digital, further pointing to the challenges we have trying to categorize them—or using print and digital binaries.

Beyond comfortably navigating the landscape of digital genres, Tracy Bowen and Carl Whithaus consider what impact emergent genres have had on students’ literacies as readers and writers. They write that our current digital landscape does “not require a conscious awareness of older text-based literacies. Rather, they require an understanding of the social conventions at that moment and what is acceptable to the receiving community” (9). Because of the creation of multiple digital genres, formulaic means of categorization will no longer work. The binary we create between print and digital becomes further problematized when we consider the appearance of print-based texts online or that of multimodal elements in a print text, like a comic (Jacobs). With the multiple changes to the types of text that appear online comes challenges for understanding how to categorize those texts, particularly if they are made up of multiple genres. In the past decade, as Bowen and Whithaus write, “[g]enres were not just transforming, they were fundamentally unstable—being made and remade within months, rather than within years” (9). Because of the multiple, emerging multigenre texts (such as a blog that contains written text,
video, and still images), naming and defining such texts becomes more difficult and listing the formulaic features, more futile.

Further complicating the formalism of genres, in their introduction to the collection *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*, Bowen and Whithaus make the distinction between genre and the “text-tool used to create a work and from the medium in which it is created and received” (3). In this regard, e-mails, instant messages, blogs, and wikis are each seen as text-tools that can be used to create a number of different genres. Building on the difference between the text-tool or medium and genre, Cheryl Ball reflects on the difficulties of naming emergent digital genres in an article with Tia Scaffield Bowen and Tyrell Brent Fenn. In an endnote, Ball wonders “[w]hen does a technology change from being a medium of production or distribution to a convention of the genre, and thus (in some cases) a genre itself?” (34). She uses the example of a student who includes multimedia created in a course on her personal blog, suggesting that we could not use a particular genre (including blogs) to name what this student has done on her site. Ball writes, “a ‘blog’ is not a genre. Although blogs tend to impose specific conventions on the texts they contain (including the design of the blog itself), blogs are also a technological distribution method” (34), considering that they house a number of other genres. What Ball does in this footnote is highlight some of the complexities of thinking through what digital genres are or might be. While we might initially consider a blog a genre, when you think more deeply about the incredible variation between blogs and that they contain a number of other genres and are really a space for distributing these other media forms, that categorization tends to fall apart. When it comes to teaching students about digital genres, the classification systems we have used previously for print-based texts no longer hold true. In the same endnote, Ball asks us to question instead “what is the impact on meaning making of the layered genre conventions of
distribution methods? And does the meaning of the contained text change when the interface changes?” (34). Ball’s questions ask instructors to go beyond thinking about genre as a list of formal conventions and instead necessitate that we think even further about how texts are circulated and where the different components of a message appear. The social emphasis of genres are relevant once again, as we look to the larger implications of the interface and means of distribution that influences what a writer does within these theories. The role of the instructor is key for promoting student awareness of various generic components and how they shape the ways our students engage with different texts.

Genre studies is therefore an essential lens if theorists wish to move beyond simplistic views of readers and the texts they read. In this chapter, I have explored the problems with creating binaries to explain ways of reading. Instead, I have posited genre theory as a means of considering the numerous components that influence people’s actions in different situations and when encountering various texts. Especially with the multiplicity of digital genres, reading research requires a more expansive means of understanding digital readers. In the chapters that follow, I will use the theories highlighted above to better understand student reading practices. For instance, using Kathleen Jamieson’s examination of the impact of antecedent genres may be a useful starting place for understanding why a student might improperly respond in a given situation, determining that they are “capable of imposing powerful constraints” (414). She explains that antecedent genres can sometimes negatively affect respondents in new situations as they try and figure out what they need to say. She writes, “I have contended elsewhere that ‘perception of the proper response to an unprecedented situation grows not merely from the situation but also from antecedent rhetorical forms’” (414). If our experience with antecedent genres help frame or dictate what’s possible in a given situation, readers whose original
experience with digital devices outside of an educational context may approach digital devices in all contexts with their prior experiences in mind. Their experience with the antecedent genres can come to impact what takes place in the new context. Using student survey data and subsequent participant interviews, this dissertation seeks to move us beyond the binaries that have come to define digital reading and use genre studies to more fully account for the situational influences on reading.
Chapter Two

A Methodology of Digital Reading

Rationale for Research Approach

This chapter will focus on the methodological approaches and methods I used in this study, as well discuss the sample, instruments, procedures, and means of analysis I employed. The hypothesis underlying my dissertation is that reading practices are guided by the context and genre of a text read rather than the particular device being used. This study examined student digital reading practices, including how students use digital devices and the types of online reading instructions they receive, as well as the impact of genre (and context) on reading. The study sought to answer the following research questions through both the survey and the interviews:

1. How do students use their digital devices on a daily basis?
2. In what contexts do students read digitally? Do their reading practices (what they read on various devices or how they use digital devices) vary in different situations? If so, how?
3. How often are students reading digitally in the classroom?
4. What types of reading instruction do students receive?

I conducted a survey to examine students’ daily practices but because assessing the role of context and genre was more complex (and difficult to discern using just multiple choice or closed-form questions), I included open-ended survey questions as well as conducted follow-up participant interviews. This chapter will discuss the steps I took in conducting this research and argue for the value of the mixed methods approach I used.
Methodological Approaches

This study drew from a number of methodological orientations. In particular, a contextualized, self-reflective, and situated attitude towards the study; influences from feminist theories; and a pluralized view of methods all played a part in how my study was actualized. These intersecting lenses reinforce the importance within composition studies of conducting research that values critical reflection and self-awareness on the part of the researcher. Taken together, these approaches respect participant knowledge and argue that it is never possible for the researcher to remain completely neutral or separate from her subject matter.

Contextual and Situated Research

Cindy Johanek’s *Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition* argues for the necessity of contextual awareness in performing research. She writes that contextualist research “. . . does not (cannot, should not) value one set of research methods over another. . . . Instead, this work calls our attention to the contexts from which our research questions come (and to the questions themselves)—contexts and questions that should guide our methodological decisions, whatever they might be” (2). Johanek's approach situates the researcher within a particular location, which then influences the possible research questions and later the methods she or he might use (3). Accordingly, this contextual approach describes my own research: My current positioning as both writing instructor and technology user led to my interest in studying student reading practices and digital habits. I took note of how students in my classes used their technologies as well as reflected on the complexities of my own digital device and reading practices. My observations often contradicted the pictures of readers presented in popular media and scholarship (as outlined in the Introduction and chapter one). As a result, I
wished to explore how people interact with their devices when they read and what impact the situations, genres, and contexts of their reading have on those practices. The choice of using surveys and interviews provided me with both the broad and narrow picture of readers my research questions necessitated. In addition, my position as graduate student and time limitations further reinforced these methodological choices.

Along with the contexts of research comes situated research practices. Patricia A. Sullivan and James Porter’s use of the word situated “acknowledges that practices are always exercised at particular moments, at a particular time and place in a culture, society, or group” (28). Situated research differs from contextual research in that contextual research involves the interconnected factors particular to a situation that lead a researcher in a given direction whereas situated research focuses more specifically on the role of the researcher within a context. Sullivan and Porter further see research as a “a set of critical and reflective practices (praxis) that are sensitive to the rhetorical situatedness of participants and technologies and that recognize themselves as forms of political and ethical action” (ix). Sullivan and Porter’s recognition of the researcher in pursuit of practical knowledge is central to my own positioning. Sullivan and Porter view the role of the researcher and his/her critical reflection as integral since research involves “complex actions that are taken in situ, that arise out of who we are and what we believe. Indeed, we have no hope of understanding how who we are, what we believe, and what we aim to see affect our sight unless and until we admit to our positioning. . .” (4). Their emphasis on self-awareness and researcher practice is similar to Johanek’s views in that self-awareness can make the researcher more attuned to the possible options she has and aware of the outcomes of the steps she takes. As I will outline further below, I aimed to balance my role in the research by including multiple perspectives in the research design while also acknowledging my own
perspective on the topic. Had I undertaken this research at a different point in time or in a different context, the approach I would take and questions I ask might be completely different. This contextualist and situated approach to research aligns with a feminist one, in that “[r]esearchers will need to articulate the assumptions that guide their research questions and acknowledge that research, by definition, is necessarily interested, limited, and partial, no matter the methodology used” (Kirsch 258). Contextualist, situated, and feminist research principles all acknowledge the situated role of the researcher in designing and carrying out a particular research study.

*Feminist Research Influences*

Although my research is not explicitly feminist in that it is not “based [solely] on women’s experiences” or does not “examine phenomena [specifically] important to women,” it does draw from multiple feminist orientations and involves “the researcher and his/her experiences and assumptions rather than pretend objectivity through a disinterested stance” (Johanek 72). Such agency and purposefulness on the part of the researcher complements the views mentioned above. My disagreement with media representations of digital reading led to my desire to further study the topic; therefore, my own stance on reading and outcomes of this work were involved from the beginning. Gesa Kirsch further highlights the type of feminist values this research study adopts. Feminist research, and the work I have attempted here, calls “for an open discussion of (1) the researcher’s *relation* to the subject (the researcher’s presence and authority are never neutral); (2) the *purpose* of the researcher’s questions (they must be *grounded* in the subject’s experience and be relevant to the subject); and (3) the researcher’s *agenda* (it is never disinterested)” (Kirsch 256).
Another tenant of feminist research connects the researcher’s interests to multiple areas in their lives. In the final, retrospective essay in *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, Lisa Ede looks back on her research influences and offers conclusions that bring together the multiple interests of the researcher: “Finally, as I teach and read and write and talk with others, I increasingly find myself looking for ways to connect, rather than to separate, what I experience as my ‘personal’ self with my scholarly and pedagogical work” (328). This interconnected approach between the researcher, her subject matter, and her multiple selves is reflective of the stance I take on my research and the exigence I feel towards how we read. Finally, I align myself with the view that “Feminist researchers start with the premise that research methods are never neutral, impartial, or disinterested. They argue that researchers need to confront their biases directly by acknowledging their research agenda and interests and by becoming involved with subjects of research studies” (Kirsch 257). It is my hope that my critical look at myself as a researcher and explication of this research offers the critical and reflective account that feminist theories adopt.

**Pluralized and Multiple Methods**

In addition to exploring my role as a researcher, this study recognizes necessity of multiple methods, particularly when a phenomena like reading is at once widespread yet also very individualized. Johanek writes that “[w]hile place might determine what research methods are possible, the research question determines what research methods are necessary” (3). To better understand student readers, both a broad approach to student practices and a specific look at individualized readers was necessary to better understand the larger digital reading landscape. Much digital reading research outside composition and rhetoric has been focused on single-
method approaches like conducting surveys (Liu “Print”; Liu “Reading”; McKenna et. al.; Mokhtari, Reichard, and Gardner; Saaid and Wahab), using case studies (Burke and Rowsell; Goldman et. al; Larson “Digital”; Rowsell and Burke), analyzing previously conducted research (Moran et. al; Schiefele et. al.;), as well as tracking readers’ eyes (Kruger and Steyn) or screen touches (Simpson, Walsh, and Rowsell). While each of these approaches reveals certain aspects of reading experience, what is missing is the insight of particular readers into the contexts in which they read combined with a broad look at multiple readers’ practices8. To offer a more complete picture of digital readers, this study sought to combine both the broad and the local in examining the way college students read.

To that end, I conducted a mixed-method study using survey (quantitative) and interview (qualitative) data “so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either quantitative or qualitative research” alone (Creswell 4). The surveys and interviews provided both broad and specific information about students’ reading practices. Further emphasizing the benefits of multi-method design, Kirsch writes: “The call for a single methodology poses the danger of reasserting the same kind of hegemony of values (cultural, ethnic, institutional, or gender-based) that many composition scholars want to undo” (254). Thus, using multiple methods helped ensure a more pluralized and inclusive look at the ways students read.

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8 Apart from these single-method studies of reading practices, studies within composition like David A. Jolliffe and Allison Harl’s examination of first-year student reading practices (using questionnaire, journals, and writing) and Karen Manarin’s multi-method approach to studying student reading strategies highlights the complexities of college readers (see also Acheson, Barratt, and Balthazor; and Evans and Po for further examples of student-centered reading research from our field). Lotta Larson’s “E-Reading” or Byeong-Young Cho’s study using verbal reports triangulated with screen capture are good examples of multi-method studies involving non-college aged readers.
The first method this study employed was a survey, which allowed me to get a sense of the overall reading trends in a cost-effective and quick manner. Since I was interested in getting a broad sense of students’ digital reading practices, sending out a survey ensured that I would “obtain descriptive information about readily observed or recalled behavior of very large populations” (Lauer and Asher 55). Based on the outcomes of the survey, I selected participants for follow-up interviews. An emergent process of research “means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (Creswell 175-177). Because I could not anticipate the results that would emerge from the initial survey data, I waited until I collected responses before moving on to the subsequent interview phase. Using Adrian Holliday’s approach to qualitative research, the emergence of the subsequent phases of this study “set up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of the people she is investigating” (5). Seeing what the survey participants said gave me an idea of which research questions were still unanswered. For instance, because the survey did not fully capture the ways participants read in different contexts, the interview was designed to gain better insight into that area of the participants’ lives.

Using interviews as the next phase of data collection was advantageous as interviews “attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale 1). The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to explain and elaborate on their particular reading processes. I only met with the participants once and the semi-structured nature of the interviews “provide[d] a clear set of instructions for interviewers” and also ensured the participants could guide the conversations through open-ended questions (Cohen and Crabtree).
Interviews also put the researcher in a unique position to encourage the participants to share their worldviews in the research context. Using the contextualized, situated, and feminist methodologies above reminded me to stay reflective and purposeful in planning and designing the interview portion of the study. To better anticipate the problems associated with this method, I relied on interview methods texts to help guide and formulate appropriately worded research questions and structure the interviews (Boyce and Neale; Clifford; Jacob and Furgerson; Kvale; Turner).

To give authority to the participants, in both the survey and interviews, I spent time discussing the research questions and methods with the target student population. Kirsch writes, “For composition studies this kind of research [i.e., feminist] means opening up the research agenda to subjects, listening to their stories, and allowing them to actively participate, as much as possible, in the design, development, and reporting of research. Such an approach will include interviews, case studies, and retrospective accounts” (257). As such, including the participants’ voices in the instrument design, getting their feedback on the methods, and considering the impact of results was a necessary part of my process. Additionally using post-critical methodological approaches as outlined by Sullivan and Porter, my research “develop[ed] and [arose] through the [research] process, in dialogic concert with the research participants” (42). While designing the survey, I spoke with a number of intermediate composition classes to refine the intricacies of the question wording based on students’ comprehension. Before interviewing participants, the design of the interview and questions went through several revisions with colleagues. After the audio recorders were shut off following the interviews, I spoke with participants about how they thought the interview went and their perceptions of the experience. Participants furthermore had the option of indicating whether or not they wanted to see and
comment on the transcribed interviews and my subsequent analyses. Drawing on the knowledge that the student population brings to the topic, and wanting to most effectively reach my audience, I approached this research “on the basis of multiple and shifting subjectivities that enable opportunities for change” (Sullivan and Porter 42). Having multiple inputs in the development of the research greatly influenced the direction this study ultimately ended up taking.

Research Sampling and Data Sources

This study took place at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and the participants were enrolled in composition courses during the 2014 fall semester. I received IRB non-human subjects designation from UC for conducting this research in February 2014 (proposal 2014-0512). As a graduate student at UC with access to the English Composition Program listserv, this setting proved to be ideal for conducting the research because of the access to participants within the Composition Program. The university student population was also ideal for studying digital reading habits as there is a need to know more about how this population uses devices to read. Because of the limited time I had to collect the data during the fall semester, I did not determine a particular, ideal sample size ahead of time.

More specifically, the sample was drawn from students enrolled in UC’s English Composition courses. According to the 2013-2014 “English Composition Annual Report”, the English Composition program saw “6,460 students in 291 sections of composition” (Malek 2). One hundred and fifty-six students were enrolled in English 1000 (a pre-requisite to 1001 for

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9 The University of Cincinnati is a “public, urban research university” located in Cincinnati, Ohio (“University of Cincinnati”). In 2014-2015, there was a total of 32,677 undergraduate students enrolled.
students whose ACT scores fell below 17 or SAT Writing scores fell below 420); 3,341 in 1001 (first-year composition); and 2,983 in 2089 (intermediate composition) (3). Although there are certain exceptions\(^{10}\), the majority of students at UC are required to complete first 1001 and then 2089 throughout their degrees, though the students are not necessarily required to complete the courses at a particular point in their academic trajectory. As such, there are often students in 1001 or 2089 across a spectrum of academic levels and majors of study. Because the courses service students in every year across the university, this population was ideal for my sample.

To access the students in the composition courses, I sent a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix A) to thirty-one composition instructors, asking them to voluntarily share the survey with their students, requesting that they not tie the survey into classroom activities or assign any grade or participation for completing it. The composition instructors were contacted during the week of November 24, 2014, and the survey was closed December 31, 2014. Although completing the survey itself was voluntary, I included the added incentive of a draw for two $50 Amazon Gift Cards to encourage participation. The survey was created through the survey website Qualtrics using the University of Cincinnati site license, and students were sent a link to complete the survey, which allowed them to complete it at a time and place of their convenience.

All of the participants completed an online consent form prior to taking the survey (see Appendix B). To help protect the participants’ privacy, the demographic information collected in the survey was done in a general manner that would not reveal the identity of the participants. In addition, the contact information collected following the survey (recruiting participants to take part in a follow-up interview as well as for the $50 Amazon Gift Card draw) was separated from

\(^{10}\) Students who enter with appropriate AP credits are exempt from 1001. In addition, there are certain majors, like business, that have their own writing course, which exempts students from enrolling in 2089.
the survey results into a new survey so that the identifying information was not tied to participant responses. Chapter three will further discuss the demographics of the 56 participants who completed the survey.

In keeping with the contextualist methodology, the sample for the interviews was taken from the survey respondents who indicated a willingness to be part of follow-up interviews. Twenty-seven respondents indicated their willingness to participate in the next phase and I randomly contacted eight of the twenty-seven participants via e-mail (see Appendix C). Because of time constraints and the difficulty of transcribing and analyzing interview data, I chose to interview the first four participants who responded to the e-mail late in the spring semester. Please see chapter three for a detailed description of the interview participants. Three of the interviews took place in Langsam Library on UC’s campus. The fourth interview took place over Skype because the student was taking part in a semester-long co-op outside of Cincinnati. All four interviewees reviewed consent documents prior to beginning and the interviews were audio-recorded (see Appendix D for consent form). Following the interviews, the participants also received debriefing information (see Appendix E). All of the interview participants were sophomores at UC.

**Instrumentation and Measures**

Throughout the survey, reading was defined as “... not only text-based reading (like an article, e-mail, or webpage) but also watching videos, listening to music, or playing games” (see Appendix F for the full survey). In defining reading in this way, I wanted to make sure that the respondents saw reading as involving other interpretative acts beyond looking at text-based articles, books, or websites, especially as students often do read other multimedia content on the
web. That definition was reiterated throughout the final survey, which consisted of 25 closed-and open-ended questions that asked students about their reading practices using tablets, smartphones, laptops, and desktop computers, as well as their in-class experience with technology and reading instruction. The survey was divided into four sections plus a section with demographics questions. The first section asked students about device ownership, purpose, and frequency of use with text-box, multiple choice, and Likert-style questions.

The next section of the survey looked at how students use their digital devices in particular contexts and included descriptive and ranking responses, which allowed participants to describe in their own words what they read on their digital devices on a daily basis. This section also asked respondents to rank the frequency of various practices based on the devices they use. According to Qualtrics, ranking questions are “used for sorting activities, where participants are asked to place items in groups, and then optionally, rank the items within those groups” (“Pick, Group, and Rank”). For example, if the respondent indicated using a smart phone, they were led to a table where they dragged from a list of activities (including texting, making phone calls, browsing the internet, social media, for example) in one column into another where they ranked them based on how frequently, sometimes, or never they are performed. The benefit of a ranking question like this is that they “gather the order of preference insights, not available through standard multiple choice questions” (“Rank Order”). This format was chosen to offer some variability to the survey design and to customize the responses to the devices participants use. After respondents ranked the items, they were then given the opportunity to further expand on their response in text boxes.

The third section of the survey involved student perceptions on technology and digital reading in the classroom. One likert question was used in this section to assess the importance of
digital devices for academic success. There were also several multiple-choice questions that asked about student in-class experience with digital devices, including how often instructors make material digitally available, what types of texts those are, and how often and which device they use to read course material. According to Lauer and Asher, “[m]ultiple-choice questions are succinct, parsimonious, easily aggregated for analysis, and standardized, allowing the researcher to compare responses with those of other groups” (65). These multiple-choice questions were used to more easily generalize the respondents’ typical in-class digital experiences. The open-ended questions in this section asked respondents their opinion of technology in the classroom and to explain whether they see themselves reading differently in different contexts. To keep with the feminist methodologies, the questions about respondent opinions were left open-ended to give the participants’ voices prominence with regards to the topic.

The final section looked more explicitly at respondent experience with reading instruction. The section included a multiple choice question asking about the types of reading instruction students received and a 5-point likert question asking respondents about the frequency of using particular reading strategies. Open-ended responses were included for respondents to elaborate on the classes where they received particular reading instruction and to note if they had used those strategies in other situations. Because of my pedagogical interest in the subject matter, learning about technology in the classroom was an important aspect within the context of this study. Following this last section participants answered multiple choice demographic questions that looked at students’ backgrounds and academic positions within the university before being redirected to the questionnaire for the Amazon gift cards.

While questions in the survey looked more broadly at reading and technology, the subsequent interviews aimed to explore the participant’s individualized practices. When
designing the interview instruments, I relied heavily on interview method scholarship to plan and carry out my research. In his *InterViews*, Steinar Kvale details useful steps for conceptualizing and carrying out qualitative interviews. His first step, *thematizing*, involves “formulating the purpose of the investigation and describing the concept of the topic to be investigated before the interview starts,” particularly “the *why* and *what* of the investigation” (88, emphasis in original). Returning to the literature on digital reading and to the survey data, I was able to see what was missing from both scholarship and the survey to narrow down the focus of the interview (to gather more information about the contexts of student digital reading and how reading practices vary in different situations). I used open-ended questions and the phrase “tell me about…” to elicit expansive responses from participants (4). The interview itself was structured so that all participants were asked the same open-ended questions and were able to “contribute their insiders’ perspectives with little or no limitations imposed by more closed-ended questions” (Chenail 255). These open-ended questions also left room for me to follow-up, based on the participants’ responses, on issues directly related to their experiences (256).

There were six open-ended prompts (see Appendix G for interview protocol and questions) with follow-up questions, which made room for the participant to direct the conversation. The questions sought to look more closely at the role of context and genre in digital reading. I began the interviews by asking for basic background information in order to “build trust” between the participants and myself as I “collect[ed] important background data” (Jacob and Furgerson 3). The open-ended questions and prompts I gave all participants included:

1. Tell me about yourself and your background here at UC.
2. Tell me about the types of digital devices you use and how you use those devices.
3. How would you define reading and what does digital reading mean to you?
4. Tell me about your digital reading practices.

