

**Academic Reading  
in a Foreign Language:  
Skills and Strategies for  
General and Specific Purposes  
University of Copenhagen, Denmark  
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**Academic Reading  
Expectations and Challenges**

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# Research Questions

- ① How important is reading compared to writing, listening and speaking?
- ② How much reading is expected of students in the first major course?
- ③ What expectations do faculty have for student reading?
- ④ What are the greatest reading challenges?

# Participants

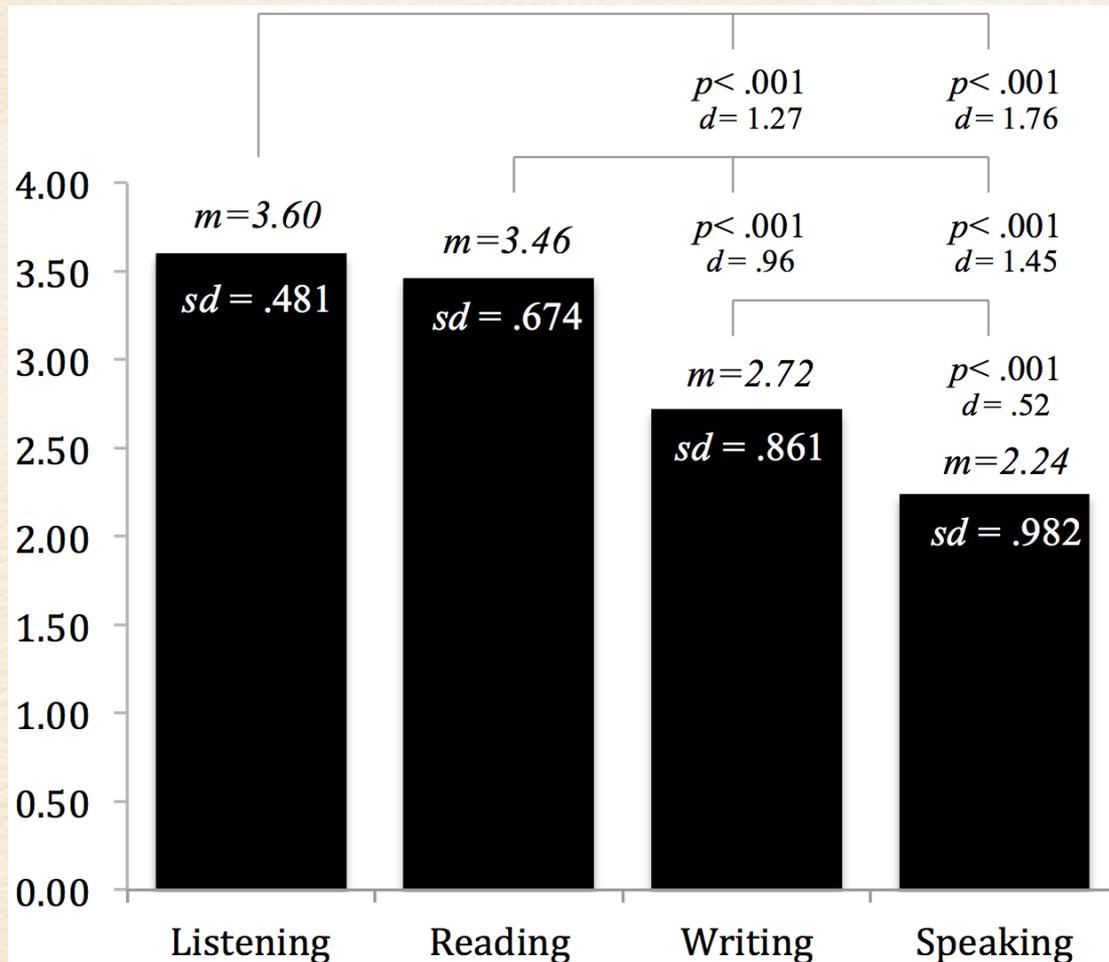
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<u>Majors</u>	<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Institutions</u>	<u>Overlap</u>
Biology	37	24	35%
Business	35	24	31%
Computer Sci	23	21	9%
Engineering	34	24	29%
Psychology	28	21	25%
Totals	157	114	

