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** afoundation withsimpler, 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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**For Further Reading**

Walter, T.L., Siebert, A., & Smith, L.N. (2000). *Student Success: How to Succeed in College and Still Have Time for Your Friends.* Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.



Note-Taking Template for Journal Articles

Title of Article: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Publication: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Author(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

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