5. Tell me about what role the type of text you’re reading or other contextual factors (like place, time of day, or mood) has on your digital reading practices.

6. In terms of reading texts for school, what do you use to read and why do you to use that format?

These questions were purposefully non-specific in their wording so that participants were free to interpret or take the conversation in the direction they felt most inclined. These questions also attempted to remain neutral and “avoid[ed] wording that might influence answers” (Turner 758). By allowing participants to control the direction of the conversation and by giving them the opportunity to define or interpret concepts in the ways they wanted, I “could ask questions or change questions based on participant responses to previous questions. The questions were structured, but adapting them allowed me to explore a more personal approach to each [. . .] interview” (Turner 755). This approach to the research also allowed for follow-up questions and the order of questioning to emerge from the direction the conversation was taking and made the conversations flow more naturally than if the protocol was completely structured.

**Procedures**

As I began developing the survey, I drew from survey design guidelines to create effective survey questions (Alrek and Settle; Barribeau et. al; Lauer and Asher; “Survey Building Overview”). As Lauer and Asher write of new researchers, “…it is wise, for the first several attempts, to use questions that have been shown to be useful and non-ambiguous in prior studies” (65). For that reason I decided to turn to and use questions that had previously appeared on other digital, reading, and technology-related surveys (particularly Clark and Foster; Educause; Gleed; Pace and Kuh; Statistics Canada). I also followed guidelines from Qualtrics’ “Survey Building
Overview” to arrange questions in a “funneled” order (ranging from general to specific) and to vary question format to encourage multiple response types (“Survey” n. pag). The survey went through a declared pilot phase and several reviews ahead of distribution in fall 2014.

In the spring of 2014, UC doctoral student Kelly Blewett and I brought the pilot-phase survey questions we developed to six composition classes and asked students to complete the survey. This survey had students answer questions about which devices they ideally use to read in certain situations. During this time, we spoke with students in one class about their experience taking the survey and clarified, modified, and added additional questions based on their feedback. We then asked the six composition courses to complete the survey while one of us was present in each classroom. We brought this preliminary survey data to the 2014 Dartmouth Summer Seminar for Composition Research and received additional feedback from participants on the survey’s focus and design (see Appendix H for the pilot version of the survey).

Independently, following the two-week seminar, I once again modified survey questions to focus more specifically on digital reading (whereas the initial survey used language that often pointed respondents to print-based texts), on reading within academic contexts, and on students’ actual practices (rather than having them imagine “ideal” scenarios). In September 2014, I brought these questions to an intermediate composition course for question clarity and design feedback. In addition to feedback from that pilot group, I also asked several composition and rhetoric colleagues for feedback on the clarity of survey questions and design of the survey, and modified the questions based on their feedback. In the fall of 2014, I distributed the survey to 31 composition instructors at UC via department e-mail listserv following the procedures described in the sample section above.

Although the survey questions went through several initial reviews with colleagues,
piloting the interview was not practical because I did “not want to lose limited research participants [. . . or] take up participants’ valuable time with under-developed questions” (Chenail 258). I did, however, test the questions and structure of the interview with a colleague to ensure that the questions were sufficiently clear and that the interview followed the appropriate timeline and formula I had established before meeting with the first interviewee.

Drawing on interview design methods from Robert Chenail; Scott Clifford; Stacy A. Jacob and Paige S. Furgerson; Kvale; and Daniel W. Turner, I created the interview protocol to help structure the interviews. As Jacob and Furgerson write, “. . . we advocate that first time qualitative researchers use interview protocols to assist them in collecting data. An interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions; it also extends to the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what you will say” in various stages of the interview as well as offers prompts for the interviewer to remember (1-2). My interview protocol included a script of important information I wanted to remember to relay to participants at the outset of the interview (regarding their rights and informed consent) as well as major broad questions I would ask and “bullet points that remind [me] of areas that have emerged from the literature or things [I] think will enrich [the] data” (Jacob and Furgerson 5). For example, below the open-ended questions “How would you define reading and what does digital reading mean to you?”, I included the following prompts in my protocol to “get at pre-planned specifics [the participant] did not mention” (5): “Digital as similar or different (in opposition) from print-based reading; Impression of digital reading or digital devices; attitude and understanding of reading acts.” These prompts helped me stay focused in case the participant started to veer off topic. The script also included information I relayed to the participants after the interview about how I would “proceed from here and what they can expect after the interview” (Jacob and Furgerson 9).
All of the interviews were arranged via e-mail and upon meeting the participants, I started by making small talk before getting to the questions themselves. Once in the interview space, or shortly after we began talking over Skype, I explained to the participant that I would be going over the informed consent with them and give them time to read it over before turning on the audio recorder and starting the interview. At this point, I read directly from the protocol with all four participants and then gave them a chance to look over the consent form. Participants were given a copy of the consent form and then I turned on the recorder and continued by asking question one from the prompt. From that point, I asked questions from the protocol with follow-up questions when necessary. After getting to all of the questions, and before turning off the recorder, I concluded the interview by “mentioning some of the main points learned from the interview” and asking the participants if they had any questions or additional thoughts on the topic (Kvale 128). Because of the variation in response length and need for follow-up questions, the interviews took between 15:40 (John) and 54:07 (Logan) minutes in length.

Following the interviews and once the recorders were turned off, I went over the debriefing form with each participant, more fully explained the purpose of the research and subsequent steps, and made sure the participant had no additional questions. According to Joan Sieber, “Research participation can have educational or therapeutic value for participants, and debriefing is an appropriate opportunity to consolidate these values through appropriate conversation and handouts” (n. pag). The debriefing form I created was based off of Queens’ University Psychology Department’s debriefing templates (“Instructions for Preparing”) and adapted to my research. After the participant left the interview setting, I set aside about 10 minutes to write and “recall and reflect on what has been learned from the participant interview, including the interpersonal interaction” (Kvale 129). This reflexivity helped maintain the critical
approach to research that I described above and allowed me to consider at the time of the interviews the impressions I had about how things went, my interactions with the participant, and the subjective elements I felt that influenced the research.

All four of the interview participants indicated that they were willing to let me contact them if I had any follow-up questions once I began analyzing the data. The only contact I had with the participants following the interviews was an e-mail to Logan for the proper spelling of the name of his co-op company. I had sent the three participants requesting to see copies of the transcribed interviews their data in August 2015. At that time, I let the participants know they were welcome to follow up with me if they had any questions or wanted to see my analysis of their data.

Data Analysis Methods

Drawing from the methodological stance detailed above, I maintain that data analysis and reporting is highly rhetorical and that “language plays an important role in creating statistics”—and by extension, making interpretations (Wolfe 461). Instead of accepting the surface value of results, I decided to “entertain, even propose, alternative readings and interpretations of their research. Such alternative readings will serve to provide additional insights, not to test and eliminate ‘rival hypotheses,’ a process that suggests there is one best, correct interpretation of data that researchers can approximate by a process of elimination” (Kirsch 259). I included multiple question types and means of collecting data to try and account for the many ways students use digital devices, rather than just flattening or drawing fixed conclusions from one method over another. In addition, critical attention to interpreting the data was necessary as “researchers also need to ask questions about the rhetorical stance—the narrative strategies, for
example—they use when reporting research studies because writing research reports is a highly conventionalized and socially constructed process” (Kirsch 264-265). My goal with analyzing the data was to maintain the same level of critical reflection and rhetorical awareness as I did when collecting the data.

This research produced both quantitative and qualitative data and as such, multiple forms of data analyses were used. Choosing which interpretative levels to explore “primarily weighs rhetorical concerns, such as whether the claim is interesting, whether it can be articulated in a way that the audience can understand, and whether it is credible” (Wolfe 465). To analyze the quantitative data, I used Stata statistical software, which I chose because of the available online support (including an online course) as well as its compatibility with my Mac computer. I also met with Huaiyu Zang, a doctoral student from the statistics department, who helped me determine which types of statistical tests were possible based on the questions I asked.

After looking over my primary research questions with Huaiyu, we determined the most appropriate type of analysis moving forward was descriptive statistics. In general, the study required the use of non-parametric statistics because I did not assume that “the groups of people from which a sample, and hence data, are drawn are normally distributed and independent” (Haas, “Non-Parametric” 1). Although the survey population is made up of undergraduates from UC, analysis of this data is descriptive because it can only be used to summarize the sample in question, not the larger population. The descriptive tests used to explore research questions 1, 3, and 4 (outlined earlier in this chapter), include mainly those of frequency of responses.

Both the survey and interviews created qualitative data that I broke down into categories reflecting the initial research questions. While the data provided multiple avenues of analysis, the coding categories were limited to two areas of analysis that were then applied to the qualitative
survey answers: (1) reasons participants indicated a preference for print texts (see Appendix I), and (2) the differences participants saw between print and digital reading (see Appendix J). I determined the frequencies of items in each category. The text-box survey responses and the interview data provided supportive anecdotes and particular insights to complement the quantitative data. Because I chose to use the interview data descriptively rather than code it to run quantitative tests, I chose not to use a second coder.

Using ExpressScribe transcription software, I transcribed the interview data myself. Because of my past experience working as a transcriptionist, I felt that self-transcription was the most appropriate avenue to take. Furthermore I believe that self-transcription allowed me to get closer to the data than I could if I outsourced the transcription. According to Kvale, investigators transcribe their own data “in order to secure the many details relevant to their specific analysis” (169). Since the interview participants had the opportunity to review their transcriptions, this ensured that their perspectives were accurately represented throughout the process. Once the transcriptions were complete, the participants who wished to review the transcriptions had an opportunity to do-so and indicate any clarifications they felt were necessary.

When analyzing the interview data, I considered the different dimensions possible within the responses as they related to the research questions. Data analysis involved an “ad hoc use of different approaches and techniques for meaning generation” including “condensing and categorizing data, narrative structuring, and meaning interpretation” (Kvale 203). Following Kvale’s interview analysis methods, I condensed the transcriptions “into briefer, more succinct formulations” and subsequently categorized the statements based on phenomenon and sub-categories that reflect my research questions (192). I organized the responses based on turns speaking and then used the language of the interview participants in detail to elaborate on the
survey results. Taken together, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data presents a picture of digital reading that looks more closely at the ways participants use their devices on a daily basis and their perceptions on the contexts of their reading.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Some of the limitations of the research came out of the timing and design of the study, particularly the survey. While the survey as a data collection method allowed me to have a better understanding of overall trends, some limitations included the possibility to “data overload” (Lauer and Asher 46) and that the sample of students was not representative of the larger population (57). Because the undergraduate student body at UC is itself not representative of the larger population, I am only able to make generalizations about this group of students rather than university students as a whole. One of the delimitations of the survey came from the way that I approached instructors distributing the surveys. In attempts to get a more representative sample of students, the instructors I contacted were instructed to let students know that completing the survey was voluntary. For that reason, I did not have the number of respondents that I initially hoped for. A larger sample size would have allowed me to make conclusions about the population in questions with greater confidence. Another delimitation to the survey involved my allowing participants to skip questions if they wanted. Because of that, not all of the participants answered all of the questions and it became difficult to analyze the data with missing responses.

One of the challenges with conducting interviews is being aware of how the interviews are conducted (which includes the positioning of the interviewer and researcher bias), the time it involves, lack of interviewer training, non-generalizable results, as well as the difficulties of transcribing and analyzing interview data (Boyce and Neale 3-4). My lack of training in
interview techniques is one of the limitations of this type of research and because of my unfamiliarity with interviewing methods, my questioning may have potentially influenced the participants’ responses. These concerns correspond with Chenail’s research, which indicates that some of the limitations of interviews include researcher bias due to their discomfort, ill-preparedness with conducting interviews, or by acting inappropriately during the interviews (257). Another delimitation of the interviews included my means of selecting participants. Because I could not anticipate ahead of time the demographics of the interview participants, I was not able to gather a representative sample of students. All of the students were sophomores and ideally I would have liked to interview participants across a spectrum. A further limitation of interviews more generally is that if the researcher is too close in age with the population under study, it can introduce a layer of bias as they “only discover what they think they don’t know, rather than opening up their inquiries to encompass also what they don’t know they don’t know” (Chenail 257). Although I attempted to remain aware of my position and role in the research, I cannot be totally sure of how I came across to the participants.

**Summary**

This chapter offered an overview of the steps I took in conducting my research as well as a theoretical rationale for my particular approach. I discussed the role of context and situatedness, feminist methodologies, and mixed-methods within my study and offered a rationale for adopting the survey and interview methods I used. The described methodologies are similar in their focus on the researcher’s authority and position within a study and were instrumental in the mixed-methods approach my study employed. This chapter also described the procedures I followed and sample I used. Studying composition students at UC had certain
advantages, such as ease of access and demographic similarities to the population I wanted to study. However, there were certain limitations with this convenience sample, such as the size of the data set of the survey and inability to contact survey respondents for follow-up. Finally, I also described the steps for analysis and limitations of the study. Having support with the statistical components of this study was particularly valuable, as was the early interaction I had with Dartmouth participants. Although this study has certain limitations, the multi-method approach to student digital reading complements the extensive research by bringing together both the broad and the local aspects of this phenomenon.
Chapter Three

Examining Digital Readers: Survey and Interview Results

As described in chapter two, “A Methodology of Digital Reading,” this study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain insight into students’ reading practices and the ways those practices vary in multiple contexts. This chapter draws from both the survey responses and participant interviews to explore participants’ digital reading practices, their conception of context in relation to digital reading, and their experiences with digital reading instruction. My initial research questions sought to explore the following: (1) How do students use their digital devices on a daily basis?, (2) In what contexts do students read digitally? Do their reading practices (what they read on various devices or how they use digital devices) vary in different situations? If so, how?, (3) How often are students reading digitally in the classroom?, and (4) What types of reading instruction do students receive? While the survey and interview data produced multiple potential avenues for data analysis, the chapter will emphasize the findings surrounding reading contexts and digital reading in the classroom, findings that will be most useful to compositionists interested in adopting reading pedagogies. This chapter will highlight the importance of material practices and physical environments on reading and will showcase some of the difficulties associated with making reading practices visible. The subsequent chapters will deal more specifically with how compositionists might bring digital reading activities and assignments into their own classrooms. By relying on qualitative data and interview responses, this chapter’s approach to presenting information aligns with the feminist and situationalist methods discussed in chapter two. Using direct quotes and statements from participants builds on the numerical presentation of results I detail below. As Johanna Wolfe writes in “Rhetorical Numbers,” “writers use rhetorical canons of invention and arrangement
when creating statistical expressions in order to make an interesting story out of their data…”
(441). Thus, further supporting the stories this chapter outlines will be the voices of the
participants themselves.

**Study Participants: A Closer Look**

In total, 72 participants began and 56 completed the digital reading survey. The
breakdown of the participants in terms of gender and racial identification is similar to that of
UC’s undergraduate population, with 50% of the survey participants identifying as male and the
other 50% identifying as female (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1**
Gender and racial demographics of survey participants

Like UC’s undergraduate students\(^\text{11}\), the majority of respondents are Caucasian (71%), followed

\(^\text{11}\) In terms of UC’s undergraduate student demographics, 45.7% of students in 2014-2015 were
male and 54.3% female, thus UC has slightly more females than the number participating in my
survey (“UC Facts”). In terms of diversity, in Autumn 2014, 72% of undergraduate students at
UC were Caucasian, 10.7% were African American, 2.7% were Asian, 2.7% were Hispanic, and
0.3% were American Indian (Office “University”). While the diversity of my participants was
slightly higher than that of the larger UC population, these numbers are relatively comparable to
that of UC’s undergraduate students.
by African American (11%), Asian (7%), Native American, and other Hispanic (each 2%).

Because the survey respondents were taking composition courses, their ages are similar to that of UC students typically taking those classes. Apart from one participant between the ages of 30-39, all of the participants are under the age of 23\textsuperscript{12}. The majority of participants are sophomores (50% or n= 28) or juniors (23% or n= 13) reflecting when students typically take English 2089, an intermediate writing course in which the majority of surveys were distributed\textsuperscript{13}. All but two of the participants are enrolled full time and the majority take face-to-face classes exclusively (n= 38), compared to those taking both face-to-face and online (n= 17), or exclusively online (n= 1). While one fifth of the survey respondents take both online and face-to-face classes, the majority of students completing the survey take exclusively face-to-face courses. Because the survey was distributed mostly to face-to-face composition classes, this number does not proportionately represent the number of UC students taking distance courses\textsuperscript{14}.

While the sample of the survey participants is similar to that of UC’s undergraduate student population, the interview participants are much more homogenous in age, gender, and level of schooling than I ideally desired. A sample of interview participants that more closely resembled those taking the survey would have been more representative of that group. All of the interview participants are sophomores and all but one are Caucasian males. Despite their similarities, the interview participants differ in terms of major, life experiences, and relationship to reading and technology. John\textsuperscript{15}, a 20-year-old business student is the second of eight children.

\textsuperscript{12} This number is slightly lower than the age of the average UC student (24.6), potentially because of when students take the composition courses (“University”).

\textsuperscript{13} In the 2014-2015 academic year, 3050 students were enrolled in 2089. Of that, 68.7% (n = 2097) were sophomores followed by 22.4% juniors (n = 684).

\textsuperscript{14} In the fall of 2014, 5,376 students were enrolled in online or distance learning, or 12.3% of the student population (Office “Online/Distance”).

\textsuperscript{15} All of the interview participants consented to using their real names in reports from the study.
Logan, a 20-year-old architecture major is completing a semester of co-op with a firm in Houston, Texas. Chantal, a 19-year-old woman of Caucasian, African American, and Polynesian descent, is a second year biology and pre-med student preparing for a summer position as an orientation leader for incoming students. Finally, Quinn, a 20-year-old marketing student is a member of the UC cheer team.

Both the survey and interview participants offer complementary views about how undergraduate students at UC interact with technologies on a daily basis and how they read digitally in the classroom. Both the survey and interviews produced extensive data covering the various ways participants use digital technologies. This chapter will focus on the findings most interesting and significant to compositionists, including (1) the prevalence of digital technologies for accomplishing multiple purposes, (2) the role of context on students’ reading practices, and (3) digital reading in the classroom. In the subsequent chapters, I will further discuss why these results are important for composition instructors interested in reading pedagogies, and how instructors might incorporate digital reading instruction into their composition classrooms.

**Students and Daily Technology Use**

The first area of interest in this study is how students use their digital devices on a daily basis. The research questions here look at what types of technologies students use, how frequently, and for what purpose. These questions furthermore ask what types of texts students read on their digital devices and what tasks they most typically perform on a daily basis. These questions were intended to go beyond the binary view of reading I describe in chapter one and instead focus on the different types of texts students read.

Digital technologies are a pervasive part of respondents’ everyday communication experiences and permeate all aspects of their lives. One of the most interesting results coming
out of both the quantitative and qualitative data was the overwhelming extent to which participants report using laptops and smartphones daily compared to tablets, desktop computers, or e-readers. One hundred percent of the survey respondents indicate having a laptop and all but two indicate having a smartphone. In terms of frequency, 100% of participants indicate using their laptops more than once a day or daily and 97% use smartphones more than once a day or daily, with the exception of the two respondents who do not use a smartphone. In comparison, 60% of respondents indicate that they do not own or never use e-readers and only 32% report using tablets within a monthly period. Because of the prevalence of laptops and smart phones compared to other technologies, the results I describe here will focus exclusively on how respondents use those devices.

One of the quantitative survey questions asked participants about the purpose for using smartphones and laptops. In response, 97% of respondents report using laptops for both academic and non-academic purposes, and 81.5% indicate using smartphones for both. As I imagine most readers today are multiple technology users, it is not surprising to note that participants use laptops and smartphones interchangeably to accomplish multiple tasks throughout the day\textsuperscript{16}. Furthermore, digital devices are not limited to certain realms (like school or pleasure); instead, the types of activities respondents complete often shift based on contexts and devices.

\textsuperscript{16} To get a fuller picture of the types of tasks participants perform using their devices, I decided that “[f]or the purposes of this survey, reading means not only text-based reading (like an article, e-mail or webpage) but also watching videos, listening to music, or playing games” (Q6). It was important that respondents understood that I was interested in the types of texts and media they engaged with digitally and was not limiting them to print-based texts (like books, newspapers, or magazines).
As you can see from Figure 3.2, when asked to rank certain activities participants perform “frequently,” “sometimes,” and “never,” participants report using both laptops and smartphones frequently for multiple purposes, and often use both devices for the same tasks to different degrees. The main area of difference between how laptops and smartphones are used on a frequent basis is that respondents are more likely to complete school-based reading and writing on laptops rather than smartphones (this finding will be discussed in further detail below). Smartphones are used more often for social media and messaging; however, 50% of the respondents indicate that they do “sometimes” use their smartphones for school-based reading and 55% indicate “sometimes” using their phone for non-school based reading, suggesting that smart phones are also used as a reading technology by at least half of the participants.

Apart from the greater frequency of laptops used for completing school-assigned reading and writing, as Figure 3.2 demonstrates, respondents use both laptops and phones frequently for
a wide range of tasks, particularly in relation to communication (e-mail, social messaging, and internet browsing). Over half of the participants rank using social media, e-mail, music, and browsing the internet “frequently” on both devices. After ranking which activities they frequently, sometimes, and never perform, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses in a textbox, describing the specific tasks they perform using their devices. These responses further highlight the extent to which participants use their devices for accomplishing a number of purposes. One respondent wrote:

Throughout the day I will typically use my smartphone for emails, texting, listening to music, listening to audiobooks, directions, games, searching the web, video chat, taking pictures, and using it as a recorder. I do many of the same things on my laptop such as emails, music, searching the web, and video chat, but I also use it for academic work, reading, research, shopping, and social media management.

Another respondent wrote:

I use my iPhone and laptop to read my homework assignments on Blackboard, browse social networks including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, academic articles on the web, emails, grades, websites on applying for internships and future career options, articles on what is going on in the media (celebrities or big controversial cases), documentaries, and music on YouTube and Pandora.

These two responses are typical of other responses to this question where participants indicate using digital devices to accomplish a number of tasks daily in a number of contexts. These respondents use devices for multiple purposes and often indicate using different devices for the same purpose (such as e-mail or social media). What both of these responses also indicate is that respondents are constantly reading and writing with their devices. Often digital devices are
associated with unengaged reading or communication practices, and alternatively, these responses demonstrate the complex, cognitive functions required to look up directions, engage in conversations, process multiple types of media, and judge multiple sources of information (in terms of the news).

Despite the majority of participants stating that they use both laptops and smartphones for academic and non-academic purposes, the majority of school-based reading and writing takes place on laptops. Using a Likert scale, I asked participants to rate the importance of their technologies for their academic success (see Figure 3.3). Laptops were rated as “extremely important” or “very important” almost exclusively, whereas the importance of smartphones for academic success was more likely to be characterized as “very important,” “moderately important,” or “not important”.

