

Skills for Psychology

Reading and understanding research articles

In your Psychology degree you will be asked to read research articles to further your knowledge beyond what is taught in lectures and textbooks. You will also be asked to summarise research findings to provide evidence to support your arguments in a coursework essay or to provide a rationale for your own research study. Being able to read, understand and summarise research findings is a key academic skill to develop.

Below are some helpful hints to assist you with your reading adapted from: Summarizing a Research Article 1997-2006, University of Washington.

Reading the article.

Research articles use a standard format to clearly communicate information about an experiment. A research article usually has seven major sections: Title, Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion and References.

Scan the article first. If you try to read a new article from start to finish, you will get bogged down in the detail. Instead, identify the main points of each section.

- The research question and reason for the study (Introduction).
- The hypothesis or hypotheses tested (Introduction).
- How the hypotheses were tested (Method)
- The findings (Results, including tables and figures)
- How the findings were interpreted (Discussion)

Underline key sentences or write the key point (e.g. hypotheses, design) of each paragraph in the margin. Although the abstract can help you to identify the main points, you cannot rely on it exclusively, because it contains very condensed information. Remember to focus on the parts of the article that are most relevant.

Read for depth, read interactively. After you have highlighted the main points, read each section several times. As you read ask yourself these questions.

- How does the design of the study address the research questions?
- How convincing are the results? Are any of the results surprising?
- What does this study contribute toward answering the original question?
- What aspect of the original question remains unanswered?

To provide you with some practice in reading and understanding research in the accompanying documents we will provide you with links to short review articles in The Conversation (<https://theconversation.com/uk>) on several different topics and relevant research articles and multichoice questions to check your understanding. It is not critical for you to understand everything in the article such as the different statistical tests used but try to identify the key points of the study.