

Reading Journal Articles

Articles published in scientific and professional journals can be challenging for a variety of reasons. Fortunately, there are simple, effective strategies for tackling this type of text and streamlining your approach. Page two of this handout provides a note-taking template.

Key Features

Journal articles differ from other types of reading in significant ways.

1. Both the **author** and the **intended audience** are likely to be **experts** in the subject. The author assumes that readers are already familiar with basic ideas, terms, and background knowledge.
2. The focus is usually **research**—either the author’s own or the work of other scholars on the subject. The text is likely to include copious **references** to other researchers.
3. The author may explore a **narrow**, highly specific topic or perspective within a larger subject.
4. The author may make a **claim**, develop an **argument**, or share an **opinion**. Look for this in the article’s title and abstract (the introductory summary paragraph).
5. Content may be presented in standardized **sections**. These include abstract, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, and reference sections.
6. The **vocabulary** is subject-specific and appropriate for advanced readers. Moreover, key terms will be woven into the text, not highlighted with special formatting or referenced in a glossary.
7. The text may include **few or no visual aids** (graphics, illustrations, photos)—only text. Moreover, there may be few or no subheadings or other content delineations.

Strategies

There are many ways to vary your approach to this type of reading.

- Ask the professor for guiding questions or key topics to keep in mind while reading. These suggestions and insights can guide your note-taking.
- Convert headings and topics into simple questions before you read. Jot these down and read for answers. Use these questions to guide your note-taking.
- Build a foundation with simpler, shorter sources of information, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and reputable Web sites. Gathering background information will help you process details and identify main ideas more efficiently.
- Supplement with a **different** article on the same topic or an article that was referenced multiple times.
- Begin with the **abstract** (or first page) and the **conclusion** (or final page) for an overview of topics. These “bookends” to the article provide a framework for comprehension.
- Skim first sentences for main ideas.
- Feel free to read sections **out of order**. For example, a quick preview of the methods and results sections may provide context. Tables, figures, and graphs (if they exist) may supply an overview of key results.
- Make a habit of condensing and **paraphrasing** what you read. As you finish each section or page, how well can you explain key terms and ideas without reproducing the author’s words? Use the note-taking template on page two of this handout to reduce an article to a single page of summaries.
- Finish an entire section or page before marking text or taking notes. If there are no breaks, create your own stopping points.
- Take note of your **own thoughts** and **questions** as you read. Don’t let them slip away! Incorporate them to class discussions and assignments.
- Re-visit the article at a later date. You are likely to make connections that weren’t obvious during your first read.



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Note-Taking Template for Journal Articles

Title of Article: _____ Publication: _____
 Author(s): _____ Date: _____

Background <i>What was the context for this research?</i> <i>What has been studied or determined already?</i>	
Methods & Nature of this Study <i>What was the objective?</i> <i>How did the author(s) collect data?</i> <i>When and where did the research take place?</i>	
Results <i>What highlights emerged?</i> <i>Were there any surprises?</i>	
Data <i>What is most striking about the tables, graphs, illustrations?</i> <i>Why did the author(s) include them?</i>	
Conclusions <i>What did the author(s) learn overall?</i>	
Next Steps <i>What is implied or proposed for future study?</i>	
Significance <i>Why does this research matter?</i>	
My Thoughts & Questions	



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