Figure 3.3
The importance of different devices for academic success

![Bar chart showing importance of devices for academic success]

Laptops are easier to use for lengthy reading and writing tasks than smartphones, because, I hypothesize, of their size; portability; and ability to hold multiple files, applications, books and programs. The interview participants confirm this view, and often talk about how, although

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17 Responses that indicated "not at all important" and "not very important" were combined in Figure 3.3 under the "not important" heading.
smartphones are an incredibly important part of their everyday lives and communication practices, laptops are easier to use for school-based reading and writing tasks. The interview respondents often elaborate on the importance of their laptops for academic success, with Logan, for instance, highlighting:

Basically my laptop at school is another part of me. It’s with me wherever I go. I’m just about always using it. So I might be […] doing computer coursework for architecture, doing digital modeling or renderings or Photoshop, or any of those sorts of things. . . .

During class I’ll be doing work on my laptop but outside my class and studio I’ll be listening to music, sometimes I’ll be watching videos or whatever online and I might be going back and forth talking with some of my friends and pull up something online to read or show them and then go back and do a bit of coursework.

For students like Logan who depend on laptops for the majority of their coursework, laptops do become an extension of their person and become the main technology they use for completing a number of tasks. Logan’s statement here blurs the distinction of school and home tasks as we see him use his laptop in a number of different ways in different settings. It is not surprising at UC that students value laptops over other devices as a number of colleges (including Arts and Sciences; Engineering and Applied Science; Business; Design, Art, Architecture and Planning to name a few) have laptop requirements of their incoming students. These colleges require students to have their own laptops that meet certain size, storage capacity, and processor specifications (“McMicken College Laptop”).

Once away from the campus environment, however, laptops might take on a less significant role. The survey and interview participants (apart from Logan) were all in school during the time of my data collection. Because of that, laptop use may have been more
pronounced. We see through Logan the kind of shift away from laptops that might be possible once students move away from their schoolwork. Logan discusses later in his interview that because he is working at a co-op where computers are supplied by the company, he uses his laptop less frequently than when he was in school. He says, “I don’t use my laptop as much. I’ve been using it mostly for watching movies or whatever at home...” With other technologies taking precedence for the work he does, Logan’s laptop functions more as a secondary, social technology and is not as important for his daily tasks.

What does remain significant for everyday communication is participants’ smartphone use. A device that almost all of the survey participants use more than once a day, smartphones play an important role in how participants stay organized, socially involved, and connected to the world around them. The interview participants in particular describe the prevalence of their phones for everyday communication. For example, when asked about her smartphone use, Chantal states: “I would like to say that I’m not always on [my phone] but I think that most of the time I am. It’s not particularly because I want to, it’s literally because everyone needs me all the time for something. . . . It is always on me. I even carry a charger with me [if] my phone dies. . . .” Chantal relishes family vacation time when she is able to power her phone down; otherwise, she’s always within an arm’s reach of those wanting to contact her. Quinn’s response further echoes the importance of his smartphone for daily tasks: “So I use my phone obviously for communicating with my friends, for work, with the whole cheer team, with school. Really my phone is everything. If I lost my phone I’d really be shit out of luck because I have so much on there.” Quinn continues, describing how with UC apps like the Blackboard app or the Bearcat app for student athletes, his phone allows him to constantly stay connected to his work, school, and social contacts. Whereas we see laptops take precedence for school, smartphones are the
dominant technology to otherwise fill in the gaps of participants’ communications.

When considering how participants use their digital devices daily, a few important findings emerge that will be further explored in subsequent chapters. First, because laptops and smartphones are used more often than other devices, it is important for instructors to recognize their strengths and limits and help students navigate them. Knowing that smartphones are important sources of communication, instructors can capitalize on school-sponsored apps and social media to reach students using particular devices. Teaching students strategies for using laptops and even smartphones more effectively for reading and writing is another way to help students working with that technology. Second, while the respondents were encouraged to focus on their reading practices, for the most part, the reading that people do digitally cannot be separated from writing. Emphasizing the connection between acts of reading and writing can help enhance students’ communicative abilities in both areas. The tasks participants perform most frequently using laptops and smartphones (checking e-mail, browsing the internet, and social media) necessitate writing and reading in order to communicate successfully. Chapter four will further discuss how we can make the reading process visible for students, ultimately helping with their written communication.

**Contexts of Digital Reading**

As detailed in previous chapters, reading is a challenge to study, and knowing how we read or paying attention to what we do in certain contexts is difficult to understand, particularly if we are not accustomed to doing so. However, as Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue write, “as difficult and counterintuitive [as] it is for readers—especially student readers—to get inside their reading while or after performing it, the work of introspection necessary to do so can
indeed teach our students how they read and teach us how they read, and how to read them as well” (83). Before looking at the contexts in which reading takes place, it is worthwhile to try and understand how the participants define reading and what differences they see between print and digital reading. Especially because there are multiple definitions for those terms, as outlined in chapter one, knowing the ways students define them can attune us to their mindset with regards to reading and help us foster an understanding of what they think those terms mean.

I asked the interview respondents specifically to define reading as well as digital reading and discuss what differences they see between the two. They largely see the act of reading the same whether print or digital, yet what distinguishes the two are the physical attributes of each and how to engage with the medium. In his interview, Quinn states, “I would honestly define [print and digital reading] as the same these days because reading is just the act of reading and digital reading is just online.” He further explains that because of the number of texts that are now available digitally, “I feel like most of what we read these days is now online.” Chantal goes further in her response, offering a sophisticated picture of what it means to read, stating:

Just the act of reading is being able to look at black and white marks and being able to translate it to information and pictures and ideas in your head. So it is translating just a bunch of marks and making sense of it, making pictures. . . . Digital reading, I think of it as the same way to me as the black and white marks. The only difference I think is that just in the reading, the experience of reading.

Chantal later elaborates on the physical differences between reading a textbook in print and on the computer. As a pre-med student, textbooks are her main source of knowledge when it comes to studying for tests. Using textbooks as an example, she describes different reading experiences when studying for exams: “. . . [W]hen you’re reading a textbook you don’t necessarily just read
line for line for line down the page, you need to be able to see the full page at the same time because a lot of the textbooks reference figures and graphs that are maybe on that page or on a different page and flipping back and forth is hard on a digital device.” Her physical experience with the textbook is important, as even the way she marks pages by folding down the corners has significance when it comes to recalling material—something that is not possible with a digital textbook.

Other interview participants further point toward the physical differences between texts. For instance, John says, “I think it’s pretty much the same but reading you think of books with covers and pages and when you do it digitally, it’s kind of just scrolling down but it’s pretty much the same I think.” As I discussed in chapter one, the physical differences between print and digital reading is something that is focused on in much reading research, and in other studies of students reading, participants often turn towards those physical differences in rationalizing why they prefer certain types of texts (e.g., Baron “Redefining”). My study participants were similar to those featured in published research, gravitating towards common pictures of what it means to read. Logan, in particular, says, “If somebody just said reading, the first thing I’d think of is reading a book.” Looking at the physical qualities of the text is a way the participants begin revealing their relationships with reading—the qualities they highlight come to suggest certain experiences they have or values about reading they hold.

I further examined participants’ relationships with reading by looking at the contexts and situations where their reading took place. One of the qualitative questions on the survey attempts to get at the different contexts of students’ reading by asking participants to describe how they read in different situations using laptops and smartphones, and to discuss what they are reading and paying attention to. In answering this question, the participants focus on their reading
practices (what they were looking at or doing as they read) rather than the different contexts where reading takes place. One participant writes, for example: “when i read, i read news apps to stay informed on things going on in the world. i am usually not doing anything as i do this, i’m usually reading because i am bored and have nothing else to do. i am paying attention to politics mostly.” This first respondent focuses on the types of texts he or she reads and the purpose for reading (“bored” and “nothing else to do”). Another writes, “I read the New York Times, NPR and other publications on my phone. I pay attention to the title and photo associated with the article usually. While I am reading these I am usually sitting in my car waiting, or at work.” This second respondent indicates more context-specific cues in his or her response, detailing the setting of the reading and the specific features of the text he or she pays attention to. And a third stated, “Like most people, I find it difficult to perceive tone through messaging. Things can come across many different ways when not speaking face-to-face, especially when it seems to be common practice to be fairly lax with components such as punctuation and using complete sentences.” This third respondent emphasizes the difficulties with reading on digital devices, focusing on issues of tone to enhance comprehension. The qualitative survey responses tend to move away from the genre-based contexts as outlined in chapter one and focus instead on specific reading processes. While these answers offer insight to some participants’ contextual reading behaviors, for the most part these responses were quite varied and do not offer as full a picture of the participants’ particular behaviors as do the interview responses.

With the interview participants it was easier to encourage them to think more specifically about the contexts in which their reading takes place by talking about the different situations and
purposes they had for reading\textsuperscript{18}. The interview format and ability to ask follow-up questions was one of the reasons why it was easier to clarify any questions the participants had regarding a question’s wording or meaning, though I attempted to encourage participants to interpret and answer the question to the best of their ability. The interview participants emphasize different contextual influences in their responses, some mentioning the time or location in which reading takes place, others mentioning their interest in a text or purpose for reading. When we think of issues of student disengagement or poor reading habits, the purpose and context of reading becomes particularly important, rather than the fact that respondents are using digital devices. Interview respondents elaborate on the habitual nature of their reading practices and indicate certain preferences for their reading in particular contexts.

\textit{Chantal’s Reading Environments}

Chantal has very particular habits for the different types of reading she does and is very aware of her daily device use. Accordingly, Chantal’s digital devices each have a particular purpose and, like others cited above, some of those purposes overlap:

I use my phone for all communications for the most part. I use some social media on my computer but my phone is mostly social media, texting, calling, group meetings, and pictures. No games. . . . I use [my iPad] for reading. I have a Kindle app on there. . . . I

\textsuperscript{18} In the survey protocol, I included the following question meant to examine participants’ contextual practices: “Tell me about what role the type of text you’re reading or other contextual factors (like place, time of day, or mood) has on your digital reading practices. In what ways do these factors impact what, when, where, how you read a text. Tell me about the different situations that you find yourself reading and the choices of device or text you make in those situations.” I attempted to leave the questions here open-ended enough so I was not implying a relationship between context and device use and attempted to let the participants interpret that question the way they saw fit.
said computer for textbook, reading textbooks but my iPad is for fiction books, just recreational reading and for Pinterest. And that’s about it. And my iPod touch is for music and also reading my kindle app.

Chantal associates her digital devices with very specific tasks. While she describes using her laptop for some textbook and school-based reading, it is mainly limited to courses, like Spanish, that require she bring the book to class. In contexts like that, she uses an e-book out of convenience. Otherwise, her textbook reading preference was much more print-based.

Beyond associating different devices with different tasks, Chantal also identified certain times of day and physical spaces where she preferred performing those tasks. Certain devices are used constantly whereas others are associated more with leisure time. When asked about her daily device practices, Chantal elaborated on how she uses particular technologies at different times of day for varying purposes:

… [L]aptop and phone is the morning through when I go to bed. I’m always on those because I have to stay in touch with people and there’s always e-mails coming in. Emails are a huge thing, which is laptop. . . . My iPod touch when I use it for music is usually during the afternoons when I’m studying and the iPad I do reading on it in the evenings and on the weekends when I have free time but it’s almost never during the day [or] in the mornings, it’s always night time. Sometimes instead of sleeping, when I should be sleeping I’m reading instead.

In this example Chantal links her devices to the time of day when she performs certain tasks. As mentioned above, cellphones and laptops are used constantly throughout the day, whereas the iPod and iPad are most closely associated with leisure time.
The contexts of Chantal’s reading go beyond purpose and involve embodied and material factors. Chantal, an avid reader, further explains that she often uses her iPad for pleasure reading (which is a quite different experience than the textbook reading that necessitates her seeing the full page). Talking about reading novels on her iPad, Chantal states: “Usually I’m in my bed or I’m sitting down at a table because I want to be able to rest my hands because I don’t want to have to hold it up the whole time because the devices kind of get heavy after a couple of hours of holding them. . . . When I’m absorbed in my recreational books, I literally don’t do anything else for hours. I will sit and read.” The experience of being absorbed in her reading here is tied to the physical environment and her purpose for reading—not the device she is using. The experience of being comfortable and immersed in the text is a much different experience than the environment where she reads and studies for school: “If it’s loud, I cannot focus. I end up having to scroll back up and reread what I just read because I’m too distracted and start listening to something else or watching something else. I do need to be in a quiet room. It needs to be kind of bright unless it’s at night and then my roommate’s sleeping and then it’ll be dark but I prefer just daylight and [a] quiet area.” Further proving the need for a stricter environment for her schoolwork, Chantal offers an anecdote of having to type a paper in the bathroom, in a space that is both quiet and bright. These two different reading and writing scenes highlight the significance of the environment and point to the fact that reading and writing are very much physical experiences.

While Chantal has certain medium preferences for her reading, her habits are more closely aligned with the context and purpose of her reading than with digital or print-based devices. Her descriptions illuminate the material conditions of reading that help her accomplish certain types of tasks. Being comfortable without distractions facilitates getting lost in a story;
using an iPod while studying can block out surrounding noise without the other distractions that come with listening to music on a phone of laptop; using a print-based textbook can help support physical interactions with the text (including page folding and note-taking) in a way that is difficult with a digital device; and being in a comfortable, quiet space is necessary for pleasure reading (whether using a print or digital device). When describing her experiences, the situational differences and reasons for reading are what help Chantal determine what and how she’s going to read and interact with a digital device.

**Quinn’s Reading Environments**

Quinn’s relationship to reading and the contexts in which his reading takes place are quite different from Chantal’s. For Quinn, his device use often occurs out of convenience and his practices change along with his schedule. Much of Quinn’s communication revolves around e-mail and staying up to date with school, his work at a cellphone store, and his involvement with the cheer team. Quinn describes a busy schedule with cheer practices and events, travelling with the football team, working, visiting family on a weekly basis, and balancing school and his social life. Most of this communication and staying up to date with these tasks takes place on his cellphone, as he states, “. . . I’m normally using my phone constantly, it’s bad. I don’t like it, I don’t enjoy it. I mean I do, I like my phone and technology’s great. I think we do use them too much though and me working at AT&T, I’m constantly on my phone, constantly working on phones and setting them up, and everything along with that. . .” While he may not be reading for pleasure in his spare time, Quinn does describe constant communicative interactions on his phone. He talks about juggling multiple schedules (and even scheduling co-workers’ shifts); e-
mails; class assignments; and cheer team requests, practices, and events; along with social media. While he is not likely to sit down and read a book, much of his day is spent reading and writing.

Quinn differs from the other interview participants because he is not a big fiction reader, stating “I don’t read a whole lot when I’m not in school but if I’m going to read it’ll be articles online normally pertaining to sports or sometimes it’ll be—I can’t remember the last time I sat down and actually read a book book—but I’ll read articles online about sports. . .” Like many of the other participants, Quinn’s interest in what he’s reading dictates much of his attention and interaction with texts. In terms of being interested in what he is reading, Quinn says, “I think that’s huge because if I don’t really care then I’ll just kind of skim through it. . . if it’s something I need to do, I’ll read it word for word and take notes. . . .” He describes taking notes by hand, because even when reading on a screen, it is easier to have the notes in front of you rather than juggling multiple applications on a computer. As someone who is interested in reading about sports, shorter articles like those that appear online keep his interest more than a longer text that he finds less interesting.

Like Chantal, Quinn also describes some behaviors that he performs at certain times of day. However, Quinn’s reading practices seem much less habitual than Chantal’s and really depend on what he is doing at a given moment in time. He does not describe certain settings he prefers for reading or devices he uses for performing certain tasks—his practices are more connected to what technologies are on hand. For example, when I asked what prompts him to use his phone for communication over his laptop, he says, “The only thing that really restricts me from [using] one [or] the other is if I have my laptop available for me at the time—so if I’m walking around campus obviously I’m using my phone.” His school-based reading and writing is based on convenience. He states that he sometimes uses his phone to complete school
assignments if that is the only thing available to him, or he will use an iPad if he is doing homework at his parents’ house and his computer is charging. In terms of daily technology practices, Quinn describes:

So normally I’ll sit down at the end of the day and go through my e-mail and Blackboard and make sure I don’t have any homework due or if I do, I’ll go do it. . . . I normally do that at night because I’m busy during the day and if I’m not busy during the day, I’m working. . . Rarely I ever get on my laptop in the morning and just check e-mail and stuff like that. It’s normally when I’m winding down. It really doesn’t have anything to do with my mood. I normally do check my e-mail whenever I have time or just get on Blackboard and do any assignments I need to do.

Like many students juggling multiple responsibilities, Quinn reserves schoolwork for the end of the day, the easiest time to check in and make sure everything is done for the next day. As Quinn states, he tries to keep up with e-mail and homework during spare time, but it is mostly the end of the day when he performs those tasks. Given his busy schedule, it makes sense that school work is reserved for spare time away from all his other requirements.

Although Quinn does not describe context-specific practices in the way that Chantal does, it does not necessarily mean they are not there. Instead, the different contexts where Quinn reads and writes are more in flux because convenience plays a bigger role in his reading and writing habits than specific settings or preferred devices. What Quinn’s contexts reveal again is that the device used is not the determining factor when it comes to completing a task. For Quinn, what is physically available within time constraints determine how and what he reads and for what period of time. Like Chantal, Quinn favors his cellphone, but makes his choices based on convenience rather than the potential ease of using certain devices to complete tasks.
John’s Reading Environments

John is an example of a student who does not give much thought to his technology use or reading practices—supporting Salvatori and Donahue’s point about student reading awareness. I tried prompting John to talk about his practices, to no avail. For instance, when talking about being more focused while reading print texts, John says, “Usually online I have to keep re-reading it and I’m not sure why.” In a number of instances, John realizes he has unconscious ways of engaging with a text, and notices certain differences across types of reading that are hard for him to explain. When I first asked John about how the time of day factored into his reading, he said, “I think I do most of the reading towards the evenings. I never really thought [that] it had an impact but. . . yeah, I’m not really sure.” I followed up by asking him about whether he used his phone for social media or reading more in the evening, and he said, “Actually I usually do that in the morning soon after I get up. It’s a different time of the day. I’m not sure if that has anything to do with comprehending it but it’s interesting to think about.”

John recognizes that he has different habits, but he cannot articulate their value. Despite saying that he did not really know or had not thought about his different reading practices, he does describe certain behaviors that seem to reoccur. For example, John describes waiting “until the last minute to get homework done” and “never” bringing his laptop to class. He often talks about feeling distracted, having difficulty focusing on assignments and readings he does not find interesting, and using various strategies (like hand-writing notes, putting the laptop away) to help him stay focused. As the interview continues and John thinks more about his reading, some reoccurring behaviors became more apparent.
Like many of the survey participants, John uses his laptop more for completing school reading and writing tasks, and his phone more for social ones: “Ok yah, so usually I do all my homework and study type of stuff on my laptop and then on my phone I usually just look at social media-type of stuff like Snapchat or Twitter and Instagram and once in a while I’ll look something up on the Internet on my phone. But usually all of the Internet stuff I use is through my laptop.” Like Quinn, John relies on convenience when determining what device he will use to read. When talking about textbooks, John states, “I usually buy digital textbooks just ‘cause when I’m doing the homework, the homework is usually through the computer and so it’s easier to just pull up the book online so I can look at both things at the same time instead of looking at the book and then do[ing] the homework.” John says that most of his homework is assigned digitally and some of his textbooks even have online components that necessitate using the e-book and digital devices for completion. John furthermore mentions that online textbooks are cheaper and harder to damage than print textbooks. Rather than indicating a preference for reading in a certain medium, cost and ease take priority when choosing which device he uses.

While John’s early comments about his phone use fail to describe any fiction reading, he later talks about how he “probably read[s] more novels than most people would.” His admission about novel reading comes at the end of our interview, suggesting that the kind of reading he typically associates with digital devices is not fiction. His comment about novel reading also reveals the difficulty associated with a conscious recollection of practices. When talking about fiction reading John says, “I like reading actual books but [. . .] usually the first thing I’ll do is look online and see if I can read it for free, and there’s a lot of PDFs where I can do that, so I read some books online and some books I can find with paper in the library or something that I can get for free.” With free or easily available digital books, John says, “I read it on my phone
actually. I’ll turn it sideways and just scroll down.” Convenience again seems to dictate how and what John reads. When I asked him how reading fiction on his phone was different from a print book, he said “It’s pretty similar to reading books, just the feel’s different. It’s kind of nice that I can read with the lights off and everything and with books you need the light on, obviously. It’s pretty similar comprehending I think because it’s a book I’m interested in.” Like Chantal, when it comes to a book he finds interesting, John does not care what device he uses to read it. What matters more is that he is able to obtain the book inexpensively and that it is something he can easily read (at night with the lights off, for example).

John’s interview highlights certain things that Quinn and Chantal state about convenience and the physical qualities of reading. Rather than talking entirely about what facilitates his reading, John emphasizes some hindrances. The distraction he describes with computers and procrastination makes reading and schoolwork physically more difficult. The cost of a book is another element that makes reading possible—from buying the less expensive e-books to finding free or low cost fiction books, the cost of reading is an important concern, especially when considering that John comes from a family of eight kids. Like the others, John’s physical environment and material factors are essential for how and what he reads.

Logan’s Reading Environments

Logan, who is on a semester-long co-op during the time of our interview, is the only student not actively taking classes. Because he is working full time, his interaction with his digital devices differ slightly from the other interview participants with much less dependence on his laptop, and much more leisure-based reading. Logan often talks about his love of reading and
admits that he is currently working his way through *Les Misérables*. Logan is quite aware of his reading habits and talks a lot about the different ways he uses technology.

More conscious of his reading habits than John and Quinn, Logan discusses how when “reading a physical book, I’d probably be more likely to be on the couch or in bed or somewhere that I can curl up and find a cozy spot to read [as] opposed to if I was reading on the computer, I’d probably be at a table or somewhere I could set my computer without worrying about it falling.” Logan talks about the portability of texts, where a “book you can more or less take anywhere,” and being more likely to read fiction for pleasure in a hard copy, or articles on his phone—something he can easily grab while commuting or juggling between tasks. Similar to Chantal, Logan associates certain environments and technologies with performing particular tasks.

Logan also describes a physical connection to books and is quite aware of their materiality. He talks about buying hard copies of many of his architecture books, imagining how they will fit into a future library. He says, “even at an early age before I could read, I’d take a book to my parents and ask them to read it to me. I think definitely the physical nature is something that either stuck with me and possibly a book seems more permanent. I have books I’ve had since my childhood whereas we’ve gone through as a family 4-5 computers maybe and I’m already planning to replace my laptop. . .” For Logan, who has a deep history and positive memories associated with print-based reading, the materiality of the book is something that encourages him to purchase and use print-based texts, at least for books he plans to read going forward. He uses digital textbooks only when they are inexpensive or about something that he does not plan on returning to later. He says that he prefers print texts partly because “I’m not
really accustomed to [digital reading]. It’s not really a common practice for me.” Logan’s history of reading print texts propels him to continue doing so as he ages.

