Reading a research paper

1. Recommended course books:
   These are textbooks which aim to summarise a large body of work.

2. Review papers:
   Academic journal articles which give an overview of research with evaluation and comment.

3. Original research papers

Read the abstract and skim the article:
Does it meet your purpose?
What questions do you want to answer?

Take down the details
- Author, article title, year of publication and journal title.
- Write down the volume, issue and page numbers so you can find it again.

- Read the introduction
  This can be a good way of establishing the research questions and any hypothesis.
  Usually authors give signposts to the most important parts of their writing.
  Take a note of any key issues and concepts.

- Skip to the end and read the conclusion
  This should help you confirm what the author's main ideas are.
  Make a note of the key findings and any key quotations.

- Pause to think
  You should have a good idea of what the research is about and the conclusions.
  Are the main ideas clear – do you need to skim and scan and clarify some things?
  Make some summary notes in your own words.

  Decide whether you need to read any more of this paper.

Be critical
- Theoretical basis?
- Influences?
- Bias?
- Sound methods?
- Alternatives?
- Reliability?
- Appropriate analysis?
- Statistical significance?
- Conflicts of interest?

If you decide to read more
Identify sections requiring close reading.
Scan for specific information such as supporting evidence.
Always have a list of questions in mind – be critical.

Check the reference list
What sources has the author used?
Is anything missing?
Are there other books or articles that might help you?