**How to read a research article**

**1. Start by understanding how a journal article is structured:**

At first glance, a journal article may seem to be a confusing collection of unfamiliar terminology and complicated tables. However, most articles follow a fairly standardized format that conforms to guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA). By understanding this structure, you will feel more comfortable working your way through each section.

a. **The Abstract**: This short, paragraph-long section provides a brief overview of the article. Reading the abstract is a great way to get an idea for what information the article will cover. Reading this section first can help you decide if the article is relevant to your topic or interests.

b. **The Introduction**: The second section of the article introduces the problem and reviews previous research and literature on the topic. This part of the article will help you better understand the background of the research and the current question that is under investigation.

c. **The Method Section**: This part of the article details *how* the research was conducted. Information about the participants, the procedures, the instruments and the variables that were measured are all described in this section.

d. **The Results Section**: What were the actual results of the study? This important section details what the researchers found, so pay careful attention to this part of the article. Tables and figures are frequently included in addition to the text.

e. **The Discussion Section**: What do the results of the study really mean? In this section, the author(s) interpret the results, outline the implications of the study and provide possible descriptions of future research that should be conducted.

f. **The References Section**: This section lists all of the articles and other sources cited within the article.

**2. Skim through the article:**

Once you understand the basic structure of the article, your first step should be to briefly skim through the material. Don’t start by doing an in-depth reading of an article before you have skimmed over each section. Attempting a thorough read-through before you’ve skimmed the contents is not only difficult; it may be a waste of valuable time. Skimming is a great way to become familiar with the topic and the information included in the paper.

**3. Take Notes on Each Section and Ask Questions:**

Your next step should be to carefully read through each section, taking notes as you go. Write down important points, but also make note of any terminology or concepts that you do not understand. Once you’ve read the entire article, go back are start looking up the information that you didn’t understand using another source. This might involve using a dictionary, textbook, online resource or even asking a classmate or your professor.

1. **Read the introduction section of the article.** What is the hypothesis? Is necessary background information and previous research described in the introduction? Why is this research important? In addition to answering these basic questions, you should take note of information provided in the introduction and any questions that you may have.
2. **Read the methods section of the article.** Whom is the sample composed of? What was the sampling strategy? Is the study procedure clearly outlined? What kind of study is this? Can you determine which variables the researchers are measuring? How are they operationalizing the measures? Did the researchers use appropriate measurements and procedures? How internally valid was the study’s methodology? If you find that there are limitations in the methodology of the study, take notes of these. Remember to jot down questions and thoughts that come to mind as you are reading. Once you have finished reading the paper, you can then refer back to your initial questions and see which once remain unanswered.
3. **Read the results section of the article.** Do researchers provide enough statistical information? Did the researchers collect all of the data needed to measure the variables in question? Again, make note of any questions you have or any information that does not seem to make sense.
4. **Read the discussion section of the article.** How do the researchers interpret the results of the study? Did the results support their hypothesis? Do the conclusions drawn by the researchers seem reasonable? Do the findings justify the author’s conclusions?
5. **Note the Sources Cited:** When reading a research article, it’s all too easy to focus on the main sections and overlook the references. However, the reference section can actually be one of the most important parts of the paper if you are looking for further sources for your research. Spending some time reviewing this section can indicate important research articles on the topic area in which you are interested.