Tips for Reading Scholarly and Journal Articles

What is a scholarly journal/journal article?
The purpose of research is to find and create new knowledge. Scholarly journals, and the peer-reviewed articles in them are how that knowledge is shared with others (like students!). In order to stay up to date in their research fields, faculty members are often reading several books and journals at the same time, so must be efficient at absorbing large amounts of information. This affects the daily student experience because faculty pass along expectations of this level of reading to the student.

How to understand the author
● Authors of journal articles always have an argument; they are trying to convince you of something
● Authors have different writing styles, so while journal articles have a standard format (listed in the section below), it is important to acknowledge just as your written communication style may differ from a classmate’s, different authors will present their arguments in different ways as well.
● You are an author too! Your thoughts and judgments about journal articles are worthwhile, so don't just take what other authors say on blind faith - question them!

What is the purpose of each section of an article?
● **Abstract:** a brief summary of the whole article; main points of the article and findings
● **Introduction:** the purpose of the study and the main question to be answered; what’s already known and what’s to be found out
  ○ **Literature Review:** existing research on topic that frames how authors arrived at this question/topic
● **Body:** the “nitty-gritty” details about the study (this is where most students get lost - most times the other sections will give you what you need)
  ○ **Methodology:** how the research was performed; subjects, testing conditions; controls; etc.
  ○ **Results/Data:** the numbers and the outcome; often presented visually with charts, graphs, and formulas
● **Discussion:** an extended summary of findings; was the original thesis or question proved or disproved; anything unexpected that arose
● **Conclusion:** restates the findings and results; what was discovered and what still needs to be researched
● **References/Bibliography:** previous research the authors used to formulate their study design and research questions; what has already been published on the topic; might point to more resources available on topic

Referencing the Article *** No matter how you reference the article, be SURE to cite the source, see Brandeis’ [Academic Integrity page](#) ***
● **Quoting** - for definitions or when the author’s original words are too unique to reword
  ○ *A good rule of thumb: 1 quotation per page maximum*
● **Paraphrasing** (Summarizing) - using your own words to share the author’s point, in detail or general terms (this is most common in scholarly writing)
  ○ *A good rule of thumb: no more than 2-3 paraphrases per paragraph*

Note-taking and Highlighting
● After a paragraph, write summarizing notes for main points and graphs/tables/visuals in the margins or a separate paper/word document (if you do this along the way, you won’t have to do as much re-reading while writing your paper)
● Highlighting: only very important quotes or terms, parts most relevant to your topic, bolded terms *(TIP: important information will often be the first and last sentences of a paragraph)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose for Reading the Article</th>
<th>Assigned Reading for Class/Homework</th>
<th>Reading in Preparation for an Essay Exam</th>
<th>Determining Sources for a Paper</th>
<th>Once Determined as a Source, Finding Citations for a Paper</th>
<th>Research Project/Independent Study/Independent Interdisciplinary Major (IIM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Order in Which to Read Sections/Where the most Energy should go</td>
<td>Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion, Discussion, Results</td>
<td>Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion, Discussion, Results (might read article multiple times)</td>
<td>Abstract, Conclusion</td>
<td>Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion, Discussion, Results (might read article multiple times)</td>
<td>All Parts: Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion, Discussion, Results, Body, References (might read article multiple times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why these Sections are the Main Focus</td>
<td>To get the main gist of the article, for a latte post or in-class discussions</td>
<td>To get the main gist of the article, to have some para-phrases, to prepare how you will use in essay</td>
<td>These should be enough to decide if it is a match and possible source</td>
<td>Should be able to find/utilize citations and main points from these sections</td>
<td>To identify research goal, what was proved, how was proven, the variables, any gaps, future research to use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Questions to Keep in Mind while Reading | - How is this article relevant to course content?  
- How will this article be utilized after I read it?  
- What are some quotes/paraphrases?  
- What is the main argument? Do I agree? | - What are big questions that I might be asked?  
- Do I only need the main point(s)/themes and results of the article or very specific details?  
TIP: Determining how much time to spend on each source can be dependent on how many articles to study (i.e.1-2 more, 7-8 less) | - What is the author’s argument and is it well supported?  
- Is it a good match for my argument?  
- What is my research question? What is the authors’ question?  
- How might this be used in my argument? | - Does this support my argument?  
- Where is the right place to add it in?  
- Do I agree with the author and findings?  
- How will I use this in my argument? | - What’s the author’s argument? is it well supported?  
- Focus on research question; related to proposed major/discipline?  
- Does this support or raise questions for my argument?  
- What didn’t get studied? Holes? Future study? |

**References**
Bridgewater State University: [http://libguides.bridgewater.edu/readingscholarlyarticles](http://libguides.bridgewater.edu/readingscholarlyarticles)
Fitchburg State University: [http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/library/research-help/tutorials/reading-a-scholarly-research-article/](http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/library/research-help/tutorials/reading-a-scholarly-research-article/)
Pasadena City College: [http://www.pasadena.edu/hstutoringlab/writing/writingscholarlyarticle.cfm](http://www.pasadena.edu/hstutoringlab/writing/writingscholarlyarticle.cfm)
Western University: [http://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/howtoreadscholarlyarticle](http://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/howtoreadscholarlyarticle)

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