Like the others, Logan’s interests in a course or subject matter control most of his attention while other coursework is reserved for spare time. The daily coursework demands placed on architecture students are a priority for Logan, which “generally means that I’ll end up pushing off whatever other reading assignments or homework I have until later at night so generally I’m starting to get tired. It depends on the night, it could be 7 or 8, it could also be midnight, 1, 2, or 3, just depending on what all is due the next day.” Logan talks about his architecture courses and labs being more production-based, with courses that deal with the history of architecture or communication or English consisting of lengthier readings. The production-based courses come first, while the other reading is often reserved for the last minute. Like Quinn, the amount of time Logan spends on a task shifts along with the demands of the day. The later it gets into the night, the more Logan describes skimming, “trying to read faster, and definitely picking up less of the material than I would if I was really being attentive to it.” Logan discusses a preference for working when it is light out, which motivates him to try and finish schoolwork during the day so that he is more awake and attentive. Finishing architecture assignments is often his primary goal, after which he turns to skimming for other courses when pressed for time.

Alternatively, Logan’s leisure reading takes place between classes, while on the bus, or commuting. While he does not devote a certain amount of time to leisure reading, he states:

I’m a Cleveland [Indians] fan, so I might sit down and read the recap of last night’s baseball game or whatever. . . if I’m in studio and I just need a quick break, I might just pull it up there and read one or two things and see if there’s anything interesting going
on. . . Sometimes I’ll just read that right before bed just as a way to end the day, just de-
stress a little bit or whatever before bed so I’m not working right up until I go to bed.

Logan uses his phone primarily for these brief check-ins and describes reading short texts often
in spare moments. Further drawing on his history and love of reading, Logan talks about forcing
himself to return to novels like *Les Mis* if he goes a few days without reading lengthier texts.

Like the others discussed above, Logan’s practices are very much embedded in particular
contexts. Being at a co-op means spending less time on his laptop, which is different from the
other students who are immersed in their academic semesters. With the interview participants,
the physicality of print-based texts is affectively based and results in habitual behaviors. Those
who attach emotions to the physicality of the text and grew up loving reading books indicate a
preference for print-based reading. Logan’s history of reading physical books as a child shapes
his adult reading and purchasing habits. Unlike John and Quinn, who describe reading more out
of convenience, Logan goes out of his way to purchase print texts and sees a future for himself
surrounded by print books. Like the others, though, Logan is a student with a busy schedule who
tries to fit his academics around other, more prominent interests. Similar to Quinn, Logan must
find time for his other courses, and often engages in skimming and less attentive reading
practices when he is down to the wire.

These four pictures of students’ various contexts illuminate the extent to which reading
practices are personal, dependent on multiple factors that are based on students’ environmental
conditions and material relationships with reading. We see students like Chantal and Logan, who
value material books, more likely to gravitate towards print when reading, compared to students
like John and Quinn who are more likely to choose devices based out of cost, necessity, or
available time. The fact that these four students use their different devices in multiple contexts
supports the view that reading happens on a continuum and that it is not easy to collapse school
and home reading based on a particular device. As their responses indicate, students often engage
in multiple practices at a given point in time, and their reading choices are often dictated by more
than just preferring a given device to complete a certain task.

**Digital Reading in the Classroom**

As instructors interested in student reading practices, paying attention to what students
are saying about the affordances of print and digital texts can help us structure classroom
assignments that encourage more effective use of reading platforms. For this reason, it is
important to know what students are being assigned, what they are being taught about reading,
and the challenges they face with reading on digital devices in classroom environments.

While the participants in my study describe continuously using laptops and smartphones,
smartphones are still negatively viewed in classroom contexts, with 72% of respondents
indicating phones are either discouraged or banned from use in their classrooms. In comparison,
only 9% indicated they were discouraged from using laptops in class. I imagine that the ban on
smartphones is likely due to the device’s association with distraction. When asked to discuss
their opinions of technology in the classroom in a qualitative survey question, one survey
respondent indicated that it “can be a distraction from lecture or other class activities.” If a
technology is available, it is tempting to multitask using that rather than paying attention to
what’s going on in class. Dan Rockmore’s article in *The New Yorker*, “The Case for Banning
Laptops in the Classroom,” summarizes some of the sentiments expressed by professors across a
number of universities towards technology in the classroom. The consensus he describes is that
laptops are distracting, that students do not pay attention when their laptops are open, and that
there is no benefit of using them for taking notes. Articles like Rockmore’s further perpetuate negative attitudes towards technology use. Powering down in this case is one of the only ways to forcibly control how technology is used.

Beyond being discouraged from using smartphones in the classroom, participants also describe other qualities of phones that make them harder to use. Quinn, in his interview, states, “So I’ve looked up a couple assignments on my phone. I’ve tried to read them but it’s hard sometimes because it’s so little. I normally don’t prefer to read assignments or books or text on my phone because it’s so small. But if I have to, you have to. So if I don’t have my laptop with me I’ll have to do that but I normally prefer to do it on my laptop. Plus it’s faster too.” The smaller screen and difficulty performing multiple tasks at once make phone reading particularly difficult.

Along with finding it difficult to read on smartphones, I was interested in the other reasons why participants found digital reading challenging. I asked survey participants: “Are there any school-assigned materials you’d rather read in print? Please explain your answer.” Participants could choose “yes,” “no,” or “unsure or N/A” and were then given a textbox to explain their answer. Sixteen of the fifty-four respondents, roughly 29%, indicated there were no texts they preferred reading in print—anything digital was fine. For the other 71% of respondents, they had at least one reason for wanting some of their school-based materials to appear in print. I coded the qualitative responses based on four reasons participants articulated for preferring print-based texts (see Table 3.1). There was an additional category if the respondent indicated multiple reasons (see Appendix I for the coding categories). I also included an “Other” category where I placed responses in which (a) the respondent wrote that he or she
just preferred reading print-based texts without a reason or (b) named the genre of text he or she preferred to read in print, without stating why.

Table 3.1
Reasons respondents prefer to read print-based texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annotation</th>
<th>Convenience</th>
<th>Fatigue</th>
<th>Distraction</th>
<th>Multiple Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the majority of respondents who stated that they prefer school-assigned print-based texts, being able to annotate or take notes on a text was the main reason why they prefer reading something in print. This echoes Chantal’s sentiment detailed above about why she prefers reading her pre-med textbooks in print. It is easier because students are more familiar with the note-taking strategies for print texts. Following annotation, convenience was the next reason participants indicate a preference for print. The textual markers of the page, the ease of access, or difficulty using or manipulating digital technologies were the main reasons identified in this category. Finally, fatigue and distraction further represent the challenges of using digital devices: it is hard to look at a screen for long periods of time and equally hard to stay focused on what you are reading with many competing tabs or screens vying for attention. Of the five respondents who indicate multiple reasons in their response, 3/5 indicated both annotation and distraction as their reasons for preferring print-based texts, while 1/5 listed annotation and fatigue, and the other 1/5 named distraction, convenience, and fatigue.

The interview participants further confirm some of the difficulties with digital reading that came up in the qualitative survey responses. When describing his different interactions with print and digital texts, Logan says, “Well if I’m reading a book or a printed handout or something like that, I might highlight an important point or put a sticky note or something in there if I want to come back to it. Even though those things are available on most computer
readers, I find that I generally do that a lot less.” Logan furthermore states that even when reading digitally, he would still be more likely to take hard copy notes to have available in front of him. Logan’s response here is similar to those survey respondents who indicate that they would be more likely to annotate and engage with a text that was printed out. While Quinn admittedly does not have a preference between print and digital reading, he does describe experiencing some of the symptoms of fatigue that others had as well, indicating, “I enjoy [digital reading] as much as reading on a text. The only thing [that] is hard sometimes is if your device is small, then the text will be small and that’s hard sometimes because it strains your eyes.” Accordingly, I am sure that most technology users, like the study participants, have experienced the challenges of reading digitally.

Although participants indicate some difficulties with digital reading, instructors continue to assign digital texts for students to read (see Table 3.2). Of the 56 respondents, all indicate that their instructors make course material digitally available at least sometimes and only two indicate that they never read course material using a digital device.

Table 3.2
Frequency of availability and use of assigned digital course materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do instructors make course material available online?</th>
<th>How often do you use a digital device to read assigned course material?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this means is that 100% of these respondents’ instructors at some point assign them something to read digitally and 96.4% of them read assigned course material using a digital device at least sometimes. The survey participants all confirm some digital reading and e-books
were used in at least some classes. Whether or not the participants prefer the features of digital or print texts, digital reading continues to take place.

Of the types of digital texts instructors most frequently assign (see Figure 3.4), PDFs followed by websites and videos were assigned more often than other types of texts (like e-books, podcasts, or other).

Figure 3.4
Types of digital texts assigned

![Bar chart showing types of digital texts assigned](chart)

While participants chose e-books less than other types of texts, there may have been some confusion about e-books compared to digital textbooks. Participants were asked to choose which of the above types of texts their instructors assign and could choose as many responses that applied to them. There was no specific category, though, for digital textbooks. It might be that participants are assigned digital textbooks, though it is not clear whether e-books were interpreted as the same thing.

Though students are being assigned digital texts to read, their experiences with reading instruction and engagement with digital texts vary. In terms of reading instruction itself, 23% of respondents indicated receiving instructions with specific strategies for reading print-based texts, while 41% indicated receiving specific instruction on reading print and digital texts. However, 23%—almost one quarter of the respondents—indicated that they have never received any
reading instruction. Even though students may not have received specific instruction, they still might engage with texts they read in critical ways. I asked the survey participants how often they engage in particular reading strategies “when reading a text assigned for school using a digital device,” regardless of whether or not they received any reading instruction (Q19). The results in Table 3.3 indicate some inconsistencies with respondents’ use of reading strategies as they range across a spectrum.

Table 3.3
Frequency of reading strategies for texts read using a digital device

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Annotate Text itself</th>
<th>Click on links</th>
<th>Note important info from the text</th>
<th>Search for keywords</th>
<th>Skim before reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking more closely at these results, it seems that the reading strategies are fairly closely divided in terms of those who perform them frequently and those who do not. For instance 20 respondents say they search a text for keywords very often, whereas 18 only do so sometimes. Twelve respondents annotate a text very often, while 13 each sometimes and never do. And 14 respondents each skim a text before reading often, sometimes, and never. The close proximity of these results demonstrates that although students engage in reading strategies like skimming before reading or annotating, there is little consistency in how often or when they use these strategies.

Building on the quantitative data looking at reading strategies, one of the survey questions asked: “Do you read digital texts in the same way whether or not they’ve been assigned for school?” Participants had the option of choosing “yes,” “no,” or “not sure/not
applicable.” The responses were pretty evenly distributed with 19 respondents choosing no, 18 choosing yes, and 18 choosing that they were unsure. The participants were then encouraged to explain their response in a textbox. I used the coding scheme for “Difference” (see Appendix J) to look more closely at the “no” responses to see what differences the participants saw between how they read print and digital texts for school (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5
Reasons for reading differently

![Pie chart showing reasons for reading differently]

Of those responses, the majority indicated paying more attention to school-based texts than they do other digital texts (attention, 36.8%), followed by those who indicated a preference for print-based reading (preference, 26.3%), those who found it difficult to concentrate on school-based reading (lack, 15.8%), and then other (those that did not fully understand or left the answer blank, 21.1%). It is important here that participants noticed that their reading practices for school are different compared to those in other contexts (regardless of whether or not the participant indicates that they pay increased or decreased attention to what they read for school). It is interesting though that almost the same number of respondents report that they do read all digital texts the same as those who misunderstood the question. One of the limitations of a survey is that participants are unable to ask for clarification when questions such as this arise; however, the
uncertainty surrounding this question might point to a larger problem with participants’ understanding of what I meant by “reading” and “knowledge” or awareness of their own reading practices and how they differ. As one participant wrote, “I just read, man.” The challenges here of knowing how we read highlight the complexities of understanding what reading is. The participants’ challenge with defining reading and distinguishing the differences between print and digital reading helps support the idea that reading is a more cognitively complex task than is often represented in the popular media. In the subsequent chapters, I will consider these challenges and more closely explore the opportunities these results present for instructors wishing to forward a pedagogy of reading that takes into account the concerns that students experience.

**Summary**

When it comes to students’ classroom experiences with digital technologies, we see some inconsistencies in terms of reading instruction and engagement with texts. Yet digital reading is—and I imagine will continue to be—a large part of reading in higher education. Of importance is that all students are assigned digital texts to read and all students read using digital devices, even if other research indicates that students prefer print-based texts. Within our classrooms, we need to move beyond concerns of preference to focus on what people are actually doing, paying attention to the problems students face and ways we might solve them. Although participants list some challenges with digital reading, those same physical challenges can emerge with print-based texts and can, with instruction, be avoided.

This chapter also demonstrates that reading practices are not readily visible. We do not often think about the contexts in which we read, though participants often describe context-
specific habits for reading certain texts or for certain types of reading. All four of the interview participants point to environmental and material constraints on their reading practices. These lived factors challenge views of reading that make digital reading appear always the same. The four interviews point to the complexities of reading, suggesting that how and why we read the way we do goes beyond preference, instead drawing on financial, contextual, and habitual factors.

The subsequent chapters will deal with what we can do with this information. If instructors are assigning their students digital texts to read, and students are experiencing certain repeating problems when it comes to reading digital texts, it becomes the responsibility of those instructors interested in pedagogies of reading to help students navigate their digital reading more purposefully. The data outlined in this chapter represents a glimpse of students’ challenges. The following chapter looks specifically at addressing the challenges of reading on digital devices and discusses strategies for making our students’ reading more purposeful.
Chapter Four

Tools for a Pedagogy of Digital Reading

Abandoning reading as a subject worthy of sustained attention and research in the field puts composition instructors in an untenable position wherein, although reading undeniably plays some role in first-year composition, these instructors lack the resources to develop reading pedagogies that will complement their writing pedagogies.

-Ellen Carillo, *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*

The results that I discussed in chapter three indicate a need for greater understanding of what our students do with their digital devices and instruction that better accounts for the wide range of tasks they perform and ways we expect them to read. As digital devices become further integrated into our lives, it is easy to lose sight of the many roles they play. As we work to better understand how our digital devices impact the ways we communicate, compositionists need to consider reading as an integral part of communication. Digital reading, then, needs to be an explicit site of study within our field. Otherwise, we risk being blindsided by new devices that disrupt normative practices—practices that will continue to change. More than just accepting that we use digital devices ourselves—and knowing that our students do as well—we need to think more critically about how we use our devices and the many possibilities they hold. Just because digital devices have become normalized as part of our everyday lives does not mean that we no longer need to cultivate technological and computer literacies. As Cindy Selfe described in 1999, awareness of technological literacy “has led composition faculty only to the point of *using* computers—or having students do so—but not to the point of *thinking* about what we are doing and understanding at least some of the important implications of our actions” (412, emphasis in original). For digital technology users today, it is not enough to use and integrate digital technologies (and digital readings) into our classrooms; it becomes essential to think about the technologies we use and how we might instruct our students to use them in ways that connect
with effective writing and communication. Furthermore, as instructors who are concerned with how our students communicate in digital landscapes, Ellen Carillo’s above call for explicit reading research and instruction becomes even more necessary when thinking about the technological literacies germane to digital device use and assignments. In response, this chapter aims to provide instructors with a theoretical rationale for critical digital reading instruction along with resources that can help them expand their digital reading pedagogies.

Because reading is such an individualized experience, and because digital reading encompasses a wide range of tasks using multiple platforms (from studying an e-textbook on a laptop, to reading a novel on an iPad, to completing a course reading on a cellphone), we cannot assume that all digital reading is the same. Instead of providing students with a one-size fits all approach to reading, we need to give students options that will serve their needs in multiple situations. Furthermore, we need to help cultivate the rhetorical awareness that multiple contexts and ways of reading exist in the first place and that students can choose how they approach and engage with a text. The view of student readers I forwarded in the previous chapter challenges the uncomplicated pictures of readers that make them appear the same in every context or reading scenario. Focusing on digital reading in un-contextualized ways ignores the affordances of different devices or how they are employed in multiple situations.

This chapter will build on my results and consider their implications for compositionists and instructors wishing to implement pedagogies of digital reading. Using the findings from my study as a guide, I will discuss the relationship between genre and context on reading and will offer some specific strategies instructors might adopt as they assign digital readings in their classrooms. Knowing that reading is a complicated endeavour and that readers approach texts using different platforms in different ways, this chapter aims to avoid simplistic or unitary
approaches to reading. Instead, I offer assignments that can help students when reading in a number of situations.

As my results indicate, digital devices—and digital reading—are not going away. Although instructors may ban digital devices in their classrooms (72% of my survey respondents indicated that cellphones were discouraged or banned; and 9% reported discouraged laptop use), it is clear that we cannot stop students from using those devices to read the texts we assign them. All four of the interview participants, and 96% of survey participants, use digital devices to read their assigned course materials at least some of the time. As instructors and researchers, it is necessary to look at digital devices as additive, as having potential for us and for our students. Digital devices are more cost-effective, allow students more mobility, and give them multiple ways to read and compose texts (both individually and collaboratively). There already exist assignments that instructors can offer to help their students become more mindful of their habits and encourage them to read in more purposeful ways. Such approaches used and advocated for by reading scholars, can benefit writing teachers by translating some of their approaches to digital situations (Carillo, Securing; Goldschmidt; Jolliffe and Harl; Manarin; Salvatori). In addition, e-books and digital annotation websites, like Genius (http://genius.com/web-annotator) or Hypothesis.is (https://hypothes.is/), offer potential for collaboration and shared, social reading experiences that can expand classroom conversations in interesting ways. Instead of adding on to the lists of complaints or concerns over how our students read, I maintain that composition researchers and teachers should approach reading in more nuanced ways in order to better understand how our students access and make use of what they read. In the everyday, students thwart morality narratives about what ideal reading looks like (e.g., curled up in a cozy nook, with a print book in hand), challenging literacy instructors to come up with something other than
The disappointment and disenchantment that appear in some reports of reading.

**The Integration of Digital Devices into our Daily Lives**

In a 2009 feature of the *New York Times* blog, Room for Debate, Sandra Aamodt and Maryanne Wolf, along with Alan Liu, David Gelernter, and Gloria Mark each offer their perspectives on digital reading. Coming from different disciplines, their perspectives vary on the benefits and challenges of reading using digital devices, in the midst of distraction, and our capacity for deep and critical thinking. Wolf, a cognitive neuroscientist, fears “that the young brain will never have the time (in milliseconds or in hours or in years) to learn to go deeper into the text after the first decoding, but rather will be pulled by the medium to ever more distracting information, sidebars, and now perhaps, videos (in the new evooks)” (The Editors). Her view is that we are losing our capacity for concentration and that these conditions are getting worse. In her section, Sandra Aamodt explains, while there have been advances in reading technologies to make digital reading easier, paper is still the preferred medium for deep, engaged thinking. In addition, she maintains that “[t]o a great extent, the computer’s usefulness for serious reading depends on the user’s strength of character” (The Editors). Alan Liu, alternatively, uses his research with the Transliteracies Project to argue that, just as we adapt to new technologies, so too should our ideas of what it means to read. Because of the social affordances of digital technologies, he claims that reading is less of a solitary experience; our romanticized views of print-based reading need to be challenged. These various perspectives demonstrate the extent to

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19 The Transliteracies Project is a multidisciplinary, multi campus research group who, between 2005 and 2010, aimed to “study online reading from different perspectives; bring those groups into conjunction behind a shared technology development initiative;” publish software platforms; and train graduate students within “technological, social, artistic, and humanistic disciplines” (Transliteracies Project).
which there is disagreement about the role of technology in our lives, fears about attention and concentration deficits, and definitions of what it means to read and interact with texts. These views also indicate how deeply ingrained the print versus digital divide is in our consciousness. Technology is seen as the catalyst for societal problems rather than as adaptive or part of a larger system of productive changes.

Since the writing of this 2009 piece, the ways we use technology have become even more entwined with our activities of daily living, which constantly call on multiple literacies. The rise of smartphone technology; the creation of visually based social networking sites like Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram; the development of wearable technologies like the Apple and Android smartwatches; and the creation of 3-D printers are just a few technological growths since the late 2000s (Sreenlvasan). Since 2009, digital technologies have become even more interwoven with our lives to the point where they are now physically wearable. The extent to which these devices are central to our lives is only going to increase as will the ways our students use them. We are past a point where we can go back to a time before digital technologies; we need to adapt to the changes around us. My survey participants pointed towards the many ways they use laptops and smartphones continuously on a daily basis. The interview participants offered even fuller pictures of how they use their devices, and showing the large extent to which these technologies are an integral part of their lives.

Although it is undeniable that digital technologies have become integral to our everyday actions, researchers and educators continue to voice concerns over student recall and comprehension using digital devices. While my study did not explicitly test comprehension and recall, both survey and interview participants revealed barriers they faced when studying, including distraction and decreased motivation for reading—barriers that can impact how
students engage with the material they read. The concerns the participants voiced are not particular to a given technology, though, and further research on how students engage with a number of digital devices is needed. Within existing research, there are conflicting views of how well students can recall or remember material read using digital devices. As Anne Niccoli notes in “Paper or Tablet? Reading Recall and Comprehension,” “[r]esearch yields conflicting results in learning between digital and paper reading in part due to advances in technology and design features” (n. pag). Niccoli further states that researchers studying the effects of digital technologies on reading are limited by the quickly changing technologies, particularly within layout and design of websites and digital texts themselves. As a result, there are conflicting studies demonstrating the effects of digital reading on students’ memories and responses. For example, M. Julee Tanner’s “Digital vs. Print: Reading Comprehension and the Future of the Book” summarizes optical, cognitive, and metacognitive studies to look at the comprehension differences between print books, e-books, and downloaded e-books to a computer or phone. Based on existing research, Tanner concludes that “print books are still best suited to the optical cognitive, and metacognitive requirements of the reading brain” (9). The research Tanner outlines is contradictory in some places, with the conclusions of different studies working against each other. Despite the evidence that Tanner cites regarding user preference and increased comprehension with print books, she acknowledges that reading is a learned behavior requiring patience, and that readers need time to learn those skills (6).

