

Strategies for Reading a Scholarly Article

Anatomy of a Journal Article

Element	What It Is	What It Tells You
Title	A concise statement of the issues investigated	What is this article about?
Abstract	One paragraph that appears before the article begins. Provides a summary of the entire article.	What topic are they studying? What was the primary finding?
Introduction	Introduces the topic of the article, discusses how their research contributes to the existing framework.	What does the author plan to do in this paper? Why should we care? What are they trying to test or show? How does this study fit into the larger context of the field?
Literature Review (can be included in the introduction or come after the introduction)	Discusses previous work on the topic, points out what questions remain, relates the research in this article to the rest of the field. Presents author's hypothesis.	What are some of the most important past findings on this topic? How have these past studies led the author to this particular study? What is their research hypothesis?
Methods and Data	The methods sections details HOW the author went about their research. It would include who or what is studied, how they studied it, what procedures and instruments they use, and what variables were measured.	What data did the author gather? How did they gather it? How did they analyze the data once it was gathered?
Results	Explains what the author found. This can be very technical, reporting the results in detailed statistical language. Tables and figures are frequently used.	What did the author find?
Discussion and Conclusion	The author answers their research question, discusses what the results mean, and how the results relate to existing research on the topic. In the conclusion, the author relates the research back to the larger context and suggests avenues for future research.	What were their findings? Why are these findings important? What are the limitations of this study? What suggestions are there for future research?
References	Lists all of the articles and sources cited within this article.	What are other articles or books about this topic?

The Key Point:

You should NOT read all these sections in order. In fact, you may not need to read all of the sections. Let's talk more about this...

Should I Read It? How?

In this part, we'll figure out which sections are necessary for which stages of your research.

Purpose	Read These Sections	Think About These Questions	Taking Notes
Finding sources for a paper	Abstract Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the author's argument, and is it well supported?• Is it a good match for my question?• How might this connect to my research question (directly, tangentially, new direction)?	List: Categorize each article as a YES, NO, or MAYBE, with no more than a one-sentence descriptor to help you remember what it is about.
Expanding sources for a paper	References	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which of these sources might be useful in answering my research question?	No. Just find the sources.
Constructing your paper/argument	Abstract Introduction Literature Review Results Conclusion Discussion (you will probably read some of these sections more than once)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does this help to answer my research question?• Which parts of my research question does this address?• How does this relate to other articles I have read?• Do I agree with the author and findings? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this study?• What new questions does this raise for me? Does this shift the focus of my research at all?	Highlighting: Only VERY important terms or quotes, parts most directly relevant to your research question. Notes/Annotations: After you read each paragraph, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• summarize main points/themes• note key evidence• define new terms• connect to other articles and your question

Wait, what happened to the Methods and Data sections?

Here's the dirty little secret...you probably don't need to read these sections. They are incredibly technical, and unless you are actually doing research in this field, or are a statistics dork, you will likely not need to know this study at this level of technicality. If you want to geek out a little, feel free, but don't worry about a thorough understanding of the stats and methods used at this point. If you go to grad school in this field you'll learn this stuff.

Oh man, this is going to take forever.

Yep. Research, REAL research, is time consuming. So settle in kids.

Want some guided practice?

Check out this [Journal Reading Tutorial](#).