How to read a research article.

Research articles are written by researchers (who have studied in their fields for many years).

Research articles are primarily written for other researchers (who have also studied in their fields for many years).

Many portions of a research article are written using the very specific terminology of the researcher. Unless you too are a researcher in the field, this will be difficult (or even impossible) to understand.

Other portions of the research article may rely heavily on advanced statistical methods or computer models. Unless you have a very strong background in statistics (and/or computer science) this too will be difficult (or even impossible) to understand.

So how can you read and understand a research article?

Many scholars and wise students use the following method for reading research articles that are outside their own discipline. This also allows scholars to review and read many long research articles in a very short amount of time (since they will not read the difficult and lengthy middle portion of most research articles).

How to read a research article:

1. **Read the abstract.** The abstract is a wonderful summary of what was studied, how it was studied, and what was discovered. The abstract is often written in less technical jargon.

2. **Read the introduction.** The introduction provides background and a summary of past research on the topic of the article. It is also a wonderful place to find additional articles (if you need to have more than one article for your project – or if you’re just very curious and want to read more).

3. Skip the middle. That’s right skip the methodology, skip the results, and perhaps even skip the discussion (unless the discussion appears to be tolerably easy to read).

4. **Read the conclusion.** It is generally a short piece that gives the reader a better understanding of why this particular experiment (research) was important.
Additional advice about reading research articles:

- If you **don’t even understand the abstract** (or even the title of an article) – **find another article**!

- If you are a graduate student, a researcher, or you are taking a “research methods” class in your major – your professor will expect you to read the entire article (including the methods, results, and discussion).

Reminder – the parts of a research article often include:

1. **Abstract [read]**
   (a summary of the article - found at the top of the article)

2. **Introduction [read]**
   (a review that cites the past experiments of other researchers that are relevant to this new experiment - found at the beginning of the article)

3. **Methods or Methodology [skip]**
   (the techniques and equipment used for the experiment)

4. **Results [skip]**
   (the analysis – often statistical – of the results of the experiment)

5. **Discussion [skip]**
   (what the results mean)

6. **Conclusion [read]**
   (what impact the research may have on the future of the discipline)