

READING ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Reading academic journal articles requires a systematic approach. They cannot be read in the same way as a story (a novel, a newspaper report, etc.). This approach helps you to efficiently identify the structure of the content (and not waste your time), and to effectively identify the author's point of view or argument (to successfully understand it).

Reading academic articles is a skilful practice: you get better the more you do it—but only if you practise effectively.

First steps for reading an academic article

- Read the **title**, and make a guess about what the point of the article will be.
- Locate the **author** details: what authority/professional standing do they have?
- Look at the **publication** details: publisher, where and when it was published. Make a note.
- Identify the **type** of text or publication and relate it to your purpose for reading it.
 - Research article (peer-reviewed, empirical research: primary source)
 - Discursive article in an academic journal (primary or secondary source)
 - Review article (literature review)
 - Theoretical article (conceptual foundation, framework/model, perspectives)
 - Chapter in an edited volume
 - Policy document, government report
 - Technical report, conference paper, etc.
- Adopt a reading strategy, e.g. **SQ3R**

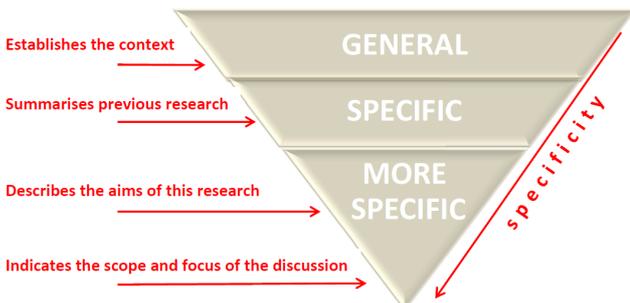
A reading strategy for academic articles

1. **SURVEY**— Skim the text for:
 - a general idea of what it is about
 - suitable information for your purpose.
2. **QUESTION** and make a note of:
 - why you are reading it
 - what you want to get out of it
 - how you will use the information.
3. **READ** for a purpose.
 - Look for the main ideas — in the abstract, introduction, conclusion, headings.
 - Break the reading of the rest of the article into sections, and note the point of each section.
 - Decide if anything is useful for your purpose.
4. **RECALL** the main points. Check that you:
 - can answer your questions
 - have gathered the information you need.
5. **REVIEW**— look back to see:
 - if the text has provided you with what you wanted
 - if you have a clear overview of the important information.

STUDY TIPS

Strategies for reading an empirical research article

Journal articles reporting empirical research have a structure that is determined by the type of research and by the journal in which they appear. This makes extracting information from them easier. The reporting of empirical research typically follows a pattern, illustrated in the table below. Choose the sections you will look at. Depending on your reason for reading, you may not need to read every section.

Function	Reading strategies
Title provides information about the contents of the article.	Read it first. Predict the main conclusions.
Abstract provides a complete overview of what the research is about, what was done, how it was done, what was found and what the results mean.	Read to gain an understanding of the paper and the research findings. Ask yourself how you might use this information.
Introduction often provides a brief review of previous research, a rationale (reason) for the research, and an outline of the research aims. Knowledge about this structure will help you read it efficiently.	Locate relevant information and develop a clearer picture of what the research is about and why it has been done. This diagram* is an outline of the sequence of information in an introduction. <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>STRUCTURE OF AN INTRODUCTION</p>  </div>
Methodology describes the methods used in the research.	Identify the specific research methods used to gather the findings.
Results describe the findings. (Sometimes the results and discussion sections are combined.)	Locate and note the main findings.
Discussion provides an interpretation of what the results mean in terms of the original research question or hypothesis, and in the field.	Read the discussion section to understand what the results mean e.g. validity, limitations, consequences, implications. Ask yourself how you will use the information.
Conclusion (or general discussion section) is a discussion of the meaning and implications of the research. It may also detail the implications of the research and make recommendations for changes to policy and practice directions or directions for further research.	Read the conclusion for an understanding of the key issues resulting from the research.
References: the literature on which the research was based.	Scan the titles in the references to see if there are other research articles or publications you could use for further information.

*Adapted from: University of Wollongong, (2000) <http://unlearning.uow.edu.au/reading/1d.html>
Strategies for reading journal articles