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# Relative Importance of Four Language Skills

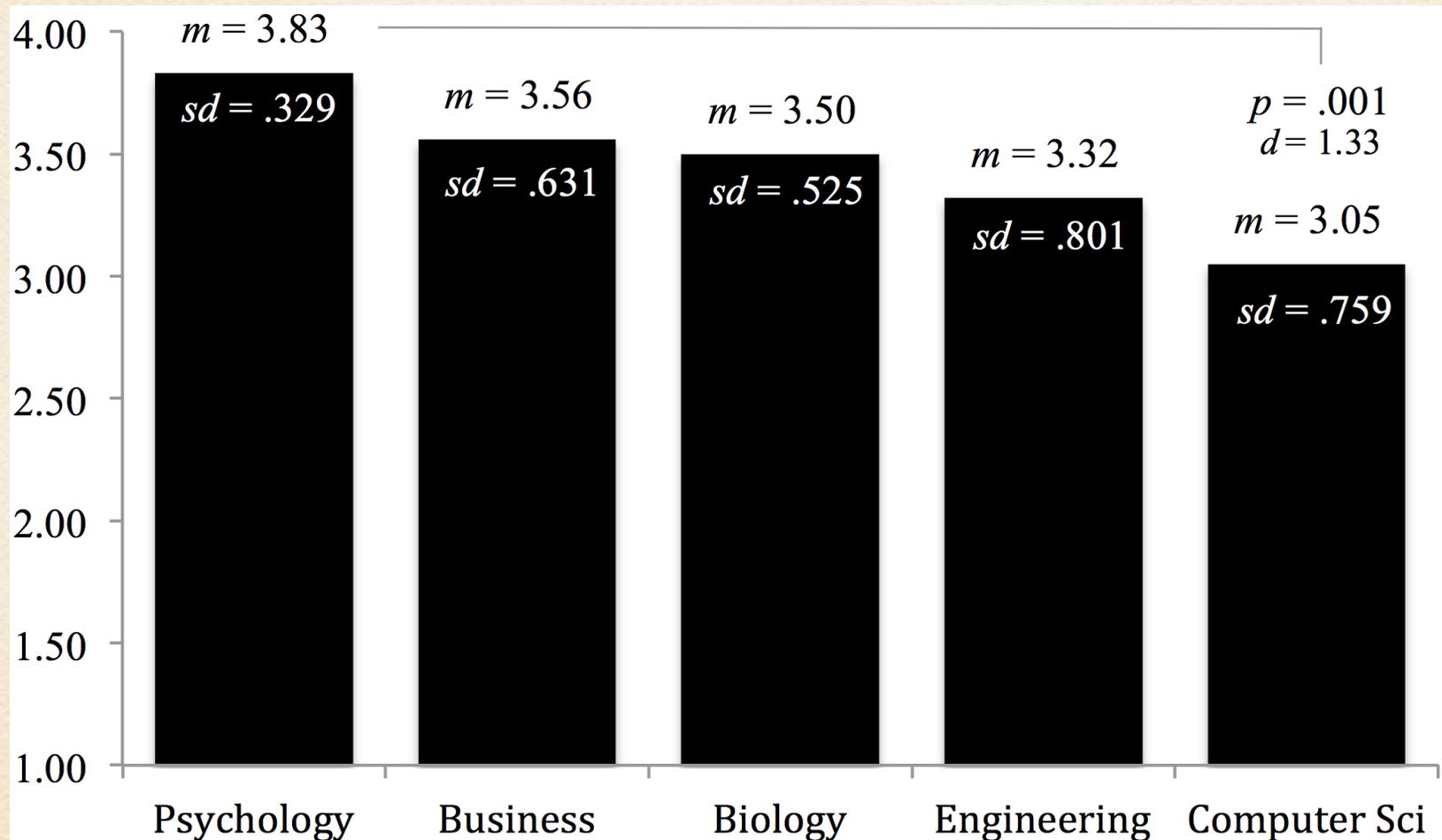
$$F(3,446) = 77.671, p < .001$$



1=not important, 2= somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important