In addition, new studies on reader comprehension and recall indicate that the differences between print and digital reading may not be as great as earlier research indicated. Niccoli’s own research studying the tablet reading practices of students at the Coast Guard Leadership Development Center challenge reports that indicate print readers perform far superior in
comprehension and recall compared to digital readers. Niccoli’s experiment on the recall and comprehension of tablet versus paper users in her study challenged both of her hypotheses that paper readers would have higher recall accuracy as well as greater reading comprehension scores. Instead, her “[r]esults did not show a statistically significant difference in group means between paper and tablet readers for either multiple-choice or short answer items.” What this means is that participants reading an article on paper did not “have a statistically significant difference in greater recall accuracy” or “reading comprehension” compared to participants who read the same article using a digital device. However, although there were no statistically significant differences between readers, individual paper readers scored higher for recall and comprehension than did tablet readers. There are a number of factors that Niccoli concludes may have influenced these scores, such as the cognitive demands of memory comprehension and recall being limited with digital devices due to the design and layout of the text on the screen, or environmental factors that may influence students’ memories. Although there are individual differences between readers, these results are important indicators that students can and do use digital devices in ways that are equally as effective as students who continue to read on print.

While comprehension, recall, and memory with reading is certainly important and of concern, for compositionists, understanding how students engage with their readings and make use of source texts is an important area for future research. Reading research should pair with existing studies like the Citation Project\(^{20}\) that look at the different ways students engage with

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\(^{20}\) The Citation Project is “a multi-institution research project responding to educators’ concerns about plagiarism and the teaching of writing” (“What is the Citation Project?” n. pag). The study collected data about how students across institutions use sources in their research and provides a descriptive look at student source use. The data collected from this project “suggests that students’ knowing how to understand and synthesize complex, lengthy sources is essential to effective plagiarism prevention” (“What is”). The Citation Project research is an important
and make use of source material in their writing. For example, Sandra Jamieson uses results from the Citation Project study to argue that “many assumptions driving pedagogy, policy, and curricula need to be revised and that faculty working across the disciplines should work with students on reading and source-use skills” (n. pag). Supported by Citation Project data, Jamieson reveals how frequently students engage with source material in their work through summary or paraphrase compared to patchwriting. She maintains “that it is an error to assume that the goals instructors believe are being fulfilled by reading are actually the goals their students set out to fulfill by reading. This error leads to additional erroneous assumptions about how and why students read, assumptions that obscure the skills and practices that writing courses across the curriculum should be teaching.” Jamieson argues that we need to work more closely with students on their reading to make sure that the connections between research writing and reading are more closely aligned so that students achieve course goals. Within my own classrooms, teaching students effective reading strategies for understanding key points of a text, summarizing source material, and knowing how to use that material to support their own writing takes on far more importance than how well students can recall specific points made in a reading on a test. For this reason, I argue that by giving students multiple ways of reading texts and by encouraging awareness of how they read, they can gather the necessary tools for making reading decisions that best suit them in particular situations.

Students already are using their digital devices in complex ways every day. The varied ways my study participants make use of their technologies challenges simplistic views of the ever-distracted technology users described in media reports on reading. Rather than assuming the indicator of how reading and writing practices are interrelated and how effective reading is a necessary part of effective writing.
worst of ourselves and of our students, I maintain that we need to acknowledge and provide assignments that complement the many types of reading readers perform. It is not just technologies that are continuing to change but the ways readers engage with technologies are also in flux. Especially when considering digital technologies, nothing about our reading practices are static. It is important for instructors and researchers to consider the fluidity of our practices when offering reading strategies to students in their classrooms. The following sections will consider the different contexts and changing situations that influence the reading practices of my study participants and provide assignments that can be used to create a rhetorical awareness of different reading contexts, which can encourage engaged and purposeful digital reading.

How Genres (and Contexts) Relate to Digital Reading

One of the themes that emerged through the interviews was context-specific reading behaviors of the participants. What is furthermore apparent is that these behaviors are individualized depending on the reader him or herself. Because of the replicable, recurrent, and socially influenced nature of reading, genre theory provides a useful framework for how we interpret the specific ways participants read. Instead of being able to generalize how participants respond to situations, my conversations with Logan, John, Quinn, and Chantal reveal that each performs unique genre-specific actions depending on why, where, when, and what they are reading.

Each of the participants I interviewed demonstrated patterns of interaction with the texts they read—interactions that changed as did the contexts and purposes of their reading. For example, consider how Chantal needed a comfortable, quiet space for her pleasure reading, and used both print and digital devices to read novels. Alternatively, when studying, Chantal needed
an uncomfortable, quiet environment with bright lights. These two ways of her reading are connected with context and purpose in which the reading takes place. Chantal knows how to maximize her time and either enjoy what she is doing (with the novels) or maintain productivity when studying for school. These patterns of behaviour depend more on the goals of her reading than on the device she is using. As described in chapter three, all four of the interview participants display their own patterns of reading, depending on the situation, available devices, allotted time, and other contextual factors.

I return here to Amy Devitt’s components of genre as I consider how genres function within the contexts in which my study participants were reading: Genres involve “typified action” and that “typification comes from recurring conditions, and [. . . ] those conditions involve a social context” (13). What Devitt describes here is how genres dictate our interactions with the world. Within social situations, recurring conditions influence how people read and the actions they take as they respond to and understand texts. These actions are both individual and social, as people use their previous interactions in the world to structure their responses to new situations. Although there are differences between the ways that Chantal, Quinn, John, and Logan read and engage with digital material, each of them demonstrates behaviors that reoccur in certain situations, ones that are heavily embedded within social contexts.

The recurring nature of social contexts is an important factor for determining the ways we respond to a variety of generic situations. As Devitt explains, “If each writing problem were to require a completely new assessment of how to respond, writing would be slowed considerably, but once a writer recognizes a recurring situation, a situation that others have responded to in the past, the writer’s response to that situation can be guided by past responses. Genre, thus, depends heavily on the intertextuality of discourse” (15). What Devitt explains here about a writer’s
responses to texts can be applied to how readers interact with the texts they read. Readers rely on
generic cues as they approach new texts and use those to determine how to act. Quinn, for
instance, when asked to talk about his digital reading, described typified actions in situations
where he has been asked to read, saying, “[s]o I guess the act of reading would be reading it and
applying it to something you’ve been told to do. So if you were going to read an e-mail or pay a
bill online or view an assignment or read an e-book or something online and then apply it to an
assignment you have, I think that would be the act of reading.” His response connects reading to
the actions that follow. His experiences with reading, especially as someone who does not read
for pleasure, dictate that when he reads it usually requires the initiation of some sort of response.
His reading is meant to accomplish a goal. Quinn’s past experience with reading this way leads
him to believe that in future situations, when he reads, he should pay attention to ways of
responding. His experience with reading is guided generically by previous contexts, yet is unique
compared to how someone like Chantal approaches reading.

While each of these students describe context-specific reading patterns, it is Chantal and
Logan who are most aware of how the material conditions of their reading affect what and how
they read. For example, Chantal’s description of reading on her iPad highlights the physicality of
her reading experience:

Usually I’m usually in my bed or I’m sitting down at a table because I want to be able to
rest my hands because I don’t want to have to hold it up the whole time because the
devices kind of get heavy after a couple of hours of holding them. I’m not even usually
listening to music or drinking or eating or anything else. When I’m absorbed in my
recreational books, I literally don’t do anything else for hours. I will sit and read.

The physical attributes of the text are important to Chantal, who will get lost in a text for
extended periods of time. Not having to bother with a heavy book ensures that she can accomplish that type of reading task. Logan also talks about how his daily rituals and contexts change his interactions with texts. While in classes at UC, Logan’s laptop took on a prominence it lacked when he went to Houston to work. Because it was no longer his primary device for getting work done, the laptop took on a secondary function outside of school. The ways that both of these students describe their interactions with the texts they read and devices they use to read point to the importance of the social environment, material aspects of texts, and recurring situations they are part of as they read and write daily. Their behaviors are typified and it is the context surrounding them that helps them determine what device they use, when, and why.

For many students, though, such behaviors may not be readily apparent. Often our practices become unconscious as our devices become more integrated, and it is easy to continue on without questioning what we do. Especially students, like Quinn and John, whose behaviors are not immediately conscious, may require additional prompting or time to consider the ways that their actions are shaped by numerous factors. In cases like Quinn’s and John’s, the convenience of whatever is available becomes a more prominent factor than an awareness of how they might read or engage with a text while using a device. By helping students become more aware of why they make the choices they do, we might better assist them in making decisions that are more purposeful given the needs of different situations.

As the participants respond in unique ways to recurring situations, this challenges the view of what a ‘typified response’ looks like. When it comes to reading for school, while students like Chantal may meticulously read and mark the pages of her textbook, others like Quinn gravitate towards whatever device he can use to access his texts, waiting until the last minute to read, with attention pulled in multiple directions. As Devitt notes, “people can create
and alter genres; that process too reveals the integration and interdependence of genre and situation” (23). As students bring their individual experiences and interactions with texts to social situations, they come to alter and affect how they read. These actions are not always what instructors might consider ‘ideal’. What determines whether something is the ‘typified response’ to a text? What happens when the typified action—such as skimming texts for a course—is not the one that is most ideal in that situation? As the survey participants indicated, there are a number of strategies readers use and a variety of ways they approach texts. Although, as instructors, our ideal typified response in our classrooms may be for students to engage in critical reading, analysis, and synthesis of the texts we assign, both experience and research suggest that those skills are not the default mode in which many students operate (Jamieson “Reading”). In situations where students are responding in different ways to readings or failing to critically engage with them, it is necessary from a pedagogical standpoint to showcase what exactly we mean by reading and help students alter the practices they typically use.

Within genre theory, recurring situations combine both societal and individual expectations of how we should properly act. Devitt’s genre theory furthermore discusses how individual experience of recurring genres get translated into larger recurring actions that are typical of others beyond the single writer: “Preexisting genres are part of what enable individuals to move from their unique experiences and perceptions to a shared construction of recurring situation and genre” (20). Unique experiences combine with typical responses in social situations to help writers and readers know how to act. The interview participants similarly reveal how their experiences repeat from those in the past. Quinn’s typical actions regarding his level of interest are one feature of his unique interactions with what he reads: “... if I don’t really care then I’ll just kind of skim through it, I probably won’t pay attention as much but if it’s something
I need to do I’ll read it word for word and take notes but if it’s just like spam or e-mail that I know I can trash, I just get rid of it right away but if it’s something I need to know I’ll read it all the way through and I’ll write notes and things.” Like the students in the survey, Quinn’s response indicates that he skims or disregards things he “doesn’t really care” about. Quinn’s description of skimming behaviour with texts he does not care about is typical of students who do not immediately see the benefit of reading within their classrooms.

While some students like Chantal and Logan were highly aware of what is effective for them, most students are not as conscious. For many students, apathy is more the typical reaction to classroom readings. Alice Horning describes the difficulty her students have with reading, stating that “. . . students don’t read assigned material, regardless of consequences and that students won’t read it unless faculty use some inducement that will have a major impact on students’ grades in the course; moreover the faculty often observe that students can’t read in the ways faculty expect, even if a carrot or stick is attached to the reading” (Reading 1). Within a classroom, when the reading is potentially something that the student “doesn’t care” about, it is important that they at least know strategies for reading the text effectively. Yet, in classroom situations, unless students have been taught specific ways of reading or expectations for digital reading within a classroom, how can we expect them to act any differently? If instructors are expecting certain behaviors of their students, they need to be willing to state their expectations and model effective reading practices. The following sections will describe approaches to digital reading that can benefit all student readers—not just ones like Logan and Chantal who are already aware of their reading and their most effective practices.
Digital Reading Instruction

One of the potential challenges facing instructors wishing to implement reading pedagogies into their classrooms is not knowing how to do-so or what resource to use. Drawing from her own survey of reading in the composition classroom, Carillo illustrates that the instructors she researched “largely believe that they lack the training and the theoretical framework to teach reading effectively” (Securing 12). Turning towards the field of composition at large, Carillo furthermore states that when reading is discussed, it is largely concerned with which types of texts should be taught. She notes that “composition scholars spend time focusing on reading as a noun—rather than on reading as a verb, as a practice or process” (7). While the instructors she surveyed did indicate that reading instruction was part of their pedagogical focus, instructors lacked the confidence to know if they were doing-so effectively. Encouraging reading as a pedagogical focus, Carillo also argued for “the need to reanimate discussions of reading in the field because, although the writing instructors [she] surveyed are committed to teaching reading, they are doing so—by their own admission—without adequate support or resources from their graduate training, professional development, or current research and scholarship from the field” (16). It is necessary to provide instructors support for reading instruction and then in turn give them ways to talk more purposefully about digital reading with their students.

Within my study, the participants reported inconsistencies with digital reading instruction that support Carillo’s claim that instructors are not teaching reading strategies consistently. Instructors, too, might lack the knowledge to guide reading instruction in purposeful ways (Securing). As I described in the results chapter, 41% of the participants reported receiving reading instruction with both print and digital texts, 23% reported receiving reading instruction with print-based texts, yet another 23% reported receiving no reading instruction whatsoever.
While it is positive that nearly 65% of respondents receive some reading instruction, it is troubling to know that digital reading instruction is not emphasized enough compared to the extent to which digital texts are being assigned. Especially since, as the survey demonstrated, all of the participants are at least sometimes assigned digital texts, instruction on how to read those texts—even print-based PDFs—is necessary to help them become more purposeful readers.

Beyond just providing students with strategies for their digital reading, it is furthermore necessary that we account for the challenges that all students face with reading—regardless if the reading takes place in print or digitally. Twenty-nine of the survey respondents reported preferring to read school assigned texts in print for reasons like being able to annotate the text (n = 8), convenience or habit of reading in print (n = 7), feeling fatigued (n = 5) or distracted (n = 4) with digital devices, or a combination of these reasons (n = 5). While the respondents linked these factors to digital devices, these challenges of readings are just as prominent with print-based reading. For instance, for students who have not had experience or instruction in textual annotation, annotating anything at all becomes a challenge. Issues of fatigue and distraction often present themselves when reading, particularly if students are not engaged or interested in the course material. These concerns are not just with digital devices, but with print ones too.

The assignments that I describe in the following sections ask students to focus on the various habits they undertake in different contexts to make them more aware of their reading practices. Instead of associating the challenges students face with one medium or another, making students aware of how they read, where they read, and what they do as they read any text—both print and digital—can help them address some of the challenges they face when needing to concentrate or critically read different texts.
Assignments and Activities

There already exist several excellent examples of purposeful reading strategies instructors might employ in their classrooms. For example, Karen Manarin had students in her class complete reading logs, drawing from models by Cathy Collins Block and Gerald G. Duffy. Manarin’s students’ reading logs allowed her to see which strategies the students defaulted to (often relating the text to their own experiences) and adjusted the class readings as a result as to encourage different strategies as they read (294). Within the January 2016 issue of *Pedagogy*, focused on the “return to reading,” there are a number of articles that offer assignments and strategies to improve student reading. For instance, Carillo’s article explores how teaching using a “mindful reading” framework can promote transfer of reading knowledge beyond the first-year classroom (“Creating”); alternatively, Elizabeth Kalbfleisch theorizes how the rhetorical concept of *imitatio* functions as a pedagogical technique for reading instruction. Complementing this work on student reading, I believe that having students think more purposefully about the different ways they read in a number of contexts can help them become more effective in their practices.

In the section that follows, I describe three reading-based assignments that build on student reflexivity and mindfulness. Each of these assignments and approaches to reading emphasize that because reading is an individual process, it is necessary for readers to become aware of their own actions in different situations. The assignments furthermore acknowledge that there are multiple ways of reading texts and that depending on different situations, different strategies might be more appropriate to use than others. The genre-based digital reading activity has students read genre theory and apply it to understand how genres might shape their interactions with texts. Genre awareness can help students determine which ways of reading
might better serve their purpose depending on the context. The second assignment, Reading Selfie, makes visible the different environments where students read so that students may more critically examine the reading that takes place in those settings. Finally, this chapter offers an assignment on digital annotation that gives students opportunities to practice marking up digital readings in classroom settings.

**Genre and Digital Reading**

As I described in the previous section, our students are already engaging in genre-specific behaviors when they read and compose the texts we assign. Yet, if the go-to action of reading seems to be skimming and scanning as Horning has indicated, students may not be consciously aware that a professor’s expectations are different from the ones they use in other settings. If students are to engage in more purposeful and critical reading of texts, instructors need to model what those acts look like and make clear what their expectations are for students. Genre theory can offer one approach to making reading more purposeful.

A genre-based approach to digital reading might begin by asking students to think critically about the ways they currently approach the texts they read and how their reading practices might differ depending on the situation in which they read those texts. Prompting students to consider what they read in a given day and what they do as they read is one way to get them to begin that work. For example, we might ask our students to make a list of all the texts they read daily and comment on what they do as they read some of those texts. Do they take notes? Do they read all of the text on the screen? Do they click on the links? Getting students to

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21 This section is taken in part from my article “A Genre-Based Approach to Digital Reading” published in the 16.1 issue of *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture* (Morris).
become more self-aware of their reading practices and encouraging them to question the habits they have developed is one way to challenge the view of singular and typified reading styles across contexts.

After analyzing their own practices, students could read and engage with genre theories, like those of Devitt or Anis Bawarshi, to get a framework for how genres involve actions that go beyond a basic classification system. After students analyze and interpret both genre theory and how they read different texts, the next step in the process would have them practice reading a text within the context of classroom requirements. Beyond getting students to recognize that different genres, contexts, and situations exist, instructors should model how they expect the texts they assign to be read for the particular learning situation. For example, in a digital composition class I taught in spring 2013, I asked students to read blog posts rhetorically for an understanding of how the writer used color, font, and design to create a particular aesthetic with the site. Before they performed this analysis, we read Anne Frances Wysocki’s “The Multiple Media of Texts” and discussed how design elements are used in websites to achieve a particular effect. Together, we went through a website to examine and discuss its design features before I asked the students to perform a similar analysis on their own. Asking my students to read for design effectiveness is different from asking them to analyze and perform a close reading of the content posted onto that site. Students will understand what I am asking when I ask them to “read” a website only if I make those expectations clear to them in the classroom situation.

A possible assignment using this genre theory approach would first ask students to read work on genre by Bawarshi. They would then choose a text they read daily, and map out the contextual factors of the genre such as the purpose for reading the text and the different responses they are expected to perform. Following this mapping, the students could write about
how the genre changes along with any changes to the relational components. Students could then reflect on how a genre they are familiar with already, like Facebook, changes in a different context, such as when they are asked to analyze a particular component, like relationship status updates, for a class. How does their own role as agent change when they move from writer to researcher? What do the different purposes entail? How do they read the status updates in a different way when they are looking for certain pieces of information? Asking students to think reflectively about how their engagement with genres changes as contexts change is one way to have them think more critically, using the language of genre analysis. While this assignment makes explicit the connection between particular texts and the contexts in which they are to be read, the following assignment has students look at their practice more broadly, analyzing how larger contexts affect the ways they read.

*Reading Selfies*

Many reading theorists have highlighted the importance of mindfulness and self-awareness when it comes to reading instruction. For example, Carillo’s approach to ‘mindful reading’ emphasizes self-awareness, as do textbook chapters like in Lisa Ede’s *The Academic Writer*. Mindful reading, for Carillo, “is best understood as a framework within which various reading approaches fit, approaches such as rhetorical reading, close reading, and critical reading” (*Securing* 19). Mindful reading is furthermore “a method of engagement characterized by rhetorical adaptability that supports students as they deliberate, reflect on, and practice a range of reading approaches that first-year instructors help students to cultivate” (19). A mindful reading approach does not rely on one prescribed model or method of reading instruction but makes students aware of the different situations where they read and the needs of those particular
scenarios. Adopting this mindful reading approach, the assignment I describe next makes visible the different situations where reading takes place and gives students opportunities to build on what they are currently doing.

To capitalize on the contextual aspects of students’ reading, instructors should offer assignments that make students’ habits visible and encourage a sense of mindfulness towards the ways they read in different situations. As my conversation with John in particular demonstrated, students are not always self-aware about the ways they read, thus sometimes need to be reminded that they are making choices in the ways they act. Rather than taking ways of reading for granted, the Reading Selfie assignment makes visible different scenes of reading in a way that encourages more overt reflection. As a result of making students aware of their reading, instilling a sense of mindfulness in students ensures that their actions are purposeful and gives them agency to make decisions about what reading strategies are more or less appropriate in future situations. Carillo’s framework of mindful reading stresses the self-aware nature of the task and charges instructors with “helping students recognize, understand, and anticipate their relationship to reading in a range of contexts and how that relationship changes depending on whether the context is an English or biology class…” (Securing 111). Within these different contexts, students are given a chance to look at which practices are most effective and reflect on which contexts their relationship with reading might work differently. Mindful reading, for Carillo “compels students to imagine a reciprocal relationship between themselves and any given context within which they read and compels them to reflect on that relationship” (111).

The “Reading Selfies,” assignment considers what Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue note as the importance of reflection on the reading process, which helps students become better readers and us become better instructors (“Tracing” 83). The Reading Selfie
assignment gives students an opportunity to look at multiple ways they read and interact with texts on a daily basis, asking them to consider various contextual factors that influence the choices they make. This type of assignment goes beyond the single-choice answers (like cost, convenience, or preference) often asked in reading surveys (Baron), and instead highlights more of the complexities that surround our daily reading and writing habits. Asking students to capture the physical environments where they read is one way to literally make visible the spaces and contexts in which reading occurs. This assignment would have students consider how the contexts (locations, times of day, moods, emotions, devices used, texts under consideration) in which they read impact their reading practices.

After reading several articles that chronicle changes to ways of reading, students would be asked to reflect on their own reading processes. The “Reading Selfies” assignment asks students to periodically throughout their day stop what they are doing and take an image of their reading environment. Students would then be asked to caption the image using some sort of descriptor that makes visible their reading practices at that particular moment in time and that would jog their memory when looking at that photo later on. The students could then collect and share these images with each other using a class hashtag (#) on social media like Twitter or Instagram or on a class blog or website. From this, a reflective writing assignment might ask students:

In a 3-5 page (1050-1750 word) reflective essay, write about yourself as a reader and

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22 In the condensed summer semester when I taught this assignment, I had students read Naomi Baron’s *PLMA* article “Re-defining Reading” and listen to a WNYC Note to Self podcast on reading and technology (“‘Bi-Literate Brain” and “There’s Just Something About Paper”). In a full semester form, I would add on to the different texts students are given that focus on reading including Lisa Ede’s chapter on reading from *The Academic Writer*, as well as reports on reading from different media sources and studies (such as the National Endowment for the Arts report on the state of reading compared to Anne Niccoli’s research on recall and reading comprehension).
discuss your reading habits and practices using your reading selfies as a guide. Include the images in your essay—along with a paragraph that describes each of the images—and use those images to make some conclusions about yourself as a reader and your reading practices. In addition to your own thoughts about your specific practices, I’d like you to compare your reading experience to those depicted in [the texts we read as a class]. How do your own reading practices challenge or complement the research presented throughout this module?

Beyond the students writing reflections themselves, in class, the collection of reading selfies could spark a larger discussion of the reading trends students notice about the current practices they like and what they might do differently going forward. I taught this assignment for the first time in a condensed 4-week online course in summer 2015 and found that the students’ responses caused them to question their practices and think more critically about the impacts of their physical environments on the reading (and writing) they produce for school, their jobs, and socially.

