



# Academic AI in practice

## What we're learning from student use of "chat with the document" in ProQuest Research Assistant

Academic librarians have been clear about what they want from AI in research tools: help with comprehension, support for working through complex sources and confidence that students remain responsible for the intellectual work. ProQuest Research Assistant was developed with those expectations in mind. Instead of a standalone chatbot, it places AI directly within the document view, where students are already reading, assessing and making judgments about sources.

Since its launch in September 2024, ProQuest Research Assistant has been available within the ProQuest document view, supporting research across scholarly journals, books, news, dissertations,

government documents, video transcripts and other trusted content types. "Chat with the document" extends this approach by allowing students to ask questions that are grounded only in the document they are viewing, with responses linked back to specific passages. The goal is to support understanding and momentum, not to replace close reading or critical analysis.

As use of this feature has grown, we have been able to examine engagement data alongside the kinds of questions students ask. Together, these patterns offer a clearer picture of how document centered AI is used in practice and how it aligns with the research behaviors librarians encourage.

## What the engagement data tells us about ProQuest Research Assistant

Use of ProQuest Research Assistant has scaled quickly across institutions and disciplines. In its first year on the platform, more than 470,000 unique users have used the Research Assistant feature on the ProQuest document page, generating nearly 2 million document-level interactions. This scale allows for a meaningful examination of how AI affects student engagement with scholarly content.

Across that activity, a consistent pattern has emerged: students who encounter Research Assistant features are more likely to engage with documents and act on them.

- When Research Assistant is visible in the document view, users are 31 percent more likely to scroll through the full text.
- When the feature is present, users are also 40 percent more likely to take meaningful actions such as citing, downloading, saving, emailing or printing a document.

Engagement increases further when students interact with AI-generated summaries. In an analysis conducted in August 2025, users who clicked to view summaries or key takeaways in full were 76 percent more likely to take meaningful actions with the document. Rather than functioning as a shortcut, these features appear to help students decide that a source is worth deeper attention.

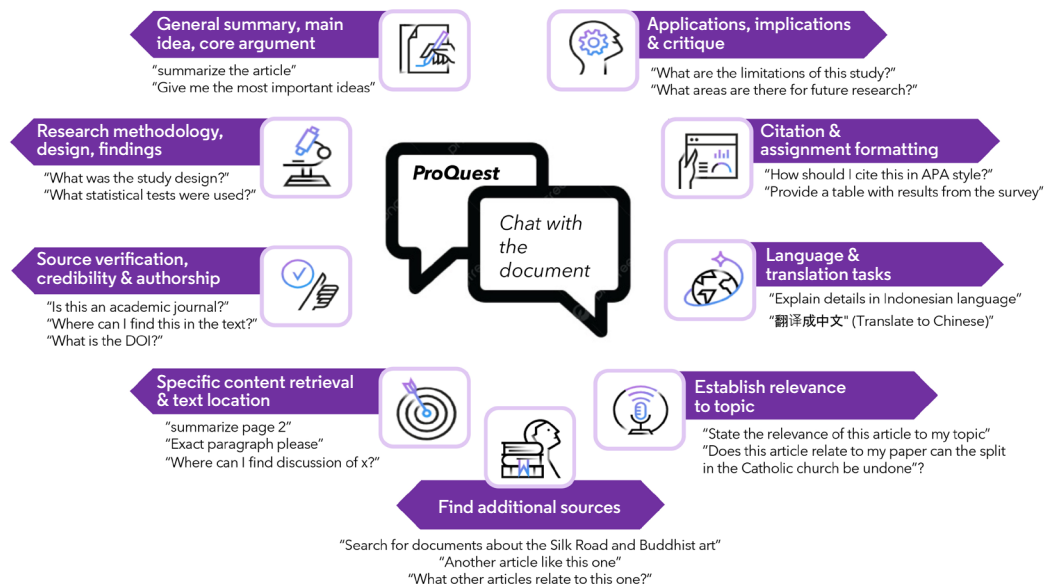


## How students are using “chat with the document”

ProQuest launched its “chat with the document” feature in ProQuest Research Assistant in October 2025. With 6 months of interactions to review, we have a detailed picture of how students use the feature once they are inside a document. The categories below reflect the primary ways students are interacting with chat today. These patterns closely mirror common research stumbling blocks seen in instruction and reference settings.