# Importance of Reading

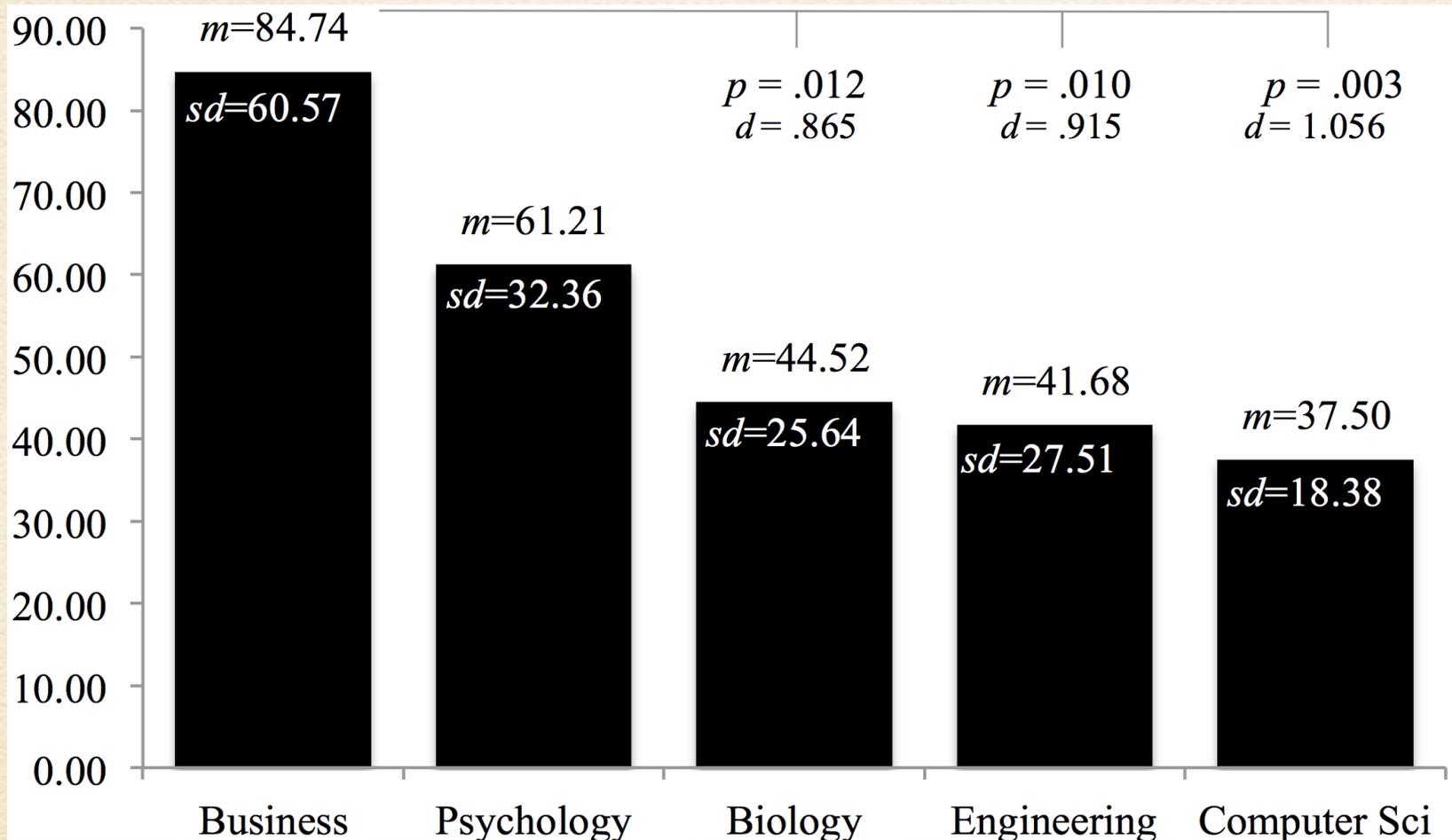
$F(4, 108) = 4.39, p = .003$



1