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### **Abstract**

Well-educated laypeople tend to rely on their own ability to evaluate scientific claims when they obtain information from texts with high comprehensibility. The present study investigated whether controversial content reduces this facilitating effect of high text comprehensibility on readers' self-reliance and whether the influence of comprehensibility and controversiality is mediated by perceived epistemic topic complexity. Eighty-eight students of nonmedical subjects read medical texts of varying comprehensibility and controversiality and indicated their willingness to rely on their own judgment. Participants' reliance on their own judgment was indicated by persuasion and confidence in claim agreement. The results showed that recipients' reliance was stronger after reading comprehensible rather than incomprehensible texts, but this difference was larger if texts were uncontroversial rather than controversial. These effects, however, were not mediated by perceived epistemic topic complexity. Implications for the communication of scientific knowledge to the lay public are discussed.