

Reading a research paper

1

Find the context

Recommended course books:

These are textbooks which aim to summarise a large body of work.



Review papers:

Academic papers giving an overview of research with evaluation and comment.



Selected original research papers.

Read the abstract and skim the article:

Does it meet your purpose?

What questions do you want to answer?

Key papers need to be read closely and should be prioritised.



Take down the details

- Author, article title, year of publication and journal title in the reference format you need to use.
- Note the volume, issue and page numbers so you can find it again.

2

Concentrate on beginnings and endings

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.
- Take a quick look at any diagrams and tables of results.



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.

Do you need to read any more of this paper?

Ditch the paper?



Be critical

Theoretical basis?
Influences?
Bias?
Sound methods?
Alternatives? Reliability?
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?

