How to Select and Efficiently Read Articles for Your Master’s or Doctoral Capstone

When writing your capstone, you will sift through large amounts of research to determine if it is relevant. Thus, you need to be systematic and approach your reading with a strategy. Use the following resource to learn the common sections of a research article and how to move through an article thoughtfully.

This resource includes an overview of research article format and tips for selecting and reading a 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: What is the current problem that needs to be addressed? What is the purpose or aim of the research?</td>
</tr>
<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: How exactly was the study conducted? 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: 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?</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 Selecting and Reading a Research Article

1. **Be Strategic About What You Read.**
   A research article is not a novel; it doesn't have to be read in straightforward, sequential order. We recommend approaching a potential article in this way:
   - First, scan the title.
   - Based on the title, does the article meet your purpose? If so, read the abstract for a quick overview, including the results.
   - If that abstract intrigues you, bring up the full article.
   - Start with the opening of the Discussion/Conclusions section. This opening should include a succinct summary of the results.
   - Keep reading the Discussion/Conclusions if the article continues to align with your topic area. Consider any limitations the authors reveal. Then view the Results/Findings.
   - Now return to the Introduction to read the other sections. Knowing the study’s conclusions, limitations, and findings already will give you a deeper context to understand the study from start to finish.

2. **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.

3. **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?

4. **Follow the Trail.**
   Looking for more to read on the topic?
   - Skim the introduction and literature review, noting evidence cited from other publications.
5. **Organize.**

- After reading an article, compile your notes into a 1-2-paragraph comprehensive summary. The summary should address the study’s purpose, sample, methods, results, and conclusions. It should also include your critical commentary addressing the study’s limitations.
- When you read another article on the same topic, add that summary below the first. Eventually, you will have one long document of many summaries. You can scan through or use Microsoft Word’s Find feature to discover similarities.
- Use a [literature review matrix](#) to store and compare key details across articles.