

## **Critical reading for assignments: reading research articles**

A journal article refers to an article, usually a research study, that is published in an academic journal and reviewed by experts in the field to ensure they meet required academic standards. Unlike a textbook, which aims to provide a broad overview of an issue, a journal article has a narrow focus. It reports on research into a specific issue or problem in a clearly defined location or organisation.

Journal articles are written academic researchers for other researchers in their field, so it is assumed that readers have knowledge of key concepts, issues and perspectives. For this reason, journal articles are challenging to read. They can be very long and complex. However, you very rarely need to read the whole article – be selective and decide in advance what you are looking for. The guide on the next two pages will help you to read a journal article more efficiently.

You may come across unfamiliar terms or theoretical concepts in a journal article. These are often not explained because it is expected that readers will be familiar with them. If these are important in understanding the article, find an explanation that you understand in another source like a textbook.

**When you start reading about a new subject, the unfamiliarity can be overwhelming and you may feel completely lost. Don't despair! The more you read around a topic, the more familiar the key concepts and issues in the literature will become. After a few weeks reading, you'll be much more comfortable.**

### Question to direct reading:

**Reference details:** (it's useful to make a note of the source here – it will save you a lot of time later)

### What is the research article about?

Read **abstract, introduction and conclusion sections** to decide if it's relevant to your coursework.

Scan the paper further to find out:

- **research problem** explored or stated **aim**?
- reason for undertaking the research?
- **key themes/issues** explored?
- main **findings and recommendations**?
- main **ideas /models and/or theories** used?
- what **new knowledge, understanding or insights** about the issue does this article contribute that is **relevant to my assignment**?

### How suitable were the research methods used?

- how were data collected – interviews; focus groups; questionnaire; survey...?
- how effective/appropriate were these methods?
- how important are the methods used in this study for my assignment?

### In what way is this study relevant/useful to my assignment...presentation...seminar/What can I use?

- new understanding of best/innovative practice?
- explanation of how theory is applied to practice?
- identification and comparison of strategies and solutions that could improve practice
- identification of challenges and why arise?
- development of model to guide practice?

**In what way does this study's findings compare to another study's? This is a way of demonstrating critical reading and understanding**

Does this study give you similar findings or different findings from other studies you have read – in what way? If different, so what? Why might the studies have produced different results?

Does one study add to/advance the findings of another – how?

If this is an earlier study, how does it compare with a more recent?

**Relevant 'direct quote' from paper for possible inclusion in course work**

- Clear definition?
- Concise and relevant point of view?

What does this direct quote add to my discussion?