### Chat with Document feedback & analysis – 72% positive user response

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1. **Establishing relevance to a topic.** Students ask for help determining whether a source is relevant to their specific research focus, deciding whether to invest time in a source. Students ask questions such as whether an article relates to a particular topic or how closely it aligns with their research question.
2. **General summaries and core arguments.** Requests for high-level explanations of what a document is about, article summaries, main ideas and core arguments. These questions typically appear early in the reading process and reflect a need for orientation rather than substitution. Students are using chat to gain their bearings before reading more closely.
3. **Specific content retrieval and text location.** Students ask where a particular topic is discussed or ask for the exact paragraph where a concept appears. This use highlights how chat helps guide students to content most relevant to their research, saving time and reducing frustration when dealing with long or dense documents.
4. **Source verification, credibility and authorship.** Students use chat to ask questions about the nature of the source. Common questions include whether a publication is an academic journal, where to find the DOI or how to confirm authorship and credibility. These questions parallel database literacy instruction and show students actively evaluating sources.

5. **Research methodology, design and findings.** Users are engaging with how research was conducted, asking about study design, statistical tests used, survey results or how findings are presented. In some cases, students request structured outputs such as tables illustrating results, reflecting an advanced understanding of this type of tool – likely developed through use of non-academic AI tools.
6. **Citation and assignment formatting.** Students regularly turn to chat for help with citation-related tasks, including how to cite a source in a particular style or how to format references for an assignment.
7. **Language support and translation.** Students ask for explanations in other languages or request translations of content, enabling engagement with content that may otherwise be out of reach due to language barriers or text complexity.
8. **Application, implications and critique.** As students move deeper into analysis, they ask questions about limitations, implications and areas for future research. These questions reflect higher-order engagement, as students consider how a study can be applied, critiqued or extended.
9. **Finding additional and related sources.** Finally, students use chat to discover related research. Requests include searches for additional documents on a topic, finding articles similar to the one being read or identifying related works. This behavior keeps students within a scholarly research environment, rather than prompting a switch to less trustworthy open web tools.

## Reducing common time-eaters without replacing the work

Across these categories, user feedback on chat interactions remains strong, with 72 percent of responses rated positively in the most recent analysis. This has held as the feature has scaled and expanded across content types and even in cases where the Research Assistant denies or blocks requests because the student is asking the tool to do too much for them. Responses to “Why did you like this feature?” most often note that the feature “Helped me evaluate the document” and “Saved me time.” Users also respond that their results were “Accurate,” “Concise and clear,” “Relevant to my research.”

Both the usage patterns and feedback map to the moments where research may slow down: determining relevance, overcoming confusion, locating evidence and understanding methodology. In the users’ own words:

- “The feature gave me direction on where to find the information I was looking for within the research study.”
- “Wonderful tool. Was very helpful about this article.”
- “To evaluate the document here saved me a lot of time”
- “It even replied in Greek!”

The questions students ask and the feedback on the tool point to use of AI to focus attention, sustain momentum and engage more thoughtfully with complex texts.

## Evolving with user behavior and librarian expectations

Insights from chat usage directly inform how ProQuest Research Assistant continues to evolve. Categories of use influence where chat is surfaced in the interface, how answers are structured and how responses link back to specific passages in the text.

Observed use of language support has also reinforced the importance of multilingual functionality, particularly for content types such as PDFs, which don't feature a translation option. More broadly, ongoing analysis of questions, engagement and feedback helps ensure the tool continues to align with librarian priorities around transparency, attribution and academic integrity.

## AI that supports deeper engagement

For academic librarians assessing the role of AI in research instruction, these early insights suggest that academic AI, grounded in trusted content and shaped by observed student behavior, can support deeper engagement with sources without undermining critical reading or evaluation.

“Chat with the document” does not remove the need for instruction. Instead, it supports it by helping students persist through the parts of research that most often cause frustration and disengagement. In doing so, it reinforces the research practices librarians have long worked to instill.

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**Discover how [ProQuest Academic AI](#) supports deeper engagement with trusted sources.**

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