FIVE QUICK TIPS

How to Read a Research Article and understand its purpose.
Scholarship is a Conversation
Take a Preview

Identify the Purpose

Analyze the Solution

Examine the Evidence

Read the Literature Review & References

Further Reading
Contact
Scholarship is a Conversation

Complex problems do not have discrete answers but may be characterized by several competing perspectives and solutions. So in reading scholarly articles researchers read analytically, examining the methods, results and discussions in the study in order to support, refute or discuss the findings through their own research and the published research of others.

(adapted from ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, August 2014. Draft 3)

The Purpose of Scholarly Communication

1. To announce and share research, its success and failures.
2. To receive affirmation and invite the scrutiny of other researchers in the discipline.
3. To provide research data and analysis for scholars and other researchers that will help expand the knowledge in the discipline.

Before You Read Think

• Why are you reading the paper?
  o For background knowledge
  o To use details that you will be adapting or using in your own research.
• What is the purpose of your research?
• What information are you looking for? General and specific.

Browsing with a Purpose.

Take a quick scan of the article to identify key points to make a preliminary assessment of quality and relevance.

• Title- Find out the main purpose of the paper
• Authors- Note authors and affiliations; look at endnotes to identify funding sources etc. - any conflict of interest, bias.
• Study Objects – Read the end of the introduction for information about the hypothesis tested and the experimental approach taken.
• Graphics- Scan tables and figures in sequence, look for information on subjects, tests performed and findings.
• Authors conclusions- look at the discussion and to see what the author
Read the title and the abstract.

The title and the abstract together provide a preview of the article and can help you to determine if the article is relevant to your research or paper. The title is a concise statement on the theoretical issues and the variables that have been studied and the abstract summarizes the main point of the study giving a synopsis of problem being studied, the method, the findings and a few implications of the study.

Question:

Is this study relevant to your topic?
Read the Introduction.

The introduction describes the issue or problem being addressed in the paper, and presents a rationale for the problem being studied. It also provides evidence from the literature that it is a viable problem and merits further attention and research. The end of introduction tells you what that specific study is about, read that first and carefully. Try to identify what questions the researcher is trying to answer.

Questions:

a) What is the problem and why was it studied?
b) How does it relate to, differ and go beyond other similar research?
c) How did they arrive at their hypothesis—through experiments, theory, informal observation or intuition.
d) What questions do the researchers want to answer?
e) What is the author’s hypothesis and what assumptions does the author make?
f) How do the conclusions relate to previous research or established theories?
Examine the discussion and the conclusions.

The conclusion consists of summarized answers to the research questions it makes sense of the data and explains the data in the context of the questions. The discussion describes the data and conclusions in light of previous research in that area and explains how the current study impacts the research in that field.

Questions.

a) Does this conclusion answer the research question?

b) How ‘big’ is the conclusion? Are there sub-conclusions or just one main conclusion?

c) How does the researcher support this conclusion? Do you come to the same conclusions after examining the evidence that is presented in the study?

d) Do the results support or refute the original hypothesis, what does this add to the ‘scholarly conversation’ and how does this impact your research or paper?

e) What are the practical or theoretical implications of the research or the paper/s findings?

f) Are their populations to which the results do not apply?

f) Did the results contradict other research findings? If so how does the author explain this discrepancy?
Examine The Evidence

Scrutinize the results and the methods.

The hypothesis is translated into set/s of testable questions or experiments so the data can be collected and analyzed to confirm, disprove or substantiate the hypothesis. The method gives details of how the study was conducted so others can recreate the study to support or refute the results. It outlines the demographics and characteristics of the study subjects, the study instruments and details of the procedures. It operationalizes the variables. The results describe how data was analyzed and give the final values and ranges.

Questions to ask

a) Why did they choose this method and analyze the data in this way?
b) How were the hypotheses translated into questions?
c) How were the variables measured and are they measuring what the researcher intends to study?
d) What are the major findings?
e) Was the original hypothesis supported by the results?
f) How does the article support the conclusion? What arguments and evidence does the author provide to support the conclusion?
Read other perspectives.

This will give you further reading in that field and the opportunity to explore ‘competing perspectives’ in the research area. It tells you who else is working in that area and positions the current study in the discourse of the discipline.

Questions.

a) Who are the main researchers in this area?

b) How similar is this study to other studies in this area?

c) Are there some perspectives from other related disciplines that may be relevant to the study?
Further Reading


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