

# Sacred Heart University Library

## Navigating the Research Process

Reading scholarly articles can be a difficult task. Scholars have done their research and written up their results for many reasons, but not for many audiences. Although you as a student need to use the articles in your assignment, they were not written specifically for you. (No offense).

The fact is, these scholars are experts in their field writing for other experts. They are using specialized language that can be difficult for someone new to understand. So, you can sit down with an article and start reading, but you may become discouraged pretty quickly.

The tips below are to help you read scholarly articles **STRATEGICALLY**. These tips can help you approach a scholarly text for easier reading and better understanding.

Read the abstract first: Preview the entire article, makes it easier to judge whether it is relevant.

Read the introduction and conclusion: Learn more about the topic of study and what the authors found out in the process.

Take a look at the tables, charts and graphs: Get a better idea of the results of the research or analytical study.

Read the whole thing.

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### 1. Read the Abstract first.

For the Sciences:

- Titles can only tell you so much about the content of the article. The Abstract acts as a preview for the entire article, including the methods and results. By reading the Abstract first, you can get a better idea of what the article is actually about, if it relates to what you are researching, and whether it is worth your time to read the rest of it.

For the Humanities:

- Articles in the Arts and Humanities do not always include an Abstract, and if they do, it might just be the first paragraph of the introduction. If not included, move onto the Introduction. Make sure to skim through the section headings, if they are there. This will give you an idea of the organization of the article as well as a general idea of themes.

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### 2. Read the introduction and conclusion

Applies for both sciences and humanities:

- These two sections give you the background information you need for the topic of the article as well as what happened in the study. The introduction also includes info about previous studies/papers that relate to the current one, which gives you, the reader, a context. By reading the conclusion you see whether the study answered the original research question and what the authors see as the next steps in the scholarship.

**Literature review:** An overview of previous scholarship on the present topic. Gives both author and reader a context for where the article falls in the literature. Likely to be a separate section within the introduction or right after it.

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### 3. Take a look at the tables, charts and graphs.

For the sciences:

- Closely look at the visual representations of the data. See what conclusions you come to and make note of them. When you read through the entire article, compare your conclusions to what the authors saw in their results and data.

For the humanities:

- Usually, there is no numeric data that the authors present in their results. However, there might be other visual representations of what the scholars are studying. For example, reproductions of art pieces, or excerpts from primary sources or literary pieces. These are worth looking at to see the materials being studied.
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### 4. Read it! (for real this time)

Okay, now that you have pre-read some of the article and are sure it relates to your research topic, read the whole thing. It still might not be easy, but it will not be as hard as if you were reading it with no context.

Some more tips about reading:

- Take notes
- Summarize sections or paragraphs
- Keep a subject dictionary, your textbook glossary or the Internet/Wikipedia close by. If you come across any unfamiliar terms, you can quickly look them up.
- Keep track of the citation information of the articles you do read and want to use in your paper or assignment. This will make life a lot easier at the end of the project.