

# Cite unseen

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Mikhail Simkin and Vwani Roychowdhury estimate that 78 per cent of cited academic papers were not actually read by the citing article's author ([14 December, p 12](#)). This is surely an overestimate.

It often happens that when authors compile their citation list, a reference to a paper they wish to cite will be closer to hand than the paper itself – which they have read some time before and is now filed away. This is especially true for the frequently cited articles that Simkin and Roychowdhury analysed. Often these “convenient” sources will be review articles (I keep them handy for this very reason) or the author's own electronic copies of previous papers on the topic.

I would not be surprised if Simkin and Roychowdhury's method revealed that 80 per cent of my own citations were apparently “cited but unread”, but I would estimate the actual occurrence of this to be fewer than 10 per cent of my citations (and most of these to have been proposed by co-authors, who I hope had read the sources themselves). Although the prevailing rate in scientific community may be higher, I doubt that it is 78 per cent.

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