

HOW TO READ A SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

SCRIPT

[SLIDE 1.1]

As a student, you'll have to find and read scholarly articles, but they can seem very overwhelming, and full of gibberish! Don't panic! This tutorial will show you how to read a scholarly article. It will describe each section of an article, and suggest ways to look through it and decide whether it's useful for your assignment or not.

[SLIDE 1.2]

Scholarly articles will have some or all of the following sections, depending on the subject. The abstract summarizes the entire article. The introduction will describe **why** the article was written, or, if the topic is a research study, why the research study was necessary. The Literature Review provides background information and cites previous studies or research. The Method or Methodology section describes **how** a research study was conducted. Results describe **what happened**. Discussion describes what it all means. The conclusion tells us what was learned. And the References section provides a list of who the author researched to write this particular article.

[SLIDE 1.3]

Now, if you want to tear all your hair out, go ahead and read these articles from beginning to end. If you want to keep your hair, and your sanity, here are some tips:

First, read the Abstract, which summarizes the article, and the Conclusion. This should give you a good idea whether the article is relevant to your needs. If not, ta da, you're done. Move on to the next article. If you think the article sounds promising, continue by reading the Introduction, and the Discussion. I think the Results and Discussion sections are so intertwined, that they're best read together. For instance, there may be some charts and graphs in the results, but you'll need to read about them in the Discussion section to figure out what they mean. I don't want to say you can skip all the other sections, but you can definitely **skim** them. Quickly.

[SLIDE 1.4]

Let's explore each section in detail. Go ahead and click on any section for more information. You'll be able to click on these sections on any page, and jump around as you choose. Good luck! Have fun! If you have any questions or run into any difficulty, please contact your friendly librarians.

Abstract:

The abstract of an article is a summary of what the article will discuss. It always appears first, either separated from the article, as shown here, or as the first paragraph in the text body. When evaluating an article, begin by reading the abstract. Also, do you see the "Keywords" section below the abstract? If

you determine this article suits your needs, consider using these keywords in additional database searches in order to find resources.

Introduction:

The introduction of a paper follows the abstract. The introduction section describes why the author chose to write this article, or why the study was needed. In addition, it may also mention important sources the author consulted, which may be useful for your purposes, especially if you need additional resources. Please note that this section is not always labeled “Introduction” – there may be a more descriptive header.

Literature Review:

Not all articles will have a literature review. Not all literature reviews will be labeled as such. Any section of a paper that discusses previous research on the topic represents a Literature Review. There can be many paragraphs, all with different sub-headings describing the content, and this section can go on for several pages. You should read this section if you don’t know much about a topic, or if you want to learn more about the types of research that have already been conducted.

Methodology:

Research studies will include a Method, or methodology, section, which describes in detail HOW the study was undertaken. For instance, the procedure -- how data was captured or measured, how many people participated in the study. You may see charts, tables, or equations. The section may discuss procedures, variables, and analysis methods. This is useful when trying to plan or duplicate research. You’ll generally skim this section and head straight for the results and discussion.

Results & Discussion:

As the name implies, the results of the study are discussed in these sections. Here, you’ll also often see graphs, charts, and data analysis. By skipping to the discussion section, you can center in on the authors’ interpretation of the results. The Discussion section will often highlight the most important data, what that data implies, and what this study may mean for future research. Skim the results, but don’t skip the Discussion section – it’s where you’ll read about what the authors learned from this experiment.

Conclusion:

It may seem funny, but the Conclusion should be one of the first sections you read in an article. The conclusion is a summary, similar to the abstract, but it adds in what was learned throughout the process. This section will also discuss limitations of the study. Each study has its limits, or shortcomings, due to population, location, methodology, timing, and is a warning that you must remember this is only one study, and the conclusions drawn from this study are of this study only. This article serves as one more piece in the puzzle you are putting together through your research.

References:

Oftentimes, the Reference section gets completely ignored, but if you're looking for additional resources, this is your gold mine. Take note of inline citations while you are reading the article, so you can find the whole citation in the References section. From there, it's a quick search in a database to find the cited article.

Research can be fun, and it can be frustrating too. Now you have a better idea of how to navigate through a dense scholarly article and make sense of what you see. If you have further questions, please reach out to the library. We're here for you. See you next time!