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important

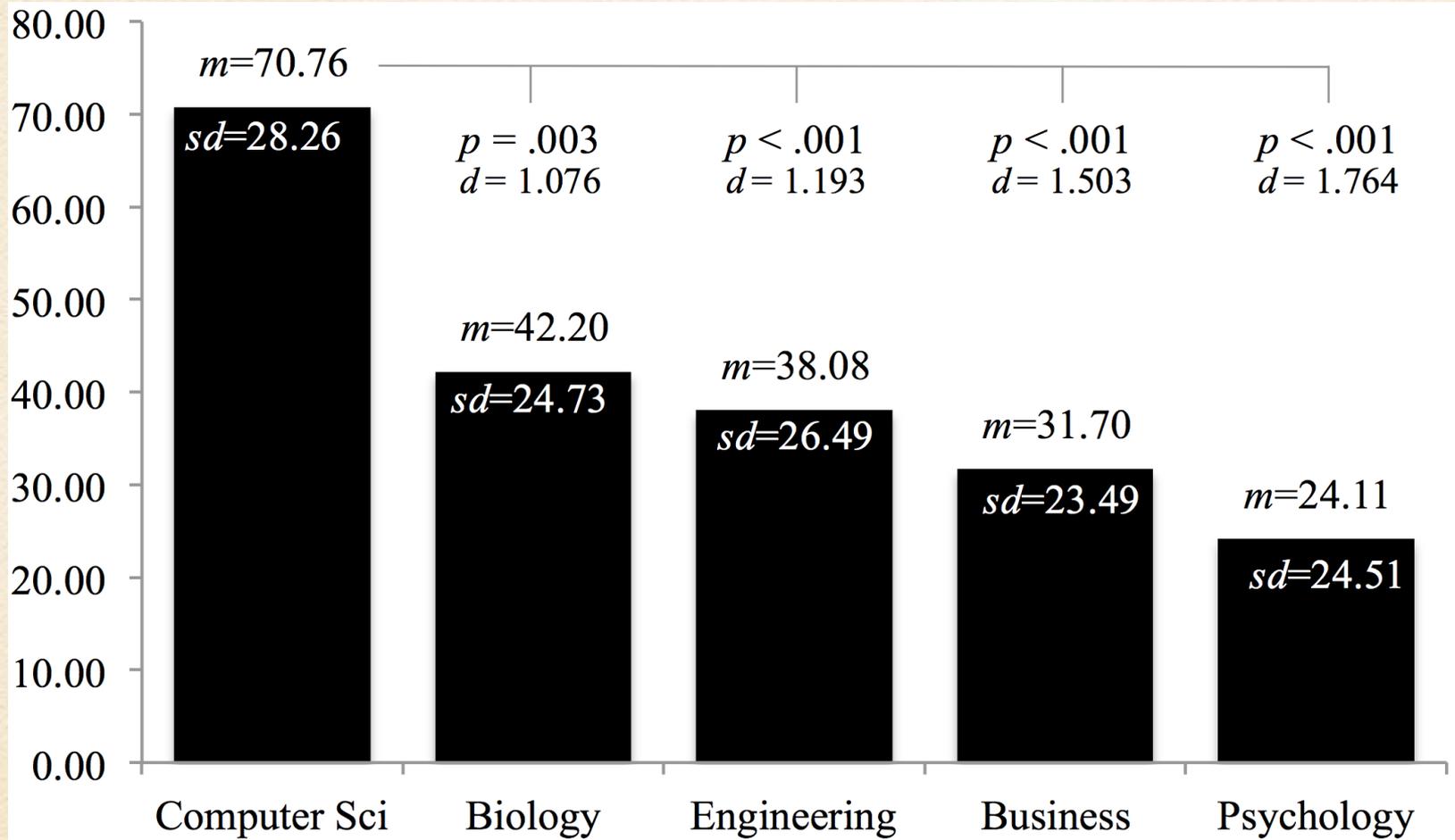
# Total Volume of Reading (pages per week)

