

Kindle so-so for students, UW study concludes

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Researchers at the University of Washington are about to present a report on a pilot project that had computer science students use a Kindle DX for their course reading.

College textbooks are a holy grail for the electronic book industry, but apparently they still have a ways to go, based on the UW study, conducted during the 2009-2010 school year.

"There is no [e-reader](#) that supports what we found these students doing," first author Alex Thayer, a UW doctoral student in design and engineering, said in a release. "It remains to be seen how to design one."

It's a great space to get in to, there's a lot of opportunity."

Seven months into the study, more than 60 percent of the students had stopped using their Kindle regularly for academic reading - and these were computer science students, who are presumably more sympathetic to an electronic book.

Although the device has note-taking capabilities, some students still tucked paper into the Kindle case to write notes and others would read near a computer that they could use for reference and other tasks that weren't easy on the device.

The study used the DX, which is the largest Kindle, a \$379 model with a 9.7-inch diagonal screen. It involved 39 first-year graduate students in [computer science](#) and engineering, with ages ranging from 21 to 53.

Some conclusions, as listed in the release:

- Students did most of the reading in fixed locations: 47 percent of reading was at home, 25 percent at school, 17 percent on a bus and 11 percent in a coffee shop or office.
- The Kindle DX was more likely to replace students' paper-based reading than their computer-based reading.
- Of the students who continued to use the device, some read near a computer so they could look up references or do other tasks that were easier to do on a computer. Others tucked a sheet of paper into the case so they could write notes.
- With paper, three quarters of students marked up texts as they read. This included highlighting key passages, underlining, drawing pictures and writing notes in margins.

- A drawback of the [Kindle](#) DX was the difficulty of switching between reading techniques, such as skimming an article's illustrations or references just before reading the complete text. [Students](#) frequently made such switches as they read course material.
- The digital text also disrupted a technique called cognitive mapping, in which readers used physical cues, such as the location on the page and the position in the book to find a section of text or even to help retain and recall the information they had read.

The study will be presented at next week's Association for Computing Machinery conference on human factors in computing systems, taking place in Vancouver, B.C.

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