I believe that an assignment like this has a lot of potential for getting students to recognize both the personal aspects of their reading and the larger social influences that recurring situations, environments, and materials have on their practices. Getting our students to recognize their practices and how they change in different situations is one of the first steps in having them become more aware of how they read, learning that they need to shape their reading to fit the demands of the context. Salvatori and Donahue, in their research on reading, highlight the importance of student awareness of their practices since, “as difficult and counterintuitive [as] it is for readers—especially student readers—to get inside their reading while or after performing it, the work of introspection necessary to do so can indeed teach our students how they read and
teach us how they read, and how to read them as well” (“Tracing” 83). Assignments like the Reading Selfie one are one way that we can get our students to start doing this type of introspective work.

Digital Annotation

Already digital annotations have been helpful for both readers and writers interested in engaging with digital texts. Leigh Meredith’s blog post on the Digital Rhetoric Collaborative reviews “the pedagogical affordances of digital annotation” by analyzing Andrew Kahn’s annotated edition of Herman Meleville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener.” In his version of “Bartleby,” Kahn tags annotations so that readers can filter or search them based on themes within the text. Through her review, Meredith examines the affordances of digital annotations for those reading previously annotated works. Meredith, in reviewing Kahn’s webtext, asks, “what kind of reading experience and engagement do texts like these, in their already annotated state, engender?” One of the benefits of turning towards scholarly texts that are already annotated, is that “it illustrates how annotations can overcome some of those barriers to readerly engagement [. . .] by providing context and commentary” (Meredith). The public nature of annotations can highlight multiple potential readings of a work, challenging the view of a singular, correct response. Alternatively, a challenge to reading already annotated texts is that much of the cognitive work of making contextual and historical comparisons has already been completed for the reader. To further open her own review to the types of engagement possible with annotation, Meredith allows readers to comment and annotate her review of Kahn’s work. The real benefit though is for students creating their own annotations of the texts they read. Meredith writes: “Ultimately this text—when approached as process rather than product—models how students might do just that.
Digital annotation tools, like Genius and Hypothes.is, can help students engage with and demonstrate both a close and contextual reading process, threading together textual observations with their own research from literary criticism and historical sources.” From Meredith’s perspective, taking the time to digitally annotate a literary text can be an incredibly useful experience for helping students with close reading, along with making necessary connections between the various contexts when a text was created.

Throughout my data, interacting with texts was one practice that both interview and survey participants noted as important to their reading comprehension. The survey reported some inconsistencies with the number of participants who identified using digital annotation in their reading. Of the survey participants, half (n = 27) reported annotating digital texts very often or often, while close to the other half (n = 26) indicated doing-so only sometimes or never. When identifying challenges of reading using digital devices, difficulty interacting or annotating texts often came up as one of the primary issues. Part of the problem with digital annotations might be a lack of knowledge about the technologies themselves or what types of apps are available. Furthermore, if students are not given opportunities to practice digital annotations, when asked to do-so, it will feel as foreign and uncomfortable as any new task does. Asking students who are unaccustomed to critical reading practices will necessarily find these tools difficult at first. Yet, it is necessary to continue encouraging students and giving them opportunities to try out new practices. As Salvatori and Donahue note, “when carefully guided rather than left to chance, annotation can work as a record of reading and a site of reflexivity” (“Tracing” 82). Because of the importance of annotation for reading comprehension and recall, giving students opportunities to ‘write’ on digital readings is one way we can make use of the affordances of digital devices to increase student learning.
If instructors assign students text-based PDFs, because students use digital devices to read them, they need different strategies as they interact with those texts. Even if students are reading print-based texts on digital devices, both Carillo and my survey indicate that “print-based reading still plays a large role in classrooms, a point corroborated by the first-year writing instructors [she] spoke to . . .” (Securing 15). Along with assigning linear, text-driven readings, I realize that “the traditional elements of print-based literacy remain crucial to the new literacies and will not be replaced by them” (15). However, because students read linear, print-based texts using digital devices, they require reading and annotation strategies that draw on the interactive possibilities of digital texts. If students like Quinn and John are reading assigned texts using any available device like laptop or cellphone, they need to know how they can engage with those texts in ways that are as effective as traditional annotation techniques. Furthermore, giving students specific instruction on digital annotation use can provide them with strategies to use in other contexts while also adding to their repertoire of both digital and print-based reading strategies.

There currently exist a number of text annotation apps and websites23 that help readers engage more fully with digital texts in ways that we do with print-based ones. These programs allow users to mark up text-based files like books, PDFs, Microsoft Office documents, and HTML files that are shared and uploaded to sites like Dropbox and Google Drive. The free, open-sourced, web-based platform hypothesis.is is one example of a site that “leverages annotation to enable sentence-level critique or note-taking on top of news, blogs, scientific

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23 iAnnotate, GoodReader, and PDF Expert are all Apple-based programs that allow users to import, mark up, annotate, sync and share digital files using cloud storage. Both Diigo and Google Drive are web-based applications that are not limited to a particular platform where users can share and comment on one another’s files.
articles, books, terms of service, ballot initiatives, legislation, and more” (“About Us”).

Hypothesis.is is the site that Meredith uses for the annotations on her review. Beyond that, Casey Boyle’s class-based annotations of a chapter from James J. Brown Jr.’s *Ethical Programs: Hospitality and the Rhetorics of Software* showcases what Hypothesis.is’ annotations can look like (Brown). Hypothesis.is and many similar applications have highlighters, sticky notes, tabs, and other tools that provide users customized experiences to allow them to engage with texts in ways they find most comfortable. In addition, there are also a number of programs and websites that also allow for annotation and commenting on digitally based multimodal texts like audio files or videos. Making use of the available tools for commenting on Audacity or on webpages with sites like Genius can give students opportunities for talking back and engaging more closely with multimodal content like video, podcasts, or images—content that is typically assigned for consumption, not interaction.

Instructors assigning digital and multimodal texts should become familiar themselves with these types of technologies, and provide multiple opportunities for their students to experiment with and use them. As Charles Moran and Anne Herrington note in their chapter on assessing digital compositions that “the best source [for assessment] is teachers’ actual practice, directly observed” (n. pag). Before being able to assess digital compositions—or I would add,

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24 Hypothesis.is has easy to follow instructions (“Getting Started”) along with a blog that contains many articles with ideas for using the service in different classroom and group settings (“Blog”). Jeremy Dean, the Director of Education for the site, also has an article on the blog, “10 Ways to Annotate with Students,” that provides ideas for using annotation as close reading, rhetorical analysis, to answer questions, among other means of using the site.

25 For example, the web-based program Genius, allows users “to add line-by-line annotations to any page on the internet” (“Web Annotator”). While users cannot comment on videos themselves, they can take advantage of annotating existing webpages and content, potentially looking towards the multimodal elements of a site. Audacity, a free and open source audio recording and editing application also has options for annotating files by adding comments to the files themselves.
digital reading— instructors themselves must be aware of their own interactions with digital devices and self-assess their own practices. In terms of digital annotation, then, it is up to instructors to first learn how to use the different technologies and become aware of how they work, to offer students the most comprehensive picture of the tools available to them.

The assignment I describe in this section employs digital annotation programs to give students opportunities to practice using these technologies. I would begin the class having students write reflectively about their own annotation practices and then assign a text like Karen Rosenberg’s “Reading Games” to introduce new approaches they might not use. We would furthermore look at previously-annotated pages (like Meredith’s review or Boyle’s class annotations) to talk about the potentials of group annotation. As a class, after discussing different annotation strategies students use already and introducing an annotation program, this assignment would ask students to read and annotate one article (or multimodal text) for homework in small groups. Because many digital annotation programs, especially Hypothesis.is, encourage group collaboration, the students could see each other’s posted comments. Returning to class, we could further discuss and reflect on note taking practices, focusing on what the students found important to highlight, ultimately making reading a more visible, social experience.

If students are lacking the genre-based knowledge of what a ‘typified’ way of interacting with readings looks like, this activity showcases that there are different approaches to reading and that different ways of interacting with texts highlights or obscures different aspects of a reading. This activity brings to light the differences between student practices—allowing them to observe what one another writes—while also giving students opportunities to try digital annotation programs. The reflexivity that students employ with this activity complements the genre-based and Reading Selfie assignments described above.
Conclusion

As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, instructors who lack the resources for developing reading pedagogies often feel unequipped for doing so in their classrooms. This chapter offers instructors assignments and tools that can make digital reading a more purposeful, engaging experience. My dissertation research has emphasized that students use multiple devices to read and engage with a number of texts in ever-changing scenarios. The three assignments I describe here can provide students greater insight into their reading practices in order to allow them to more mindfully engage with texts in different contexts. Furthermore, the tools for digital annotation and collaborative note-taking activities can make reading a more social experience and make student reading practices more visible. Both students and instructors can benefit from becoming familiar with digital annotation technologies, particularly if they are reading texts on digital devices.

This self-aware approach to reading aligns with theorists researching mindful reading and transfer to contexts beyond the writing classroom (Carillo, Securing; Horning, “Reading”). As students become more aware of their reading, the next step is to help them transfer this awareness to the writing they produce. If students are aware of what their practices look like in different environments, this self-awareness can lead to reflection on the writing practices that often follow the readings they do. While my study did not focus on the relationship between digital reading and digital writing, that line of study would prove useful for looking at how digital readings are employed in the writing classroom and what possibilities exist for a pedagogy that considers both reading and writing as necessary steps of the composing process. Particularly if students struggle with source use and research writing, as the Citation Project
suggests (Jamieson), looking explicitly at the connections between student reading and writing is necessary for cultivating effective communication. The assignments discussed in this chapter offer several options for bringing reading and writing practices to the forefront of the writing classroom. Going forward, the concluding chapter will further consider what other avenues for future research exist building off of the digital reading research I performed. In particular, the concluding chapter will discuss how reading research can benefit from considering disabilities studies, as well as scholarship on materiality, emotion, and embodiment. A contextual framework of reading must focus even greater attention on reading as a physical process and further consider the material components of scenes of reading. In addition, the conclusion will explore the limitations of my research and consider new methods for studying the ways that students read.
Conclusion

Conclusions on the Material/Embodied Contexts of Digital Reading

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that we need a more expansive picture of digital reading that better accounts for the complex ways we read and interact with digital devices. Instead of assuming that digital readers are perpetually distracted or inattentive, I have demonstrated that readers use digital devices in many complex ways as they communicate. Using genre theory as a lens, I explored this position by surveying and interviewing undergraduate students about their reading practices. As I completed this research, what I discovered is just how much is involved with reading and how much more there is left to explore to fully understand how people read. I believe that this research only begins to explore the complexities of digital reading. In this chapter, I will summarize the findings of my research and discuss the benefits and limitations of the mixed methods approach I employed. Reading as an area of research appeals to a broad range of disciplines and there is much to learn from how researchers in disciplines like psychology, education, marketing and consumer research, and human computer interaction, to name a few, study reading practices. While I decided to explore reading primarily through the lens of context and genre for this dissertation, there are other theoretical lenses that provide alternative insights into reading. In particular, I will discuss what materialist, affective, and disability frameworks can offer researchers and point toward some potential avenues for future reading research with those perspectives as foci.

To study reading, I relied on qualitative and quantitative research methods. I learned a lot about how students at the University of Cincinnati use digital devices for reading in different contexts as a result of this mixed-methods approach. Building on the broad and narrow picture of readers I describe, future researchers might take advantage of visual methodologies to look more
closely at the impacts of physical environments and bodily practices of readers as they use digital devices. I believe that by going beyond self-reported practices to examine what students actually do as they read, researchers can become attuned to reading as a physical process involving more than the reader and his or her text, whatever its medium. Reading researchers could benefit from using eye tracking technologies and photographic resources to capture the physicality of reading. Because reading is a physical and embodied process, future research must consider both the environments of reading as well as the bodily processes of readers as they interact and engage with digital devices and the texts they read.

Within composition studies this past year, there have been several high profile discussions about reading practices. For example, for several weeks in January 2016, e-mails circulated over the Writing Program Administrators Listserv (WPA-L) about “getting students to read” (Carbone); *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* sent out a call in February 2016 for a forthcoming special issue on reading in the writing center (Ambrose); *Pedagogy*’s January 2016 specially themed issue focused on reading; and recent issues of *College English* (January 2016) and *College Composition and Communication* (June and December 2015) each had several articles centered on reading (Enoch and VanHaitsma; Robillard; Sweeney and McBride; Trimbur). As Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue wrote in their “Guest Editors’ Introduction” to the *Pedagogy* special issue, “Of course, over the years reading has always been ‘there,’ whether ‘there’ is in the classroom or the book or the journal or the Internet. Recently, [. . . on the WPA-L], several have forcefully stated that yes, of course reading has to be taught, of course reading cannot be taken for granted, of course students can only improve as writers when they improve as readers” (2). Salvatori and Donahue’s perspective, along with those in recent books (like Horning and Kraemer’s edited collection *Reconnecting Reading and Writing*, and
Carillo’s *Securing a Place for Reading and Composition* and journals, emphasize that studying and teaching reading is necessary for compositionists who we can approach the subject in myriad ways. This dissertation outlines a complementary perspective to current conversations on reading within the field by focusing explicitly on digital reading and making a case for bringing digital reading instruction into the writing classroom. As conversations around reading in our discipline continue, we need theories and pedagogical approaches that reflect our contemporary moment and support the many literacies we all employ.

To address the need for further reading research in the field, my dissertation examines the different ways students interact with digital devices in their daily lives. I uncovered the often complementary ways that digital devices are used for both reading and writing. I maintain we need to move beyond the simplistic view of technologies as the cause of student reading problems. Instead, it is necessary to recognize that we read in a number of different ways, no matter which device or medium we use to read. By seeing the additive potential of digital devices, our students can become more rhetorically savvy participants in their technology use, rather than passive consumers or uncritical users of their technologies. It is clear, based on my research, that digital devices are not going away, so rather than arguing for a return to a simpler or less digital time, we should try and understand how people use digital devices and capitalize on their affordances. Rather than prescribe ‘how to’ approaches to reading, the assignments I discuss in the previous chapter encourage student mindfulness and invite recognition of the many ways we are called to read. As Ellen Carillo explains, “. . . mindfully reading involves enacting a theory of reading; it is not simply another name for reading or another type of reading. . . . mindful reading is best understood as a framework within which instructors teach their chosen reading approaches” (*Securing* 117, emphasis in original). Because reading is a process unique to
the individual reader, I argue students and instructors both need to find the strategies that best serve their purposes in particular situations, rather than believe that there is only one correct way to read all the time. Becoming more self-aware can help readers to focus on what works best for them within particular contexts. Mindful reading encourages “the metacognitive basis of this frame wherein students become knowledgeable, deliberate, and reflective about how they read and the demands that contexts place on their reading” (Carillo 117, emphasis in original). While encouraging increased student mindfulness, chapter four outlines activities that make readers aware of how their reading choices could benefit them in certain situations. I additionally describe annotation tools that allow users to critically engage with their devices in ways that have proven useful for successful and critical reading (Goldschmidt 57-58). These assignments provide instructors and compositionists additional tools for incorporating digital reading into the writing classroom. My dissertation is significant to these larger field conversations because of its acknowledgement of the contextual implications of our reading practices and need for a shifting mindset about digital technologies and literacy acquisition.

Along with recognizing my project’s significance, I also need to consider some of the limitations of my research while highlighting what I have learned from this process. Methodologically, my choice of survey and interviews was appropriate for this research because these methods allowed me to obtain a broad range of opinions and explore several narrow perspectives in greater detail. Yet, because this study was limited to a small sample size (n = 56 for the surveys and n = 4 for the interviews), the results do not fully capture the range of all student reading experiences. To gather a broader picture of readers—particularly at different ages and with more diverse backgrounds—a larger sample size is needed. Research targeting different groups might reveal different orientations to reading that I was unable to capture.
through my small sample of students. In my attempts to be random in my sample selection, I ended up choosing a group that was more homogeneous than I intended. Future research on reading would benefit from a larger sample size of a more broadly represented population. In addition, moving the study beyond a university population could offer fascinating insights into the lives of readers at different points in their lives.

One of the main things I learned from performing this research is that reading is a complicated process to understand, particularly because of the differences between how readers engage texts, and differences between the situations where they read. It is exciting that my research led me to this complexity, which challenges the simplistic or singular views of readers that are often presented in much of the popular research I outline in the introductory chapter. One of the challenges I faced was in the question wording. While I attempted not to replicate the binaries present in existing reading research, some of my questions were framed in ways that upheld a print vs digital divide. In addition, because reading is so individualized, it is difficult both to study and make general conclusions about. Along with the difficulties of studying reading, capturing the context of reading proved to be a more difficult endeavour than I anticipated when I first began this research. I realized after completing the survey that certain questions that were meant to capture the different contexts of reading actually looked at the types of texts students read, emphasizing the device used rather than the context or situation where reading took place. For example, survey questions 6, 7, and 8 (see Appendix F for the full survey) asked participants to “rank the ways you most frequently use your” laptop, smartphone, and tablet and provided respondents with options like “texting, social media, music, school assignments, watching videos. . . ” These questions emphasized the multiple ways participants can interact with and use those devices. The questions here failed to consider the role of the
different situations in how participants select a particular device in the first place. It was only through the interviews that a more detailed definition of context emerged. The interview participants were able to elaborate on their different reading environments and how their reading practices changed along with the material and financial demands of various situations. Through the interview participants in particular, it became apparent to me that digital reading is not always the same and should not be considered as such. Because the interviews took place following the surveys, it was not possible to go back and reframe the context questions to better articulate what I wanted to know. Emphasizing the environment broadened the interview participants’ understandings of context. Future reading research should more fully account for the specific situations going beyond a categorical approach to texts and devices.

Building on these considerations, the suggestions I develop in this chapter provide ways future researchers might expand the scope of reading research to account for broader populations, environments, and embodied and emotive processes in relation to reading. These physical and material factors play a significant role in how we respond to situational cues (both consciously and unconsciously) and how we make choices within a number of contexts. Attention to the materiality of reading can further illustrate the ways that reading is a complex, situated practice. As Stacey Pigg’s “Distracted by Digital Writing” suggests, “There is much for contemporary literacy scholars to contest in the evidence presented for claims about declining literacy” (n.pag). Because representations in popular media recall the literacy crises narratives that decry our attention problems, researchers are needed now more than ever to challenge these problematic views of interactions with digital technologies.

In the following sections, I will discuss how embodied theoretical perspectives can benefit reading research. As Gesa Kirsch notes, “In the end, any research report is a form of
narration, a story about a selected set of observations. Different forms of narration are grounded in different rhetorical traditions that can bring with them a preferred methodological orientation” (265). The narrative approach I took with this dissertation could be supplemented by alternative lenses or means of understanding the data. In the sections that follow, I will consider what embodied, disability, and materialist theoretical lenses could add to future reading research. I also explore what eye tracking and visual ethnography methods might lend to studies of reading within composition moving forward.

**Reading as an Embodied, Material, and Affective Process**

Because my research led me to view reading as an embodied, situationally contingent, and emotive practice, I believe that future research could benefit from theoretical frameworks explicitly focused on physical and embodied perspectives. In *Embodied Literacies*, Kristie Fleckenstein argues for the necessity of bringing the physical body into discussions of literacy learning because we are “neither writers nor bodies, but writing bodies” (44)—or alternatively, reading bodies. Because of their connectedness, it is necessary to consider the role physical bodies play in reading and writing. She furthermore explains, “A corporeal literacy points us to the material dimension of writing-reading, to meaning’s reliance on our physical participation in the world” (46). Because both reading and writing are embodied practices, attention to the physicality of those acts is necessary for further understanding them. I believe that future reading research can benefit from the orientations emotive, disability, and materialist theories provide. These lenses necessitate attention to the relationships formed between bodies and their environments as they move through the world and further build on the contextualist approaches I argue are already important components of our reading processes.
To more fully understand what we do as we read, we need to begin by considering the role of the body when we read. Theories of embodiment and emotion highlight the physical elements that situate us in particular ways within our environments. In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan examines how emotions circulate both on a bodily and biochemical level while also being “social or psychological in its origin” (1). She defines the circulation of emotions as a “transmission of affect,” a phrasing she uses to “capture a process that is social in origin but biological in effect. The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without” (3). We experience emotions on a personal level, but our emotions are equally influenced by others in our environments, and their emotions have the potential of affecting our own. Brennan’s theory locates affects as originating “independent[ly] of the individual experiencing them. These affects come from the other, but we deny them. Or they come from us, but we pretend (habitually) that they come from the other” (13). For Brennan, our emotions are interconnected bodily and social processes that we experience on a physiological and collective level, sometimes before consciously registering these feelings (3).

The biological/environmental/social examination of emotions as outlined by Brennan is useful for compositionists and reading researchers, especially those studying student readers.

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26 Although I am focusing specifically on theories of embodiment, disability, and materiality in this chapter, contributions from feminist and critical race theories would also be appropriate lenses to use to draw attention to the ways different bodies use digital devices. Looking more closely at the intersectional characteristics of race, gender, and class are furthermore necessary considerations for researchers studying the role of digital technologies in our lives. As Adam Banks notes in *Digital Griots*, “Writing in this multimedia age must be more than multimodal, more than multimedia; it must be a digital humanities project—in other words, intellectual work connecting technologies, in all layered sense in which we use the word, to humanistic inquiry” (154).
Emotive theories can allow us to gain greater insight into behaviors we may initially take for granted or outright dismiss. Emotion is an embodied and performative process, and, as Laura Micciche notes, “In relying primarily on classical formulations of rhetoric that privilege reason, compositionists tend to either neglect or underestimate emotion’s presence in the process of meaning-making. . .“ (1). Emotion is not often what we think of as an important contributor to how our students read, write, and engage with texts. Yet, emotions make up both our social and personal interactions with the world around us, and it is important to question the role affects play when we sit down to read. As I have outlined previously, so many negative attitudes are ascribed to the actions of digital readers and digital reading that it is necessary to question what impact those attitudes have on the lived experiences of readers. By paying attention to emotions, we can start to unpack assumptions about reading and writing.

Furthermore, greater attention to the emotions that shape our reading experiences can help us problematize our relationships to texts and understand our ways of reading. For example, in a conversation I had with composition and rhetoric scholar Lisa Ede, she described assigning a “long, dense, and theoretical” reading in a graduate seminar that one of her students simply hated (Ede n.pag). The student, according to Ede, had an “entirely negative—even hostile” response to the reading. When trying to understand her reasoning further, she told Ede “Well, it probably didn’t help that I read this essay in tiny bits and pieces while on a forced weekend-long shopping march with my mother.” The student in this example was annoyed already about the shopping experience and was likely concerned about finishing the reading as she made time to read it between stores. The negative feelings the student experienced in combination with a non-ideal reading situation then led to her extreme dissatisfaction with the reading itself. By questioning the student further about the environment where she read and the emotive impacts of the
situation, both Ede and the student had greater insight into the connected effects between the
device used, emotions experienced, and environment on the student’s understanding and
appreciation of the text.

