Reading Scholarly Articles

A scholarly article

- is a report of scholarship, or original research, written by a professional.
- has a main argument and is based on evidence (such as surveys, measurements or an historical text).
- may present a new theory, explain a new process or method, or review other articles on the same topic.
- has been critiqued, or peer reviewed, by other scholars and editors.

Reading scholarly articles can be challenging because

- the writing is dense. The author has to make an argument and support it with evidence in a small amount of space.
- the words are unfamiliar. The author uses formal English and specialized terms.
- the formatting is not intuitive. The author must organize the article according to style guidelines or journal specifications.

Reading scholarly articles can be beneficial because

- the information comes directly from the author. You can come to conclusions on your own, without a third party to color your interpretation.
- the sources are considered the most credible base for your research.

Reading scholarly articles takes time and practice. With some effort, you will gain insight into specific topics and general academic conventions.

Remember: a primary source is writer → publication → you.

A secondary source is writer → publication → reprinted in a textbook, reviewed in another article, etc. → you.

Be sure you know which kinds of sources are acceptable for your research project.

Insight
You're using a credible primary source that has (mostly) unbiased information.

Effort
Plan to read the article more than once to fully understand it.
Reading Scholarly Articles

Every scholarly article has a main argument, supporting evidence, and a conclusion that you’ll need to identify and understand before you can evaluate the article’s usefulness.

CONTENT

- What is the main argument? Are there sub-arguments?
- What is being used as evidence: measurements, charts, examples, quotes, other items?
- What is the main conclusion? How is the evidence connected to the conclusion?
- What words do you need to define in order to understand the article? Use a dictionary!

CONTEXT

- Who is the author? What kind of institution does he or she work for: a university, a corporation, a governmental organization, a non-profit organization?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the author’s purpose for writing the article? For example, is it to persuade the audience of a product’s superiority or to disagree with a widely stated theory?
- Does the author use only objective language or language that appeals to your emotions?

YOUR RESPONSE

- Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?
- Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what is the author’s strongest point? What is the weakest point? Where does the author go wrong? What might your counterargument to this article be?

Take notes of your impressions about the article. Here are some questions for you to consider: