

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION INFO SHEET

Academic Reading: How to read a journal article (AR: JA)

Academic journals are periodicals, often peer-reviewed and published by experts in a field or by professional bodies comprising information relevant to a particular area or theme. This Info sheet focuses on one type of article: research reports.

Learn about:

- six steps to efficient reading of a journal article
- features of a research report
- analytical thinking.

See also [Info Sheets](#) on note taking, marking your page, critical and analytical thinking.

Research reports have a common set of features including: abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, analysis and results, discussion, conclusion, references, and possibly appendices. Although it is useful to know the structure, it is best not to read research reports from beginning to end word for word. The following steps will help you use research reports efficiently for your research.

Step 1

Evaluate the source's worth.

- Title and abstract - what is the article about?
- Author - qualifications, institution, experience, past publications?
- Publication - authoritative, peer reviewed?
- Timing - recent, significant?
- References - how many, how good?

Step 2

Evaluate the relevance of the source.

- Remind yourself of what you are looking for: your topic or question.
- Read the abstract, introduction, headings and conclusion or findings to determine its relevance. The literature review section will help you to understand past studies related to the current article.
- Look at diagrams, tables, graphs and read the first lines of key paragraphs.

Does it add to your understanding/knowledge of your area of study?

Does it answer any of your questions?

Note: If the article doesn't pass Steps 1 and 2, forget it and start another search.

Step 3**Prepare to read the source.**

- Print out the article and get ready to write on it with pens, pencils, and highlighters.
- Remind yourself of your reason for reading it.
- Skim read headings, and sub-headings.
- Identify the most important and relevant sections to read in detail.
- Highlight any key terms and definitions.

Step 4**Read the source in detail**

- Read one section at a time. This will give you the main argument of the article, determining its relevance to you and your project. Then try reading the methods to identify how the research was done. The analysis and results will give you more details about the research.
- Highlight main points, key terms and findings. Use colours to help with marking your page: one for each concept or theory. Use the same colours across all articles to help with cross referencing.
- Make your own list of abbreviations and symbols for use in the margins: see Info Sheet on marking your page for ideas.
- Make notes –see the note making Info Sheet

Step 5**Analysis**

Look at your notes and think about the ideas before going on to another section. Ask yourself questions at the following different levels:

1. Literal - obvious meaning
2. Lateral - other possible interpretations, reasons, outcomes.
3. Critical - strengths, weaknesses. Are the main ideas supported by evidence/examples? Is the argument logical? Is the conclusion justified?
4. Speculative - what other arguments or conclusions could flow from the evidence? What new questions does it raise? What further studies or research could be done?

More Info

Cyberlab for Psychological Research gives more info on a typical research article

<http://faculty.frostburg.edu/mbradley/journalarticles.html>

Pasadena City College provides tips on how to read and take notes on a scholarly journal article

<http://www.pasadena.edu/hstutoringlab/writing/writingscholarlyarticle.cfm>

Kishwaukee College Library provides a 5 minute YouTube clip on How to read a scholarly journal article <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEVftUdfKtQ>

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