

How to Read an Academic Journal

In college, you will read a variety of journal articles for coursework and research for assignments. Journal articles may seem daunting, but by understanding how journal articles are organized and written, you will be able to choose relevant articles and find the information you need.

Parts of a Journal Article

Abstract and Keywords	This is a concise summary of the article. Read this first to decide if the article is relevant to your current research topic. Below the abstract you will find 4-5 keywords. These indicate the subject area of the article.
Literature Review	Most articles will have a literature review early in the paper. This summarizes the past research done on the topic. Note that this is not a discussion of the research in the current article. However, the literature review may point you to other material relevant to your project.
Research Methodology	This section describes the way in which the research was conducted. Who are the participants? Is the study qualitative or quantitative? How was the data gathered? Where was the study conducted?
Results	This section discusses the findings of the study in detail. It often includes statistical information, charts and graphs.
Discussion	In this section, the researchers discuss the significance of the results. What do the results mean? Are they significant? What are the implications of what was found? The authors might also indicate areas for further study.
References	Skim the reference list. This may lead you to other key articles that are related to your topic.

How to Approach Journal Articles

1. Begin by reading the **abstract** and **keywords**.
Decide if this article relates to your current research project. If the article does not fit well with your research, stop reading.
2. If the article seems relevant, scan the article briefly.
Look at the headings, as well as terms in bold and italics. Also, look at charts and graphs.
3. Before you begin reading the article, note the bibliographic information. You will need this for your Works Cited or References page.
4. Now, read the **discussion** section closely.
This is key to understanding the article well.
5. On a separate sheet of paper, create questions that you will answer by reading the article. Include questions such as: "From what you know, does this author agree with other researchers and what you understand about the topic? Does this article support or contradict your thesis?"
6. Read the article purposefully, answering your questions.
Do not be afraid to change your questions as you read and discover more.
7. When you find the answers to your questions, write them down, *along with the page number where you found the information*.
You will need the page numbers to properly cite your sources when you write.

As you learn to approach journal articles systematically, you will become skilled at extracting important information as you read.