

Guidelines for Reading Articles/Book chapters

Words don't communicate until they are strung together in an orderly sequence (sentence, paragraph, etc.). To read in an effective way, you must begin by searching for this organization. Without an understanding of the overall structure of the article, chapter, or paper that you are reading, it will be difficult to remember and understand what you have read. Below are some *general* guidelines that might help you read more effectively. Although it may seem like these steps take a long time, they really don't, and they will help you get the most important information from a reading more quickly and effectively.

Preliminary:

1. Carefully read the title, identify whom the authors are and where they are from (their affiliation), and determine what year the article was written. All of these things may help you remember the article.
2. Determine how long the article is.

Determine overall organization:

3. Read all of the major subheadings of the article first. Write them down on a piece of paper to help you remember later. If there are no subheadings then find the 'topic sentences' in each paragraph and jot them down to get the main ideas of the paper.
4. If there is an 'abstract', also read this to get a general idea of what the article is about

Concentrate on content:

5. Identify what the main objectives or research questions of the article are and write them down. There are usually only 1-3 main objectives in any single writing. These should be easy to find in all works of writing, but often they are not. In general, you can often find these at the end of an introduction, or sometimes at the very beginning of the introduction. If you cannot find what the main objectives of the article are in the introduction, then jump to the end of the article and try to find what the main conclusions are, and whether they restate the main objectives of the article.
6. After you have figured out what the main 'questions' or objectives are of the article, then skip to the end and identify what the main conclusions are, and write these down. Again, these are not always easy to find and you may have to read more than just the last paragraph.
7. NOW, you are ready to read the article - you should already have a general idea what the main questions/issues are, you have a general idea of what the main conclusions are, and now you can concentrate on the intricacies of the author's logic and reasoning. You should never read an article or book chapter from beginning to end like a novel - you do NOT want to be surprised by the ending. You should know the ending, and concentrate on the arguments and logical reasoning of the writer as you are reading the article.
8. Be sure to read and understand ALL figures, tables and graphs. Most often, this is where the most important information is found!
9. **You should never finish reading unless you can answer the following questions: 'What was the main point of this article/chapter/paper?'; 'What were their main lines of reasoning and the evidence that they used?'; and 'What were their main conclusions?'. If you cannot answer these questions, then re-do the above steps until you can.**
10. While doing the above activities, you should also keep track of what you think the major strengths and major weaknesses of the article are. Summarize them after you have addressed all of the above issues.

Usually, if you can address all of the above issues, then you have effectively read an article.

Reading worksheet for each article/book chapter

- *You should USE YOUR OWN WORDS in filling out this worksheet*
- *Also, you should revise this worksheet on the computer by making more space after each bullet and then printing out a lot of them so you have them handy to use every time you read a new article.*

Preliminary (doesn't take much space)

- **Authors:**
- **Year published:**
- **Title and Journal:**
- **Affiliation of authors:**

Overall Organization (takes more space than this)

- **Major subheadings or topic sentences of paragraphs:**

Content (takes more space than this)

- **What are the main objectives and/or the main research questions of this article?**
- **What approach do the authors use in the study** (*e.g. Experiment, descriptive, comparative, monitoring, modeling, etc.*)
- **What are the main conclusions of this article?**
- **What are the main lines of evidence that the authors use to support their conclusions?** (*You should refer to figures and tables AND other articles cited by the authors here*)
- **What are the major strengths of this article?**
- **What are the major weaknesses of this article?** *In other words, could it have been written better or clearer, could the study itself have been more thorough or better designed, etc.*
- **From memory, state the 'take home messages' from this article. If you cannot do this at this point, you should retrace the above steps until you can.**