



Reading a Scholarly Article in the Social Sciences or Physical Sciences

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 social sciences or physical sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.) contain the following elements:

Section (identified by a heading)	Function
Abstract	This section contains a brief summary of the article, which also includes the methodology (how the study was conducted) and results.
Introduction	This section contains important background information about the topic being studied, and often discusses why the researchers decided to study this topic.
Methods	This section presents a discussion of how the research was conducted, and includes information on data collection, experiment or study set up, and any follow up conducted once the study or experiments were completed.
Results/Findings	This section presents the data gathered from the research conducted. It will usually contain graphs, charts, tables, and other visual representations of data.
Discussion	This is usually the longest section of the paper, where the authors analyze and evaluate the results and discuss what they mean. They will also decide if their results answered their research question or not.
Conclusion	This section discusses how the study might lead to future research and will also note how the results add to what is already known about the subject.
References	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 social sciences and physical sciences 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 abstract first:

- This will make it easier for you to decide if the article is relevant to your research, and it will help give you some idea of what the article is discussing.
- If the article isn't relevant to your research, you can save yourself the time and effort of reading it and move on to something more relevant to your research.

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. Preview the Data:

- Look at any charts, tables, or graphs that are included with the article. See if you can make any conclusions on your own based on the data presented. You can use your notes in this section to compare your own ideas with the way the authors are interpreting the data.

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, or how they have performed their study or experiments.
- 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!