

How to Read a Scholarly Article: Key Reading Strategies

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So Many Articles, So Little Time

Skipping around is encouraged when reading a scholarly article:

- begin by reading abstract
- skim the introduction and jump to the end to read the conclusion
- then, look at the results to view the data (graphs, charts, images, etc.)

Skimming these sections first will allow you to quickly determine if the article is relevant to your research and if you should do an in-depth reading.

1. Abstract

Read the abstract first

The abstract previews the entire article, makes it easier to judge whether it is relevant.

For the sciences:

- Titles can only tell you so much about the content of the article. The Abstract acts as a preview for the entire article, including the methods and results. By reading the Abstract first, you can get a better idea of what the article is actually about, if it relates to what you are researching, and whether it is worth your time to read the rest of it.

For the humanities:

- Articles in the Arts and Humanities do not always include an Abstract, and if they do, it might just be the first paragraph of the introduction. If not included, move onto the Introduction. Make sure to skim through the section headings, if they are there. This will give you an idea of the organization of the article as well as a general idea of themes.

2. Intro & Conclusion

Next, read the intro and the conclusion

Learn more about the topic of study and what the authors learned through their research.

Applies to both sciences and humanities:

- These two sections give you the background information for the topic of the article as well as what happened in the study.
- The introduction includes info about previous studies/papers that relate to the current one.
- The conclusion will provide a summary of the the study findings or analysis and an explanation of how their research contributes to their specific field of study.
- By reading the conclusion you see whether the study answered the original research question and what the authors see as the next steps in their research.

3. Look at the Data

Take a look at results, i.e. tables, charts, graphs or images

Get a better idea of the results of the research or analytical study.

For the Sciences:

- Closely look at the visual representations of the data. See what conclusions you come to and make note of them. When you read through the entire article, compare your own conclusions to what the authors saw in their results and data.

For the Humanities:

- The article may not present numeric data however, there might be other visual representations of what the scholars are studying. For example, reproductions of art pieces, or excerpts from primary sources or literary pieces. These are worth looking at to see the materials being studied.

4. Read the Article from Start to Finish

Do an in-depth reading

Now that you have pre-read some of the article and are sure it relates to your research topic, do an in-depth reading.

Applies to both sciences and humanities

- Read the article from start to finish.
- Take notes.
- Summarize sections or paragraphs.
- Keep a subject dictionary or the Internet/Wikipedia close by. If you come across any unfamiliar terms, you can quickly look them up.
- Keep track of the citation information of the articles you do read and want to use in your research. Look at the References/Works Cited list. You may find additional scholarly articles related to your research.

Reverse Oreo Method

Scholarly articles are structured in the reverse of an Oreo, meaning that the "good stuff" is on the outside: the Abstract, Introduction, the Discussion, and the Conclusion.

The "dry stuff" is on the inside of the article - the Methodology and the Results. A key point of the scientific method is that results must be able to be replicated to be valid, so Methodology shows exactly how the study might be reproduced, but sheds little light on the big picture, unless you are replicating the experiment. Statistical analysis in the Results are important, but is typically just the math verifying the significance of the results.

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Last Updated: May 20, 2021 8:54 AM

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