Many readers have experienced similar situations where the larger environment severely
impacts how they respond to a text. Especially when student readers describe negative attitudes
towards texts we assign, considering in greater depth the connections between emotions, bodily
responses, and environments can lead to a broader understanding of our feelings going beyond
liking or disliking something. By considering the social and physiological connections between
readers, their emotions, their environments, and what they do as they read, researchers could
examine how these elements work together to influence reading processes. One of the benefits of
considering material and emotive approaches to reading is that these approaches can explain
behaviors we may otherwise take for granted.

Disability studies, as one approach to embodied research, can provide useful perspectives
for re-seeing the world from a different lens, challenging insights and views from the able-
bodied perspectives that many unconsciously adopt. As Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Brenda Jo
Brueggemann note, “The questions posed by disability studies ask us to think carefully about
language and its effects, to understand the role of the body in learning and writing, to view
bodies and minds as inherently and wonderfully divergent, to consider issues of access and
exclusion in politics and the environment, and to reengage with theories of difference and
diversity” (1). The lens provided by disability studies challenges both linguistic and bodily
assumptions about our interactions with the world. Because reading is a physical process that is
both embodied and cognitive, locating the connects and disconnects between body and mind and
material reading objects and technologies is necessary for understanding the variety of practices
readers engage with. By focusing on “the link between language and material practices” (Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson 11), disability studies can help us question the reach, use, and presentation of non-abled-bodies in digital spaces. Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell further argue that there is a “need to critically analyze the ways in which disability is constructed in these central technologies of contemporary society, namely new digital media and communications technologies” (148). It is necessary too for that conversation to include the use of digital technologies for reading. Goggin and Newell also claim that within the popular uses and marketing of new media, the interests of people with disabilities have not been fully realized:

> With alarming regularity, wealthy corporations and governments have adopted new media policies that explicitly militate against the interests of people with disabilities; [. . .] have remained disinterested in new knowledge about disability and communications; [. . .] have judged people with disabilities as costing more money than they are worth as customers; have relegated people with disabilities to the digital margins by seeing them as a ‘special’ case, not part of the mainstream. . . (148).

In multiple contexts, the interests of people with disabilities are seen as secondary to the larger population. Looking more closely at how people with disabilities are situated (both in language and in culture) in relation to technologies, can help us reconsider normative and able-bodied perspectives. Accordingly, Lewiecki-Wilson and Brueggemann note, “Disability, unseen, unacknowledged, and unexamined, is already always present in the spaces and practices of writing instruction. . . . Gaining a greater awareness of disability’s presence should thus be part of teacher training, not as an add-on, but as a conscious surfacing of habitual practices and discourses for critical examination” (13). If we wish for our teaching to be an inclusive practice, we need to thing about how reading and writing technologies impact all of our students.
Within pedagogical and education-based research, theorists are already using disability studies to question authority in multimedia composing (Fox); interrogate narratives of normalcy and prosthesis in online education and with new technologies (Clairborne; Moeller and Jung); and examine the digital divide, universal design, and issues of access (Dunn and Dunn De Mers; Simpson; Yergeau et al). Within these studies, researchers question normative assumptions about access to and use of digital technologies, classroom spaces, and virtual instruction. There is also learning disability research that examines the pedagogical implications of learning disabilities in terms of literacy instruction and student self-perception in a classroom (Dunn; Grover and Hendricks; Peters). The lessons that we can gather from various disability studies perspectives has further implications for how we think of students and their technologies. For example, following her interview with Nick, a student with a learning disability (LD) label, Patricia Dunn concludes that “we must change how society thinks of LD students, because students are absorbing these self-hating attitudes. . . . And for LD students, that is the disability, and it is a learned one: the inner belief that one is somehow inferior’s to one’s peers” (149).

What Dunn describes here about the internalized behaviors of students with learning disability labels is similar to the negative internalization that Stacey Pigg believes takes place with students and digital technologies, who come to accept the distracted technology user labels they are constantly given. Disability studies, then, is another frame that reading researchers can use to question how different individuals come to access and use a variety of technologies. Like emotive theories, disability studies perspectives bring focus back to bodies and call attention to the ways that objects and individuals connect and influence one another.

New materialist orientations are another lens that brings greater awareness to how the physical body and objects intersect. According to Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, new
materialism involves “returning to the most fundamental questions about the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world; it means taking heed of developments in the natural sciences as well as attending to transformations in the ways we currently produce, reproduce, and consume our material environment” (3). New materialist positions place equal value on objects, bodies, and the environment acting together in space. Our orientations, or relationships to objects within physical spaces becomes an additional determinant for how we interact within the world around us. As Sara Ahmed notes, “Orientations shape how the world coheres around me. Orientations affect what is near or proximate to the body, those objects that we do things with” (235). She goes on to explain how the writer’s physical body is shaped by the labor of writing, and the tools used to write are shaped in a way that makes that writing possible. Looking more closely at the form of objects, how our bodies respond and interact with them, and how our bodies shape in response to them demonstrate that our orientations to reading grow and change with the objects we use to read.

Within new materialist theories (Bennett; Bogost; Bryant; Latour), humans, non-humans, and matter are given equal weight as agents in environments. With our reading and writing practices, it is necessary to consider the tools and objects we use to communicate beyond ourselves while still recognizing the importance of the user him or herself. The material objects used and environments where reading and writing take place is integral to my research results.

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27 At a more extreme end of this materialist view, object oriented ontology “contends that nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally” (Bogost 6). While I believe that we should pay more attention to objects in our environments, I do not agree with the extremity of Bogost’s claim that bodies do not matter. Especially within a classroom, the writing students produce and readings they complete needs to remain the primary focus. We cannot lose sight of how the reader interprets and the writer responds to ideas and texts using physical objects—especially when that reader is not male, white, heterosexual, or able-bodied. It is the interplay between reader/writer and object in terms of the object and environment’s influence on the reader/writer that remains a central concern of mine.
New materialist theories offer reminders of the importance of objects in making meaning and call attention to the interactions between objects and people in various environments. Especially as our digital technologies continue to produce increasing amounts of waste as they become obsolete (Apostel and Apostel), we cannot ignore the impact of how we use (and discard) technologies within the larger environment. Reading theorists can use various materialist approaches as lenses for examining the objects and environments we use to read throughout the process, including the environmental impact of those objects once we discard them.

Taken together, this brief look at emotive, disability, and materialist theories are a reminder to reading researchers that different orientations to reading will reveal different aspects of the reading process. All three of these lenses bring greater attention to the ways the social environment and physical bodies intersect and influence action in different settings. Our environments, the technologies we use, our emotions, and our physical bodies are critically important components in our communication practices; thus, researchers should take them into consideration when studying the ways we read and write. While I do not have the space here to more fully examine the emotive, embodied, and materialist perspectives outlined above, this brief overview suggests just how these theories can refocus our attention to the physical bodies and material objects interacting together in reading situations. To truly consider the role of environments on the ways we read, it is necessary that researchers become attuned to these material and lived practices of reading that go beyond a lone reader curled up in a chair with a book.
Visual Technologies and the Reading Process

To more fully capture the various environments where people read, researchers could benefit from employing visual research methods, like videos and photographs. As Brian McNely notes, “By thinking about the things that mediate everyday work environments in creative ways—using visual methods of research—professionals in communication design may better realize insights about participants and make fruitful cross-case comparisons and generalized typologies of user experience” (49). McNely explains that the spaces where we work and live are significant, and researchers can gain a great deal of insight into the importance of those spaces by capturing those environments. If researchers include photographs and videos in their research processes, they will learn more about the activities and lived experiences of participants than simple reports alone. He furthermore claims that by using visual methods,

We can develop an ‘insider’s view’ of a particular participant or organization, and we can provide rich details about how an individual or group uses communication in everyday contexts. But while such particularity is a tremendous strength, it is also seen as one of the primary limitations of traditional qualitative research. In-depth interviews may tell us much about how a small group of users behave, but generalizing to other organizations or research sites is problematic. Visual methods, however, may also foster cross-case comparisons. In methodological terms, they may help us develop nomothetic insights—visual typologies with generalizable claims” (51, emphasis in original).

I quote McNely at length here because what he describes in organizational and communication terms can be useful in studying reading processes. If researchers wish to pay attention to the different contexts and environments where people read, they need to use methods that allow them to do so. Furthermore, because reading practices are individualized, visual research
methods can allow for studying similarities and differences between readers in ways that other methods may not. While my research demonstrated useful insights into student reading practices through the surveys and interviews, it is not possible to use this particular group of students to make conclusions in other contexts. By having photographic representations of the physical environments and different contexts of reading, the data could be used in more comparative ways. As McNely notes, and as I have been arguing, the everyday contexts and environments where people work and act are significant, and it is necessary for those interested in studying reading practices to fully consider the environments where these actions take place.

One such approach to visual research methods includes visual ethnographies. Sara Pink defines visual ethnography as “an approach that engages with audio-visual media and methods throughout its processes of research, analysis and representation. . . . This might involve analysing the existing visual cultures in which one is researching and collaboratively producing audiovisual materials with research participants—and usually entails understandings such sets of materials in relation to each other” (“Mobilising” n.pag). The collected visual data in a research process becomes an important component of the research itself in the same way that survey results and interview transcripts might. In *Doing Visual Ethnography*, Pink writes, “Images are indeed part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge” (1). Within research settings, Pink believes that images can encourage conversations and provoke memories on the part of participants. Especially because of the incredible access we now have to cameras that are built into our technologies, Pink maintains that “photography, video and web-based media are increasingly integral elements of the work of ethnographers” (*Doing* 1). Even before digital cameras, images have proven useful for literacy researchers. For example, David Barton and Mary Hamilton used images of the Lancaster community they
studied to better understand the literacy practices of the community in question and to provide material for “in class discussions of how literacy is socially situated, how it belongs to a particular place, and to make comparisons with their own situations” (281). The images researchers acquire are useful during and after completing research, and as McNely notes above, can provide useful points of cross-comparison that other types of data might not.

An example of visual ethnography for reading researchers might come from the Reading Selfie assignment outlined in chapter four. Researchers using images could take advantage of having participants photograph their different environments and then use the images to encourage greater analysis from them. Participants would be encouraged to note bodily responses to the scenes and readings, paying attention to the time of day, their moods, what they are noticing on a textual level, and the way they feel as they read. The analysis in this type of setting would involve an expanded view of what literate activities look like. This type of analysis that considers the larger contexts of reading, environments, and embodied responses of participants as they read is similar to the “chronotropic lamentation [. . .] of writers’ literate activity” that Paul Prior and Jody Shipka outline (n.pag). This type of analysis examines “the dispersed, fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action along with the ways multiple activity footings are held and managed” (Prior and Shipka). By considering the larger literate connections between contexts, objects, environments, and individuals, our views of what literacy means can expand beyond the school/home/work divides. Furthermore, an analysis of the larger scenes of reading can disrupt the larger cultural myths about what reading looks like and about what readers should do as they read.
Another research method that has the potential for disrupting typical pictures of readers’ activities involves the use of eye trackers. Eye trackers allow researchers to make individualized conclusions about the readers they examine and the texts they read. In their CCC article “Tracking the Mind’s Eye,” Chris Anson and Robert Schwegler discuss the relatively non-existent use of eye tracking software within North American composition studies apart from a handful of examples (151). The two argue that “today, eye-tracking research has increasing potential for the study of writing, especially in the context of screen-based learning and digital interaction” (151). Their article demonstrates the usefulness of eye tracking for studying peer review and instructor response on student work. Anson and Schwegler summarize the ways that eye tracking technologies have been used extensively in multiple disciplines including medical fields and disability studies, aviation and transportation, along with “neuroscience, psychology, advertising and marketing (including product packaging), computer science, human factors research, and industrial engineering” (155). As many of these disciplines have benefitted from eye tracking research, so too might composition studies.

Eye tracking technologies have been important tools for researchers wishing to understand the relationship between users’ sight and the actions they perform. As Benjamin Tatler, Clare Kirtley, Ross MacDonald, Katy Mitchelle, and Steven Savage write, “The eyes have two crucial functions: first, to gather information about the world and, second, to provide feedback during tasks, for example, when we manipulate an object. Using eye movements, these processes can be measured online as tasks are performed in both laboratory and real-world environments” (4). Researchers can use the eye movements to make inferences about what

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28 See Anson and Schwegler for a detailed explanation for non-specialists of how eye tracking technologies work, along with some background on eye tracking and reading (152-155).
participants are paying attention to as they perform different tasks. According to Andrew Duchowski’s *Eye Tracking Methodology*, eye tracking technology is now in its fourth generation and is “digital video-based combined pupil/corneal reflection, augmented by computer vision techniques and Digital Signal Processors” (v). The speed, accuracy, and usability of eye tracking technologies have greatly improved since the earlier versions that relied on analysis of photographs or video frames (v). Eye tracking technologies have seen significant improvements to the point where they are light-weight, mobile, and wearable (shaped like glasses).

Eye trackers are useful for understanding what users pay attention to in a given setting (Duchowski 3). In their analysis of eye tracking research, Tatler et.al describe how “Mobile eye-tracking devices permit eye movement recordings to be made in untethered, real-world activities. This technological advancement has not only allowed researchers to study eye movements in the context of natural action but has also identified key insights into the relationship between vision and action that were not previously recognised” (4). Eye tracking is useful in real-world settings while researchers try and understand what a reader is seeing or doing with materials before them. While it is not my purpose here to survey the large scope of reading research using eye tracking, it is important to note that many eye tracking studies focus on what readers’ eyes are paying attention to on the page or screen and provide analyses of attention and focus on reading comprehension29.

Within marketing and consumer research, researchers are using eye tracking software in ways that reading researchers might build on and adopt. For example, Tracy Harwood and

29 For example, eye tracking has been used to study user response time in word recognition with transposed words online (Rayner et. al); users’ reading paths on newspapers (Holsanova, Holmqvist, and Rahm); the link between reading audio-video subtitles and academic performance (Kruger and Steyn); users’ reading paths online (Nielsen); and online sentence processing (Witzel, Witzel, and Forster).
Martin Jones outline the use of eye tracking in retail environments. While their study focuses on “consumer behavior in a UK branded retail environment using mobile eye tracking technology” (183), their research has resonance for reading researchers interested in the physical environments of reading. Harwood and Jones describe that much consumer and retail research is limited because it is based on consumer self-reports, surveys, and third person observations (184). The authors alternatively use eye tracking technologies to “evaluate consumer responses at a holistic level. This type of observational technology provides a first-person perspective into embodied behaviour reflecting goal orientation that third-person techniques cannot capture” (185). The authors use Tobii30 eye tracking software, which allowed them to capture not only the wearer’s eye movements, but also audio and a video of the environment where the video was being captured. The use of this technology provided the authors a rich array of data they could then use to analyze shoppers’ retail patterns. Compositionists and reading researchers could draw from marketing research in using eye tracking technologies like this to really capture the broader environment beyond where students compose and read. The eye tracking research I previously cited focuses more specifically on the user’s eyes on a screen or page, whereas Harwood and Jones emphasize both the user’s direct attention along with the broader environment. The advances to this particular eye tracking technology would allow for a holistic view of the reader’s environment without the researcher imposing on the participant’s space.

Beyond providing useful information about reading processes and along with the larger environment, another benefit of eye tracking research is its interdisciplinary possibilities. Most

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30 Tobii’s eye tracking glasses are a “wearable eye tracker with live view function for insights in any real-world environment” (Tobii Pro). The glasses are described as “ultra-lightweight” and “user-centric” so that they promote “natural viewing behavior and ease of use” (Tobii Pro). Their company also connects researchers with analytics specialists and user support.
often, unless trained otherwise, researchers in composition who wish to use eye tracking software will require some interdisciplinary collaboration with specialists in the sciences who have the proper cognitive theory backgrounds and appropriate training in eye tracking methods and methodologies. Because studying reading is an interdisciplinary endeavour, such research between compositionists and computer scientists or psychologists can further broaden the kinds of questions that get asked about reading and expand the potentials for uncovering new information about our reading processes. Future reading and composition research within our field would benefit from studying the uses of eye tracking in other disciplines and applying those methods to studying how our students read.

Concluding Thoughts on Digital Reading

The embodied theories and visual research methods I outlined in this chapter have the potential to expand our understanding of what reading processes look like. As an everyday activity that we all perform using various devices and involving numerous types of texts, reading is a necessary part of both the composing and communication process. The contexts where those practices take place matter. As McNely notes, “. . . in general, the things near us and with us matter to the work we do, to how we perceive that work, and to who we are. In other words, the systemic contexts of our everyday work environments are by no means trivial. We should take these things seriously. . . .” in our lives and in our research (40-50). For researchers interested in better understanding the impacts of everyday environments on readers, looking more closely at these every day activities and “things near us” is important and necessary, especially as these perspectives can potentially challenge the problematic representations of readers circulating in the public media.
When combined with embodied, material, and disability studies scholarship, visual research methods provide greater insight into the individualized practices of readers and are significant for their emphasis on the importance of the objects, environments, and bodies involved in how we read. As I have outlined here, these methods offer a complementary perspective to the digital reading research this dissertation has begun. These methods and technologies call on researchers to adopt contextualist, reflective, and feminist approaches to research since they vary in different situations and require researcher awareness of minute shifts within the research setting. The research I have described in this dissertation provides a foundation for which future researchers who wish to adopt embodied and visual research methods may build from.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment e-mail sent through Composition Instructor listserv

Hi Friends,

I hope the end of the semester is going well for you! As you may know, I am conducting a research study for my dissertation, “Contexts of Digital Reading: How Genres Affect Reading Practices,” which examines the relationship between student reading ability and digital reading devices (such as computer screens, tablets, and cellphones). The purpose of this study is to gain greater perspective on the perceptions and practices involved when students read on digital devices and assess how those practices change when in varied contexts. The first part of my study involves students filling out an online survey, linked below.

Would you please pass the information following this e-mail along to your composition students? If you would like, I’d be more than happy to come and speak with your class about the survey and the purpose behind my research.

**Please note that it is very important that you do not tie participation in this research study to grades or evaluation of any kind, including extra credit. Students should not feel coerced to participate; participation must remain strictly voluntary. Please also make it clear that you, their teacher, will have no way of knowing who participates and who does not. Their identities and information will be kept confidential.**

If you or your students have any questions or concerns regarding their participation in this survey, please do not hesitate to contact me at morri2j8@mail.uc.edu.

Thank you so much for your help passing this survey on!

Best,

Janine

___________

Dear Student:

You are receiving this message because you qualify to take part in a research study being conducted at the University of Cincinnati. **This study looks at the different ways you use your digital devices (cellphones, laptops, and tablets) to read.** The survey linked below will ask you questions about how many devices you use, how you use those devices, and your understanding of your own reading practices.
This research study consists of an online survey that will take about 20 minutes to complete. **Participants who complete the survey will be entered into a draw for 1 of 2 $50 Amazon Gift Cards.** The winner will be notified at the end of December, 2014.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and does not require that you supply any identifying information. Your answers will be kept confidential and if you choose to enter the $50 Amazon Gift Card draw, your contact information will be separated from your survey responses.

To participate in the study, please click the link below, or copy/paste it into a new browser tab or window.

[http://cincinnati.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3BQfaSqJ7a8PnkF](http://cincinnati.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3BQfaSqJ7a8PnkF)

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research study, please contact the principle advisor, Janine Morris at morri2j8@mail.uc.edu.

Thank you,

Janine Morris  
PhD Candidate  
University of Cincinnati | Department of English & Comparative Lit  
248 McMicken Hall | PO Box 210069  
Cincinnati, OH 45220  
morri2j8@mail.uc.edu
Appendix B

Survey informed consent

Informed Consent Form

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your answers to this survey will help the researcher better understand how students use their digital devices to read.

Procedures
You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about your reading and digital device habits. The questionnaire consists of 27 main questions with several follow-up questions and will take approximately 20 minutes or less to complete. Questions are designed to determine how and when you use your digital devices for various purposes.

Risks/Discomforts
Risks are minimal for involvement in this study and we do not expect any harm to come upon any participants. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you have the right to skip the question or withdraw at any time.

Benefits
Participants who complete the survey have the option to enter a draw for 1 of 2 $50 Amazon gift cards. The draw will take place December 30, 2014 and winners will be notified via e-mail. Please note: Your e-mail address will be stored separately from the survey responses and all your answers will remain anonymous and confidential.

Confidentiality
All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator listed below will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

Participation
Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your academic status, GPA, or standing with the university. If you desire to withdraw, please close your internet browser at any time. You will also have an option after completing the survey to provide your name and e-mail address if you are willing to be part of a follow-up interview about digital technologies and reading (to take place in the Spring of 2015).

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Janine Morris (principal investigator) at morri2j8@mail.uc.edu.
Questions about your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Laura Micciche at micciclr@ucmail.uc.edu or contact Claudia Norman at the office of The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board at claudia.norman@uc.edu.
Appendix C

Interview recruitment e-mail

Dear ________,

My name is Janine Morris and I’m a PhD Candidate in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. In December 2014 you took part in a survey I conducted that asked you about the different ways you use your digital devices (cellphones, laptops, and tablets) to read. After completing the survey, you indicated that you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. **I’m writing today to see if you are still willing to take part in a face-to-face 30-45 minute follow-up interview.**

The interview will ask further details about your reading practices and habits using digital devices. The results of the interview will be used as part of my dissertation looking at the different ways students use digital devices to read. The interviews will take place on campus at a time of your convenience. **If you are interested in participating in the interview, please respond to this e-mail so we can arrange a time in the coming weeks.**

If you choose to participate in the interview you will receive a $50 Amazon gift card as thanks for your participation. I have received IRB approval for this project, and will take all the necessary steps to ensure the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of your responses. Your name will not feature in any of the data, and any responses will not be traced back to you. The interview will be recorded digitally and you will be provided with paper copies of the final transcripts.

I hope you will consider participating in this important look at student reading and digital device use. If you could please get back to me about whether or not you would be willing to take part in the interview, I would appreciate that very much! I am also happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding a follow-up interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Janine Morris
PhD Candidate
University of Cincinnati | Department of English & Comparative Lit
248 McMicken Hall | PO Box 210069
Cincinnati, OH 45220
morri2j8@mail.uc.edu
Appendix D
Interview Informed Consent

Adult Consent Form for Research
University of Cincinnati
Department: English and Comparative Literature
Principal Investigator: Janine Morris
Faculty Advisor: Laura Micciche

Title of Study: Attending to Digital Reading

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Janine Morris of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of English and Comparative Literature. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Laura Micciche.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to find out information about student digital reading habits. The information from the interviews will be used in my dissertation, and may also be used for articles, presentations, or books. The information you provide will not yield generalizable knowledge about reading but will provide local insights that will be used to shape teaching and future scholarly inquiry.

