

Working with Scholarly Articles

This tutorial has three sections. It can be viewed as a whole or section-by-section.

The following transcript applies to Section 2: Reading a Scholarly Article.

Transcripts for [Section 1: What is a Scholarly Article?](#) and [Section 3: Finding and Identifying Scholarly Articles](#) are also available.

Section 2: Reading a Scholarly Article

Scholarly journal articles are articles written by specialized authors which have gone through a peer review process before being shared with a specialized audience. These articles are a component of an ongoing scholarly conversation in which a variety of perspectives may be represented and meaning must be negotiated.

Since scholarly articles are intended for audiences with specialized knowledge, it can sometimes be difficult to read and understand the information in them.

Scholarly articles can take many forms, but there are a number of common elements that you may encounter while reading these articles. While not all scholarly articles are structured using these specific building blocks, understanding what they are can help you become a better reader of scholarly articles.

The first part of a scholarly article you will likely encounter after the title is the abstract. The abstract is a short summary of the article in which the author briefly states the problem he or she was trying to solve through research, the motivation for solving that problem, the approach used, the results of that approach, and the conclusion. Reading the abstract will help you decide whether the article might be applicable to your own work.

In the introduction, the author will expand on the parts of the abstract that give context to their research. The author may describe in more detail what circumstances led to this choice of research, including more information about the problem being solved, why it's important to solve this problem, and why they

are trying to solve it in a particular way. This is the area of the article where the author may talk about how their approach and contribution to the scholarly conversation on a topic is different from what's come before and why those differences are important.

The scholarly conversation to which the author is contributing will become more visible in the literature review. This is where the author discusses the sources being used as a foundation for the research they conducted. The author will analyze and respond to previous work that is related to their own and perhaps express how they are hoping to build on, confirm, or counter these previous writings. The literature review will help you as a reader understand where the author's ideas come from and if you care to dig deeper into that topic, give you ideas for sources to seek out.

The methods and results describe the research that was done and detail the results of the research, often using tables and graphs or other visual aids to help summarize this information. The author may also reference materials they have included in the appendices, which appear at the end of the paper. These appendices may include items such as information about the instruments used to measure results. The methods, results, and appendices are most important if you intend to try to validate or replicate the research the author describes. If you are not interested in trying to replicate the research, these sections may be less important to you and you may even find that you want to skip over them.

The discussion section is where the results of the research are analyzed and the author considers the implications of what was found. If the introduction describes a problem that the author was trying to solve, this is the section where the author may detail how the results helped to solve that problem, or not. The author may also discuss shortcomings of the research that was done or opportunities for future research that may lead to more insight. If you are interested in what the author found and the potential impact of their research, this will be the most relevant section.

As you might expect, the conclusion is where the author brings it all together and reflects briefly once more on the problem at hand, what was done to try to solve that problem and future opportunities for research related to that problem.

As stated earlier, not all scholarly articles will have this exact structure, but understanding these elements can help you become a better and more efficient reader of scholarly articles.

[In the next section](#), we will explore how to find and identify a scholarly article in a library database.

Scroll down to answer a Check Your Knowledge question to complete this section.

Check Your Knowledge

Not all readers will need to read every section of a scholarly article in order to find the information that is most relevant to their needs. Which of the following most accurately describes the relevance of a section of a scholarly article to a particular need?

- a) The literature review shows the strength of the author's argument by citing sources with which he or she agrees.
- b) The methods/results section is most relevant to readers who want to validate, replicate, or adapt the author's research.
- c) The discussion section is most relevant to readers interested in feedback the article author has received about his or her research prior to publication.
- d) The introduction is most relevant to less specialized readers who may need more background information about the topic before learning about the author's research.

You Answered: B

Correct!

[Exit the Tutorial](#)

[Continue to Section 3](#)

You Answered: A, C, or D

Incorrect

[Each section of a scholarly article](#) plays a role in helping the reader understand the research that was done and the place of that research in the scholarly conversations surrounding that topic. Not every section will be relevant to every reader. Knowing the function of these common elements can help you as a reader make decisions about which parts of the article to prioritize in your own reading.

[Continue to Section 3](#) or [Review more](#)

Optional review

Myth 1: The literature review is most relevant to readers interested in learning about the article author's previous work on the subject.

The literature review is the section of the article where the author identifies relevant past contributions to the scholarly conversation in which he or she is now participating by writing this article. The literature review may trace how the conversation has taken shape over time and can help give the reader an understanding of how the author is hoping to contribute to that conversation, by building on or challenging past work or filling in a gap in understanding.

Since many researchers spend their careers exploring various facets of a single topic, it's possible that they will address their own previous work in this section, if that work is relevant. But a reader hoping to learn more about the author's past research may do better with a search for the author's name in a library database or an internet search engine.

Myth 2: The discussion section is most relevant to readers interested in feedback the article author has received about his or her research prior to publication.

The discussion section of an article is where the author will explore the implications of his or her research, including its potential impact, any shortcomings and opportunities for future research on the topic. This is the author's analysis of his or her own work and will not generally incorporate outside examination. Though an article author may receive feedback as part of the peer review process and may rewrite parts of the article to reflect that feedback, any response to his or her work will most likely appear in the form of another researcher's article in which that second researcher offers commentary or conducts his or her own research to build on, validate, or challenge what the original author wrote.

Myth 3: The introduction is most relevant to less specialized audience members who may need more background information about the topic before learning about the author's research.

The function of the introduction section of an article is generally to give context to the author's research, often including information about what problem the author is trying to solve and why the author feels it is important to try to solve the problem in a particular way. For those less familiar with the topic, this background information may help them understand it better but remember that scholarly articles are intended for specialized audiences, which means that some background knowledge will be assumed. Those looking for an introduction to the topic intended for a more general audience may find relevant information in reference sources, such as encyclopedias.

Check Your Knowledge

Not all readers will need to read every section of a scholarly article in order to find the information that is most relevant to their needs. Which of the following most accurately describes the relevance of a section of a scholarly article to a particular need?

- a) [The literature review shows the strength of the author's argument by citing sources with which he or she agrees.](#)
- b) [The methods/results section is most relevant to readers who want to validate, replicate, or adapt the author's research.](#)
- c) [The discussion section is most relevant to readers interested in feedback the article author has received about his or her research prior to publication.](#)
- d) [The introduction is most relevant to less specialized readers who may need more background information about the topic before learning about the author's research.](#)