

Reading Scholarly Journal Articles



Scholarly articles are published in peer reviewed journals, issued by academic institutions or professional organizations. These scholarly articles are complex – not easy reading – and comprehending them requires attentiveness and practice. The authors are scholars, researchers, and experts in a given field of study who usually assume the reader has some prior knowledge of the topic, since the primary audience are readers familiar with this field: scholars, researchers, professors, and students.

These journal articles may have different purposes: a review article, a theory building article, a meta analysis, or an empirical research article (the kind most often read by students). Scholarly articles of all types include thorough documentation of primary and/or secondary research, since the article's main purposes are to contribute the findings from original or experimental research to the existing body of knowledge, to help answer important questions, and to advance scholarly conversations in the discipline.

Most scholarly articles follow this **standard format**:

Abstract

Provides a summary of the article, including the results or findings

Introduction

Poses a research question or hypothesis
Establishes why this question or issue matters
Provides background and gives limits of the study

Literature Review

Updates the reader on previous scholarship on this topic
(Note: the extent of the literature review varies, depending on topic and type of journal)

Research Method

Discusses hypothesis being tested or research question being investigated
Describes strategies for research: *qualitative* (interviews, surveys, person-to-person research, or observation) and/or *quantitative* (data garnered via measurements)

Results or Findings

Presents data from the research (may use tables or charts to present data)

Discussion

Interprets the findings or results and applies them to the research question
Explains what was learned, why it matters, and what is left inconclusive

Conclusion(s)

Presents implications of the research
Gives suggestions for further study

Bibliography

Strategies for Reading Scholarly Articles

Prereading

- **Read** the Abstract.
- **Preview** the article's major section headings to see how the article is structured.
- **Identify** the research question, purpose, and main points of the article. (Note the findings, which will be stated in the Abstract, as well as in the Results and the Discussion of the Results.)
- **Examine** charts and tables to see what kind of data the authors collected; this will assist with reading the authors' analysis of the data.
- **Ask questions** and write them down as they occur to you while you preview the article.
- **Keep in mind your purpose** for reading: Is it to summarize the article? To find support for an argument you are making in a paper? To critique the author's methods or contributions to the field?

Reading / Note-taking

- **Read thoughtfully** and take notes on the main points in each section. Reading the article more than once is often necessary. Try reading once for a general understanding and again for details you may have overlooked.
- **Annotate** with notes in the margins to flag important information, including the goal(s) of the study; the qualitative or quantitative nature of the study; the discussion regarding the participants, including descriptions of control and experimental groups; the findings; and the conclusions.
- **Look up** unfamiliar terminology. Keep a list of terms you may find in articles in a given field of study.
- **Outline** the main content of the article on a separate sheet of paper.
- **Summarize** the main idea of each section in your own words.
- **Read aloud** when necessary to help with comprehension.
- **Don't** be overly anxious or harshly self-critical if, after several close readings, you fail to fully understand all that is in the research article. As a student new to the field, lacking any specialized training at this stage in your studies, some research articles may seem almost incomprehensible. **Do** make a list of terms, concepts, models and theories that are new to you, search them out on the Web (you are capable of teaching yourself much!), and then meet with the faculty member teaching the course for discussion.

Review

- **Review** your notes and outline.
- **Reread** the Abstract to be sure you fully understand the article.
- **Connect** the information in the article to what you may already know about the topic from class discussions, other course readings, and your personal experience.
- **Work with others** who are reading the same article. Make sure that all have read the article completely, and help each other fill gaps in understanding.

*For more information on working with sources, see SVSU Writing Center handouts **Annotated Bibliographies, Outlines, and Active Reading Strategies**.*