$F(4,79) = 4.87, p=.001$



# Volume of Digital Reading (percent for the course)

$$F(4,105) = 10.06, p < .001$$



# Overall Reading Expectations

Theme Reference	Total
Understand course content	23.08%(57)
Apply new knowledge	21.86%(54)
Prepare for lectures/labs	16.19%(40)
Engage in critical thinking	9.72%(24)
Synthesize information	5.67%(14)
Understand genre-specific information	5.26%(13)
Learn/use vocabulary	4.45%(11)
Demonstrate knowledge through writing	4.05%(10)
Understand research	3.64% (9)
Conduct research	2.43% (6)
Be strategic readers	2.02% (5)
Use text as a resource	1.62% (4)
Total	100%(247)

NOTE: There are no statistically significant differences across the five majors.

# Reading Expectation #1: Understand Course Content

"Expect" is too strong a word, as students rarely read what they are assigned anymore. What I "hope" them to **gain from the reading is a familiarity with the concepts of Statics**, which they can in turn use as a springboard for the problem-solving skills that form the foundation of the course. In short, the reading is to inform the acquired skill set.

(Engineering, Professor #16)

## Reading Expectation #2: Apply New Knowledge

Students need to read the textbook with ease and apply critical thinking to their problem solving, application questions. For this they must be eloquent in English language and developed readers. If not, they would take too much time to study and probably would **not perform well on the four midterms and the final exam.**

(Biology, Professor #6)

## Reading Expectation #3: Prepare for Lectures/Labs

I expect the students to be able to **read material, attend lecture, integrate the two sources of material**, and apply them to assigned work. I expect them to make small intuitive leaps in recognizing the application of the in class material to choices that they see occurring in their lives.

(Business, Professor #7)

# Overall Reading Challenges

Theme References	Total
Genre	20.30%(41)
Lack of motivation	14.85%(30)
Strategic reading	14.85%(30)
Time	7.92%(16)
Vocabulary	7.92%(16)
ESL	6.44%(13)
Academic Preparation	4.95%(10)
Basic comprehension	4.46% (9)
Reading to learn	3.96% (8)
Reading graphs	3.47% (7)
Amount of reading	2.97% (6)
Critical thinking	2.97% (6)
Relying on lectures	2.48% (5)
Following directions	1.49% (3)
Access to texts	1.00% (2)
Total	100%(202)

NOTE: There are no statistically significant differences across the five majors.

# Reading Challenge #1: Genre

Many appear to be incapable of reading anything that isn't on a web site, and even then, unwilling to read things unless they take the form of responses to an email or a posting on a blog. And even then, without a video accompanying the email they seem to be at a loss to comprehend the ideas.

(Computer Science, Professor #5)

## Reading Challenge #2: Lack of Motivation

Apparently one of the **greatest challenges is sitting down to read the text at all!** I believe many never do this. I think they rely on skimming and memorizing definitions of bolded terms. For students who do make the effort to read the text, I believe there are often problems comprehending vocabulary that one might assume is basic for college students. They also have difficulty extracting key points from the text. However, this is more understandable given that many of our students speak English as a second language. Probably only challenging if not a native speaker

(Psychology, Professor #11)

# Reading Challenge #3: Strategic Reading

Students **tend to read texts like a novel and not evaluating their understanding of the information they are exposed to.** We tell them to link everything they read to the learning objectives for that lecture topic, but too many simply refuse to do this.

(Biology, Professor #3)

## Implications from the Survey

- ① The language skill of reading is perceived by university faculty to be important.
- ② Students read significant amounts of text in introductory courses within their majors (ranging from 25-85 pages per week).
- ③ Given faculty expectations for reading, the current *one size fits all* approach to teaching academic reading in Intensive English Programs should be reexamined.

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