

Tips for Reading Academic Articles (credit to Dr. Sue Ashford and Dr. Lisa Leslie)

A primary goal of this course is to bring everyone up to speed with the skill of reading academic journal articles.

Although you will develop your own strategy over time, it is useful to keep the following questions in mind when reading a given paper:

- What are the main takeaways? What do you think are the paper's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the aim of the research? What is the "big picture" question and what more focused research question is addressed?
- What do we already know about this research question? That is, what does past research say?
- What theoretical contributions does the research offer? Why is this research question important? Meaning, why should anyone care? What is the author's approach to the research question? (i.e., What is the theoretical foundation)?
- What are the underlying assumptions that the authors make about people or organizations? How tenable are those assumptions?
- For empirical articles (i.e., articles with data collected): Who were the participants? What method was used? Are the sample and method appropriate given the study's hypotheses?
- What were the major empirical findings that are relevant to the aims of the study? Do you believe them? If not, what would you have found more convincing?
- What alternative explanations can you think of for the empirical findings? What might the authors argue back with regards to these alternate explanations?
- How generalizable are the findings? What are the boundary conditions? (i.e., for whom and under what conditions do the findings apply? When might they not apply?)
- What are the key differences between this author's argument and others you have read? Can these differences be resolved through an empirical test? What would that study look like?
- What is missing? What questions aren't being answered in this article?

You might also want to compare and contrast the assigned articles on the questions above - how do they differ? How are they similar? What studies need to be done to develop knowledge in the area under discussion?