How to Read a Scholarly (Peer-Reviewed) Article

This handout provides information on the different parts of a scholarly (peer-reviewed) article. Understanding the different parts of the article will make it easier to determine if they are relevant to the topic being researched. Additionally, this handout will provide some guidance on how to read an article that you will use for your assignment.

Anatomy of a Scholarly (Peer-reviewed) Article

Many scholarly (peer-reviewed) articles are organized in a similar manner. The following headings are most common with these types of articles.

- **Abstract**
  - Brief summary of the article.

- **Introduction**
  - An in-depth introduction to the topic the paper.
  - Explains what the article hopes to contribute to the topic.

- **Literature Review**
  - Reviews what is currently known about the topic.
  - Sometimes this section is included in the introduction.
  - Discusses previous research that has been completed and relates that to the current research being discussed.
  - Discusses the hypotheses that author has made regarding the topic being researched.

- **Methodology**
  - Explains how the author conducted the study being discussed.

- **Results**
  - Discusses the analysis completed on the data collected.

- **Discussion**
  - Discusses what the results mean and how the study contributes to existing knowledge on the topic researched.
  - Discusses if the hypotheses set forth at the beginning of the study were met.

- **Conclusion**
  - Explains the importance of the research conducted.
  - Discusses what research should be conducted next.

- **Reference List**
  - List of the items used by the author of the article to support their argument.

Couple Things to Keep in Mind

- Don’t just pick the first article that you find. Sometimes this may not be the best source of information. You may have to look past the first page of results when searching.
- If you are not sure if an article is scholarly (peer-reviewed), ask a research librarian or your instructor.
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1. Don’t Just Look at the Title of the Article
   a. Many times, the title of the article has nothing to do with what the article is actually about.
   b. Before you discard an article, GO to #2.

2. Read the Abstract First
   a. The abstract will discuss the purpose of the article and may provide some results of the research.
   b. You can rule out a lot of articles based on the abstract alone.
   c. If the abstract looks like it may work for your research, GO to #3.

3. Read the Introduction and Discussion/Conclusion
   a. The introduction will provide an in-depth discussion of the topic.
   b. The Discussion and Conclusion will provide an in-depth discussion of the results.
   c. These sections should further cement whether or not the article will work for your research.
      i. If the article meets your needs, GO to #4.
      ii. Otherwise, discard this article and move on to the next one.

4. Read the Entire Article
   a. Once you have determined that the article meets your needs, you are now ready to read the entire article.
   b. It may be easier to read one section at a time and summarize each section before moving onto the next section.
   c. If you are unsure of some of the jargon used, write down the words and look them up in a dictionary.
   d. You may want to use a highlighter to note some of the more important points of the article.
   e. Make sure you keep track of any quotes that you may want to use from the article.

Some Questions You May Want to Consider as You Read an Article

- What is the main purpose of the article?
- What is the question the author is researching?
- What information is used by the author to support their hypothesis?
- What are the main conclusions of the author?
- Are there any assumptions that the author is making about the topic?
- Do you accept or reject the conclusions of the author?

For additional assistance:
- Stop by the Library Services Main Desk on the 3rd floor
- Call 301-687-4395
- E-mail libref@frostburg.edu

Adapted from:
1 – Reading Academic Journal Articles from http://www.brockport.edu/sociology/journal.html