Who will be in this research study?
About four people will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you are an undergraduate student at the University of Cincinnati who uses digital devices (laptops, cellphones, tablets, desktop computers, or e-readers) to read.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to answer interview questions with the primary researcher about your technology use and reading habits. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes. The interview will take place on campus at the University of Cincinnati. The primary investigator will take notes during the interview and the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?
It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research study. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you can refuse to answer any questions that you don’t want to answer.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
Because of being in this research you might get further insight into your own practices and
habits. Being in this study may help university instructors understand how students use digital devices to read.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
You will be given a $50 Amazon gift card to thank you for being in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
If you do not want to take part in this research study you may end the interview at any time. You have a choice about whether or not to use your real name and whether or not the interview may be audiotaped. You also have a choice to see the transcribed interview and subsequent interpretations. There is a place at the end of this paper to mark your choice.

How will your research information be kept confidential?
Information about you will be kept private by using a study ID number instead of participant’s name on the research forms and audio files, and by keeping the master list of names and study ID numbers in a separate location. Participant’s name will not be included on the typed transcripts. Your information will be kept on a password-protected hard drive and stored in a locked cabinet for two years after the completion of the research study. Signed consent documents and master lists of participant names and ID numbers will not be stored in the same place as identifiable data. The research will be de-identified as soon as possible by removing the participant’s name and identifying information from all research data. The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name. The researcher cannot promise that information sent by the internet or email will be private.

NOTE: federal regulations require that signed consent documents must be kept for a minimum of three years after the study is closed.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

What are your legal rights in this research study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Janine Morris at morri2j8@mail.uc.edu or 519-564-3761. Or you may contact faculty advisor Laura Micciche at micciclr@ucmail.uc.edu.

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, complaints and/or suggestions about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51
Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you don’t want to answer.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Janine Morris.

Agreement:
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

___ YES, you may use my real name ___ NO, I do NOT want you to use my real name

___ YES, you may audiotape my interview ___ NO, I do NOT want you to audiotape my interview

___ YES, I would like to see a copy of the transcribed interview & interpretations ___ NO, I do NOT want to see a copy of the transcribed interview & interpretations

___ YES, I am willing to be contacted to answer any follow-up questions or clarifications about my interview. ___ NO, I do NOT want to be contacted to answer any follow-up questions or clarifications about my interview.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature __________________________ Date _____________

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent __________________________ Date _____________

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR REFERENCE.
Appendix E

Interview debriefing form

The purpose of this research is to further explore the role of context and genre when reading with a digital device. Genres are more than just types of texts but also include the repeated actions that readers take when they interact and engage with what they read. Popular reading research often suggests that people always read the same way and that print reading is more engaged and purposeful than digital reading (which is often associated with skimming and scanning). The questions you answered today asked about your perceptions on reading, how you use your digital devices, and the impact of context and genre on what and how you read digitally.

Because reading practices are so individualized, it is difficult to use a survey to look at specific readers’ practices. Because of that, your generosity and willingness to participate in this study are greatly appreciated! Your input will help contribute to the advancement of research on reading, literacy, and digital technologies, and will also help improve teaching practices.

If you have any complaints, questions, or concerns about this research study, you can contact Janine Morris at morri2j8@mail.uc.edu or 519-564-3761. Or you may contact faculty advisor Laura Micciche, Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at micciclr@ucmail.uc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, complaints and/or suggestions about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

If you are interested in this area of research, you may wish to read the following references:

Thank you very much for participating!

Please sign below to indicate that you received the $50.00 Amazon Gift Card in thanks for your participation in this research:

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________
Participant Signature _______________________ Date ________________

PLEASE KEEP THIS SHEET FOR YOUR REFERENCE
## Appendix F

**Digital Reading Survey Questions and Response Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Type and options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: Digital Device Ownership &amp; Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What brand of the following devices do you have? (i.e. a MacBook Pro for laptop). If you do not own a particular device, please leave that space blank.</td>
<td>Fill in the blank (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do you use each of the following devices (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)?</td>
<td>Likert (I don’t use this device; academic purposes only; both academic and non-academic purposes; non-academic purposes only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What device are you using to complete this survey?</td>
<td>Multiple choice drop down list (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Desktop Computer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How often do you use the following devices (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)?</td>
<td>Likert (Never; Less than once a month; Monthly; Weekly; Daily; More than once a day).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2: Device Use in Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The following set of questions asks you about how you use various digital devices, including what you read on those devices. For the purposes of this survey, reading means not only text-based reading (like an article, e-mail, or webpage) but also watching videos, listening to music, or playing games.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you read on your digital devices (laptop, smartphone, tablet or iPad, desktop computer) on a daily basis? Please elaborate here as much as possible.</td>
<td>Essay text box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you use a smartphone on a regular basis?</td>
<td>Single answer (yes or no). [If yes is selected, the respondent moves to 6a. If no is selected, the respondent moves to 7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a If yes, rank the ways you most frequently use your smartphone by dragging the item on the left into the corresponding box on the right.</td>
<td>Drag and drop the following items into Frequently, Sometimes, and Never boxes (Texting or other messaging; Making phone calls; Browsing the Internet; Social media; School-assigned readings; School-assigned writing or assignments; Reading (not school-assigned); Checking e-mail; Music; Games; Watching videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b [If participant answered yes to 6] Describe the ways in which you typically read on your phone. What are you reading? What do you do as you read? What types of things are you paying attention to? Please elaborate as much as you'd like.</td>
<td>Essay text box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you use a laptop or a desktop computer on a regular basis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>If yes, rank the ways you most frequently use your laptop or desktop by dragging the item on the left into the corresponding box on the right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td>[If participant answered yes to 7] Describe the ways in which you typically read on your laptop or desktop computer. What are you reading? What do you do as you read? What types of things are you paying attention to? Please elaborate as much as you'd like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>If yes, rank the ways you most frequently use your tablet or iPad by dragging the item on the left into the corresponding box on the right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you use a tablet or iPad on a regular basis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>[If participant answered yes to 8] Describe the ways in which you typically read on your tablet or iPad. What are you reading? What do you do as you read? What types of things are you paying attention to? Please elaborate as much as you'd like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>If yes, rank the ways you most frequently use your tablet or iPad by dragging the item on the left into the corresponding box on the right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Technology &amp; Digital Reading in the Classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>How important is each device for your academic success (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>What is your typical in-class experience with the following devices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>What is your opinion on technology in the Essay text box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In general, how often do instructors make assigned course materials (readings, textbooks) available to you in a digital format (i.e. PDF, website, Ebook)?</td>
<td>Single answer multiple choice (Never; Sometimes; Often; Very often; Not sure/not applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a [If the respondent did NOT select Never or Not sure to question 12, the following question appeared] If your instructor assigns digital texts for you to read, in what format do those texts appear? (select all that apply).</td>
<td>Multiple answer multiple choice (Websites; Videos; PDFs; Ebooks; Podcasts or audio files; Other-please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In general, how often do you use a digital device to read assigned course material?</td>
<td>Single answer multiple choice (Never; Sometimes; Often; Very often; Not sure/not applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13a [If the respondent did NOT select Never or Not sure to question 13, the following question appeared] Which device do you use most often to read assigned course material?</td>
<td>Single answer multiple choice (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13b [If the respondent did NOT select Never or Not sure to question 13, the following question appeared] Please explain what factors contribute to your choice of device.</td>
<td>Essay text box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Do you read digital texts in the same way, whether or not they've been assigned for school?</td>
<td>Single answer multiple choice (Yes; No; Not sure/not applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15a Please explain your answer.</td>
<td>Essay text box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 4: Reading Instruction**

The following set of questions asks you about your experience with being taught strategies for reading in school. Remember, for the purposes of this survey, reading means not only text-based reading (like an article, e-mail, or webpage) but also watching videos, listening to music, or playing games.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. In your experience as an undergraduate student, have any of your instructors taught you specific strategies for reading or analyzing either print-based (articles, books) or non-print (video, audio, image) texts?</td>
<td>Single answer multiple choice (Yes I've ONLY been taught PRINT-BASED reading strategies; Yes I've ONLY been taught NON-PRINT reading strategies; Yes I've been taught strategies for BOTH; No, I have not been taught any reading strategies; Not sure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16a [If the respondent did NOT indicate that they had not received reading instruction or that they weren’t sure, the following question appeared] List the class(es) in</td>
<td>Essay text box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
which you learned the reading strategies.

16b [As long as the respondent indicated they had received reading instruction, the following question appeared] If yes, list any specific reading strategies you remember being taught:

Essay text box

16c [As long as the respondent indicated they had received reading instruction, the following question appeared] Have you applied those reading strategies to other situations?

Single answer multiple choice (Yes-Please specify when; No; Not sure)

17. Whether or not you’ve been taught reading strategies in a course, please indicate how often you do the following when reading a text assigned for school using a digital device. (Click on links; Look for keywords in texts; Take notes of important information from the text; Annotate or take notes on the text itself; Summarize the main points of the text; Make notes of unfamiliar words; Skim the text before reading; Other-please specify)

5-Scale Likert (Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often, Not sure/NA)

Section 5: Demographics

18. What is your gender identity?

Multiple choice (Female, F-M Transgender, Male, M-F Transgender, Not sure, Other)

19. What is your racial or ethnic identification?

Multiple choice (American Indian or other Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Caucasian (other than Hispanic), Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Other Hispanic, Other-Please specify)

20. What is your age?

Multiple choice (Under 19, 20-23, 24-29, 30-39, 40+)

21. What is your classification in college?

Multiple choice (Freshman or first year, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate Student, Unclassified)

22. Are you currently a full time or part time student here at UC? (part time is fewer than 12 credit hours)

Multiple choice (Full time, part time)

23. What is your major here at UC?

Text box entry

24. What kind of classes do you take?

Multiple choice (Exclusively face to face, Take some classes face to face and some online, Exclusively online)

25. Do you live on or off campus?

Multiple choice (Live off campus)
Digital Reading Survey Amazon Entry & Interview Sign-Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Type and options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, to take place on campus sometime in the Spring of 2014, to further discuss your digital reading practices? Interview participants will be compensated with a $50 Amazon gift card.</td>
<td>Multiple choice (Yes, No)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[If yes is selected the following question appears] Thank you for your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Please provide your name and e-mail address in the fields below. Note: Your contact information will not be shared and will not be connected with your survey response.</td>
<td>Form entry (space to include name and e-mail address)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks for participating! <strong>If you'd like to enter the draw for 1 of 2 $50 Amazon gift cards, enter your contact information below.</strong> Your contact information will not be shared and will not be connected with the responses</td>
<td>Form entry (space to include name and e-mail address)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Interview Protocol and Questions

Date: 
Location: 
Time: 
Interviewer: Janine Morris 
Interviewee: 

Opening statement/brief description of project: [READ] 
My name is Janine Morris and I’m a 4th year PhD student from the Department of English and Comparative Literature, focusing on Composition and Rhetoric. My dissertation studies how people use digital devices to read in different scenarios. I’m interested in studying this topic because I think a lot of times the research on reading oversimplifies what readers do and I’m interested in hearing more about how specific individuals use digital devices on a daily basis.

There are a few important things that I’d like to go over with you and then I’ll give you a few minutes to read over and sign the informed consent document.

1. Participation in this interview is voluntary, that means that you can stop the interview and leave at any time without any penalty.
2. I don’t anticipate there being any risks to you participating in this study, but you can refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to or that make you uncomfortable.
3. It’s important that you know that I will be using what we talk about today in my dissertation research and possibly in future publications, presentations, or books about this study. However, unless you give me permission, I won’t use your real name and all of your identifying information will be stored separately from the audio recording and interview transcript.
4. With your permission, I will be audio recording the interview. Creating an audio recording will help me focus on what you’re saying today without having to take extensive notes and will help remember what we talked about later on. If you would like, I will send you a copy of the transcribed interview as well as any interpretations of the data.
5. The interview today should take between 30-45 minutes. You’ll see at the end of the consent form, that I’m also asking for your permission to contact you with any follow-up or clarification questions about the interview. This is in case something comes up as I’m transcribing or interpreting the data that I’d like to hear more about. There’s no penalty if you decline that as well.
6. Once we complete the interview, I will give you [or send you] a $50.00 Amazon Gift Card as thanks for your participation.

Please take the next few minutes to go over the informed consent form and let me know if you have any questions or concerns as you read through the document.

Do you have any questions before I turn on the recorder and we begin?

1. I’d like to start by having you tell me about yourself and your background here at UC. 
A. Tell me about your year in school, name, age, major, the kinds of classes you take.

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]
2. Tell me about the types of digital devices you use and how you use those devices.
A. What devices do you use for school/for pleasure? Differences between your device use; Tell me about how and when you use particular devices. What types of sites do you visit or things do you look at? Where do you use your devices?

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]

3. As I mentioned earlier, the focus of this interview is on digital devices and reading. How would you define reading and what does digital reading mean to you?
A. Digital as similar or different (in opposition) from print-based reading; Impression of digital reading or digital devices; attitude and understanding of reading acts. What differentiates digital texts from print-based ones?

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]

4. Tell me about your digital reading practices.
A. What actions do you perform as you read? Where, what time of day, types of texts do you read? When do these factors shift? What role does your interest in the subject matter play in how you read? How does the situation impact your reading practices? Do these practices ever change? When? Why?

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]

5. Tell me about what role the type of text you’re reading or other contextual factors (like place, time of day, or mood) has on your digital reading practices.
A. In what ways do these factors impact what, when, where, how you read a text. Tell me about the different situations that you find yourself reading and the choices of device or text you make in those situations.

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]

6. In terms of reading texts for school, what do you use to read and why do you to use that format?
A. How are you most frequently assigned reading materials? What are your reasons for choosing [particular device] over others? Which devices do you use in certain classes? Why? What are the affordances of particular devices over others? How do particular devices impact the reading practices you mentioned?

[RESEARCHER THOUGHTS]

It seems to me that we’ve covered the following topics today and here’s what I’ve understood from what you said:

7. Before I turn off the recorder, do you have any final thoughts on digital reading or questions for me based on what we’ve talked about?
I’ll turn off the recorder now.

Thank you for participating in this study! Now I’ll go over this debriefing form with you and give you the $50 Amazon gift card as a thank you for participating in the study [Go through debriefing form].

Do you have anything you’d like to add about your research experience or why you chose to answer the way you did? (Remember this is off the record).

Any other questions or concerns for me?

As a reminder, I may be contacting you in the future if there is a need for you to clarify information, if I have additional questions, or if you indicated that you would like a copy of the transcript or interpretation of the data.

[POST-INTERVIEW REFLECTIONS]
Appendix H

Digital reading pilot survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Type and options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How many of the Following Devices you own? (Laptop; Tablet or iPad;</td>
<td>Multiple choice (I don’t own any, 1, 2, 3+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How often do you use the following devices (Laptop; Tablet or iPad;</td>
<td>Likert (Never; Less than once a month; Monthly; Weekly; Daily;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer)?</td>
<td>More than once a day).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In what context do you use each of the following devices? (select</td>
<td>Multiple choice (N/A- I don’t use; Academic; Non-academic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all that apply) (Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop Computer)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In what situations are you most likely to read the following types</td>
<td>Multiple choice (N/A I don’t read; school, home, work, other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of texts? (select all that apply) (Magazines, websites, text messages,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mails, fiction or non-fiction novels, online fiction or fan fiction;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comics or graphic novels; blogs; recipes or cookbooks; other literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(plays, drama, poetry); audiobooks; other articles (news, sports,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>celebrity, special interest; social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twmlr, Pinterest))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outside of school situations, how often do you read the following?</td>
<td>Likert (Never; Several times a year; Once a month; 2-3 times a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Magazines, websites, text messages, e-mails, fiction or non-fiction</td>
<td>month; Weekly; Daily; 2-3 times a week; Daily; More than once a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>novels, online fiction or fan fiction; comics or graphic novels; blogs;</td>
<td>day).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recipes or cookbooks; other literature (plays, drama, poetry);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audiobooks; other articles (news, sports, celebrity, special interest;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Twmlr, Pinterest))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If you had a choice, what device are you most likely to use to read</td>
<td>Multiple choice (N/A- I don’t read this type of text; Laptop;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the following? (select all that apply) (Magazines, websites, text</td>
<td>Table or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messages, e-mails, fiction or non-fiction novels, online fiction or fan</td>
<td>Computer; Print or hard copy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiction; comics or graphic novels; blogs; recipes or cookbooks; other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literature (plays, drama, poetry); audiobooks; other articles (news,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports, celebrity, special interest)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest; social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tubmlr, Pinterest)</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>If you had a choice, where (in what space) are you most likely to read the following types of texts? (select all that apply) (Magazines, websites, text messages, e-mails, fiction or non-fiction novels, online fiction or fan fiction; comics or graphic novels; blogs; recipes or cookbooks; other literature (plays, drama, poetry); audiobooks; other articles (news, sports, celebrity, special interest; social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tubmlr, Pinterest))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple choice (N/A- I don’t read this text; Living Room; Bathroom; Bedroom; Elsewhere at home; At school; On vacation or while travelling; Outdoors; Public space (restaurant, coffee shop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>If you had a choice, which device are you most likely to use to read in the following situations? (select all that apply) Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader; Desktop Computer; Print or hard copy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple choice (Bedroom; Living room; Bathroom; Elsewhere in your house; Classroom; Library; On vacation; While traveling (car, bus, plane, train, boat); In a coffee shop or restaurant; outdoors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Imagine your ideal reading situation for a book that has not been assigned for school. Fill in the blank (What type of book are you reading? [For example, fiction, non-fiction, graphic novel, magazine, etc]; What time is it? Where are you? What are you using to read? [For example, are you using a printed copy of a text or a particular device?]; What factors influence your choice of device [i.e., convenience, affordability, preference]?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Imagine your ideal reading situation for a text that has been assigned for school. Fill in the blank (What type of text are you reading? [For example, textbook, scholarly journal, novel, case study, etc]; What time is it? Where are you? What are you using to read? [For example, are you using a printed copy of a text or a particular device?]; What factors influence your choice of device [i.e., convenience, affordability, preference]?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Imagine your ideal reading situation for a news story that was not assigned for school. Fill in the blank (What type of text are you reading? [For example, The News Record, Cincinnati Enquirer, New York Times, ESPN, a source linked from the Internet etc]; What time is it? Where are you? What are you using to read? [For example, are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. During the current school year, how many books have you read?</td>
<td>Likert (None, fewer than 5, between 5 and 10, between 10 and 20, more than 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Textbook or assigned book; Assigned articles or course readings; Assigned websites or blogs; Assigned multimedia (videos, podcasts); Non-assigned books; Non-assigned websites or blogs; Non-assigned multimedia (videos, podcasts))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How important is each device for your academic success?</td>
<td>Likert (N/A I don’t use this device; Not at all important; Not very important; Moderately important; Very important; Extremely important)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Laptop; Tablet or iPad; Smartphone; Dedicated e-reader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What is your typical in-class experience with the following devices?</td>
<td>Likert (Banned from using in class; Discouraged from using in class; Neither discouraged nor encouraged from using in class; Encouraged to use in class; Required to use in class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. During the academic year (outside of class time), how many hours a week do you usually spend on activities related to your academic program, such as studying, writing, reading, labwork, rehearsing, etc?</td>
<td>Single answer (5 hours a week or fewer; 6-10 hours a week; 11-15 hours a week; 16-20 hours a week; 21-25 hours a week; 26-30 hours a week; more than 30 hours a week)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 5: Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. What is your gender identity?</td>
<td>Single choice (Female, F-M Transgender, Male, M-F Transgender, Not sure, Other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply)</td>
<td>Multiple choice (American Indian or other Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Caucasian (other than Hispanic), Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Other Hispanic, Other-Please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. What is your classification in college?</td>
<td>Single choice (Freshman or first year, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Are you currently a full time or part time student here at UC? (part time is fewer than 12 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>What is your college here at UC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>What kind of classes do you take?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>With whom do you live during the school year?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Coding for Reasons (Question 14)

Question 14 asks respondents to discuss any texts that they would prefer reading in print and to indicate why they refer to read that text in print. This coding analyzes the reasons why the respondent chooses print. These responses may fall under multiple categories. Please indicate any that apply.

Annotation

**Definition:** Code as *annotation* any response in which the respondent refers to taking notes, annotations, or marking up a page.

*Annotation* may include instances where the respondent…
(a) refers to marking something up or writing on it (e.g. make notes, highlight)
(b) refers to difficulty with making annotations on digital devices.

Distraction

**Definition:** Code as *distraction* any response in which the respondent describes being distracted from a digital device.

*Distraction* may include instances where the respondent…
(a) refers to having to move between tabs or items
(b) refers to rushing, multitasking, or feeling distracted.
(c) refers to being able to focus better, concentrate easier, or remember material more clearly.
(d) refers to being unlikely to complete the work.

Fatigue

**Definition:** Code as *fatigue* any response in which the respondent refers to being tired or fatigued as a result of looking at a screen.

*Fatigue* may include instances where the respondent…
(a) refers to having strained, sore, or tired eyes.
(b) refers to having to read something for an extended period of time or something of an extended length.

Convenience

**Definition:** Code as *convenience* any response in which the respondent refers to print-based reading as being more convenient.

*Convenience* may include instances where the respondent…
(a) refers to being able to find their place in a text when they stop reading.
(b) refers to having a hard copy in front of them for ease of access.
(c) refers to finding digital technologies difficult to manipulate or use.
(d) refers to being more familiar with using print-based technologies.

N/A

**Definition:** Code as *n/a* any response in which the respondent indicates that they have no preference for print-based reading.
N/A may include instances where the respondent…
(e) refers to not having any preference for print-based texts.
(f) refers to have a preference for digital texts.
(g) refers to responses that answer no to whether the respondent would rather read print-based texts (e.g. “no”, “not really”).
(h) refers to a material reason for preferring digital texts (e.g. cost, environment, saving space)

Other
Definition: Code as other any response in which the respondent does not offer a response or in which the response is not identifiable or categorizable in the above categories (e.g. not applicable, I don’t know, blank or no response).
   Other may include instances where the respondent…
   (i) refers to responses that do not clearly indicate a reason for preferring print-based texts (e.g. “Everything. I much prefer print.”)
Appendix J

Coding for Difference (Question 15)

The purpose of this code is to understand why students who indicate a difference between print and digital reading see that there’s a difference in the way they read.

Attention
Definition: Code as attention any response in which the respondent refers to paying more attention to the texts they read for school.

Attention may include instances where the respondent...
(c) refers to reading school texts more thoroughly or carefully.
(d) refers to re-reading, looking for meaning, or taking notes on something that they read for school.

Preference
Definition: Code as preference any response in which the respondent indicates a preference for print-based reading.

Preference may include instances where the respondent...
(e) refers to being distracted when using digital devices.
(f) refers to preferring print-based texts or reading on print.

Lack
Definition: Code as lack any response in which the respondent refers to a lack of attention to school-based texts.

Lack may include instances where the respondent...
(c) refers to skimming material they read for school.
(d) refers to being uninterested or unengaged in school-based reading.
(e) Refers to paying more attention to pleasure reading.

Other
Definition: Code as other any response in which does not fit into the above-described categories.

Other may include instances where the respondent...
(g) left the response blank.
(h) Misunderstood the question and their response does not answer the question.