



Reading a Scholarly Article in the Arts or Humanities

Scholarly articles (also called “academic articles,” “peer reviewed articles,” and “journal articles”) are designed to add to our knowledge of a subject. Most academic disciplines use scholarly publications to communicate research findings and ideas.

While scholarly articles don’t all look the same, they can have similar characteristics, and you can use these characteristics to help you read and understand what the authors are trying to communicate.

Usually, a scholarly article in the arts or humanities (including English, history, and philosophy) contains the following elements. Note that these elements may be different, or perform different jobs, than those in the social and physical sciences. You will also notice that articles in the arts and humanities might be quite a bit longer than those in the social or physical sciences so you might need to set aside more time to read them.

Section (identified by a heading)	Function
Abstract	This section contains a brief summary of the article. It may or may not be part of the article you’re reading, but you should read it if it is included.
Introduction	This section can be quite long and will give a lot of background information on the topic being studied. There will be a thesis statement stating what the author is trying to prove and there might be a literature review included.
Discussion and Conclusion	These sections will likely not be identified with the words “Discussion” and “Conclusion”. The discussion will make up the bulk of the article and will generally lead into the conclusion.
Works Cited	Lists the sources the authors consulted when they were doing their research. These are usually other journal articles like the one you are reading.

Strategies for reading arts and humanities research articles:

Academic articles can be challenging and intimidating if you don't have a lot of experience reading them (and sometimes even if you do!). Here are some strategies that will help you get started.

1. Start with the Introduction:

- Some arts and humanities research articles will have an abstract, so you can begin there if one is present. If there isn't one, move right into the introduction. Look for the thesis statement and take note of any background information that you need. Look for section headings to give you a sense of where the article is going.

2. Read the introduction and the conclusion:

- These will help you learn a bit more about the topic and will help clarify what the authors are studying a bit more precisely. It will also tell you what they conclude, and why the research they have done is important.
- Part of the introduction, or the section immediately following it, will include a literature review. This will show you how other researchers over a long period of time have studied the topic and what they have concluded.

3. Look for any visual elements:

- In many articles in the arts and humanities, you will not find anything but just text. Some, though, might contain reproductions of artwork, figures, sculptures or books that you should look at before you start reading.

4. Read the whole article:

- While you're reading, take careful notes, being sure to record any ideas you might have that agree or disagree with what the researchers are concluding.
- Summarize sections or paragraphs in your own words to make sure you understand them. If you can't explain the content in your own words, go back and read that section again (Don't worry! It's perfectly normal that you might have to read a section a few times!).
- Look up unfamiliar terms right away – don't just skip over them! You can use a dictionary for this, or a textbook glossary, or search online for a reliable definition.
- Keep track of the citation information of anything you read – you'll need it later!