How to Read a Research Article Assigned as Coursework

Reading skills are vital to your success at Walden. The kind of reading you do during your degree program will vary, but most of it will involve reading **journal articles based on primary research**. The good news is that these articles follow a general format, making it easier for you to navigate and locate pertinent information. This resource includes an overview of **research article format** and **tips for reading an assigned research article**.

### Research Article Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>A succinct representation of the research study, typically in 12 words or fewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>A one-paragraph summary of the article, including the study’s purpose, methods, findings, and conclusions. Abstracts also contain keywords that tell you the main topics covered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>A section that provides background on the topic and establishes the authors’ rationale for conducting their study. It should answer these questions: <em>What is the current problem that needs to be addressed? What is the purpose or aim of the research?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Literature Review</strong></td>
<td>A survey and analysis of current research on the topic, in order to show the problem and any existing gaps in the literature. The literature review is meant to substantiate the need for the authors’ study. It can be organized into thematic subsections, allowing readers to scan and skim as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>A section that delineates the design and procedures for the study. It should answer this question: <em>How exactly was the study conducted?</em> This section typically includes details about the type of study (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), research instrument, participants, ethical considerations, and data collection and analysis steps. The authors must provide sufficient detail so that other researchers can replicate their study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results (sometimes called Findings)</strong></td>
<td>A section that contains the data generated from the research study. If the study involves quantitative elements, you will likely see numerical tables or figures. If the study involves qualitative elements, you may see portions of transcribed interviews. A mixed-methods study can include a combination of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion (sometimes called Conclusions)</strong></td>
<td>The authors’ interpretation of the data from the Results/Findings section. This section should answer these questions: <em>What do the results mean? What are the real-world implications? What, if any, additional research should be done in the future to confirm or elaborate on the results?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>Full publication information for each source cited within the article.</td>
</tr>
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Tips for Reading an Assigned Research Article

1. **Understand What You Are Reading For.**
   Typically, you need to read an article as preparation for a discussion or assignment. It is helpful, then, to view the assignment instructions first. Those instructions will reveal how you should be interacting with the article. *Will you be summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, or comparing the information to something else? Are there key terms or concepts you should keep in mind?* Knowing the assignment will allow you to read the article with purpose.

2. **Gather Clues as You Read.**
   Approaching a research article can be overwhelming, especially if the topic is new to you. We recommend reading pieces of the article first, before diving into the full document. Each piece of the article provides important clues about the study and its impact.
   - First, scan the title. *Based on the title, what is the article about? What type of study did the authors conduct?*
   - Next, read the abstract. The abstract gives a quick overview so that you are prepared for a full reading. *Are you intrigued by what you’ve read? What questions do you have about the study?*
   - Skip ahead to the opening of the Discussion/Conclusions section. This opening should include a succinct summary of the study’s results. *What surprises you? What limitations do the authors disclose?*
   - Keep reading the Discussion/Conclusions and then move on to the Results/Findings.
   - Now return to the Introduction to read the full article. Knowing the conclusions, limitations, and findings already will give you a deeper context to understand the study from start to finish.

3. **Google Away!**
   As you read, you may encounter terms you are not familiar with, perhaps regarding the theory or methods used by the authors. Have a tab open in your browser where you can quickly Google those terms for a better understanding.

4. **Take Good Notes.**
   Summarize each section of the article in one sentence (in your own words)—by hand in the margin of a hard copy or as an electronic comment on a PDF copy. This approach allows you to quickly find relevant information later.

   Answer questions as you read:
   - *Who* conducted the study (researchers and their affiliation—that is, the university or the organization where they worked when they conducted the study)?
   - *Why* (study purpose)?
   - *How* (methodology)?
   - *What* resulted (findings)?
Record your own reactions to the study. *Are there any weaknesses? Is the study valuable to your field? Is it useful to you?*

Remember the assignment instructions while you are reading, and highlight information in the article that will help you complete that assignment.