

# Reading Strategically

When reading scholarly literature, read strategically. Scan articles before reading in depth, focusing on the elements that will give you the information you need first. This will quickly let you know what the article is about and its relevance for your research. It will also prepare you to read the full article later, giving you a mental map of its structure and purpose.

## First, Identify These Elements:

- ❑ **Author.** Who are they? A quick credential check is a great idea. If you have more time, investigate what else they have published, their reputation, and institutional associations.
- ❑ **The Article Title.**
- ❑ **The Journal Name.** At a glance, it should match the discipline you're working within. For more information, look it up. Is it scholarly? Reputable? What's the scope?
- ❑ **Date of Publication.** Is the article current?
- ❑ **The Abstract.** This is a synopsis of the article. Its purpose is to help you decide at a glance if the article suits your research.
- ❑ **The Research Question.** This is not a specific section, but it will normally be stated within the abstract or the first few paragraphs. The research question is the scholarly question the author was investigating: it's the "why" of the article.
- ❑ **The Conclusion.** Read the conclusion before reading the whole article to see if it will be worth reading. Unlike reading the end of a novel first, this won't spoil your experience.
- ❑ **Bibliography.** All scholarly articles should have one. References tell you how the author is engaging within a scholarly conversation.

## Some Articles May Have These Sections:

- ❑ **Literature Review.** The author summarizes relevant research on a topic in a literature review. Literature reviews are very helpful for finding more information and contextualizing the position of this article.
- ❑ **Methodology.** The methodology section can be very technical: it's the "how" section. Scan it for relevant information and read in depth if needed.
- ❑ **Images and Data Visualizations.** These will tell you at a glance if your author did research that involved data, or what images were important enough to warrant inclusion.
- ❑ **Results.** The results of a study will be relevant for assessing its usefulness. Can you use these results as supporting evidence in your assignment?

- ❑ **The Discussion.** This may have a different name. Placed near the start or end of the article, it's the "why you should care" section. Pay particular attention to the references the author makes, as this is the context for the argument.

### As You're Reading, Ask Yourself:

- **If you're working on an assignment, how would you use this article?** Does it contain information that will be helpful in answering a research question?
- **How does this article fit into the scholarly conversation on this topic?** A scholarly conversation is the discussion between experts about a developing topic. How does this article compare to other, similar articles in your assigned reading?
- **Do you agree with the author's conclusions?** While you are reading, it is important to be open to learning new concepts. New information can call into question old beliefs.
- **What are the weaknesses of this article?** Be prepared to critique the article you are reading, keeping an eye out for flaws in reasoning or poor scholarship.
- **What is the author's purpose in writing?** What is the argument? Who is the audience?
- **Is this article what you were looking for?** The resources you find while doing research should impact your search strategy. Whether or not this article is relevant to your assignment will help you decide what to search for next.

#### Taking Notes

Take notes while reading. This will help you be critical and formulate your ideas about an article while keeping track of references.

When taking notes use the six month rule: take notes that will still be helpful six months from now.

Find a note-taking method that works for you. Pen and paper? Digital highlighting? Google doc? There's no right or wrong way.

### Bibliography:

Sharpe, Krista Bowers. "Scholarly Article Autopsy." *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox*. June 19, 2017. <http://sandbox.acrl.org/library-collection/scholarly-article-autopsy>

Sweeney, Miriam M. "How to Read for Grad School." *Miriam M. Sweeney*. June 20, 2012. <https://miriamsweeney.net/2012/06/20/readforgradschool/>