

How to Read an Academic Journal Article

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Preparing to read a journal article: Getting started summary

FIRST TIME | Initial setup



1. Setup your **glossary**



2. Download the blank **journal scrapbook** sheet

EVERY TIME | Before reading any article

1. Populate a new **journal scrapbook** with title/author & keywords
2. Sketch out your **reading goals**

Preparing to read a journal article: Startup Toolkit

GLOSSARY | record new terminology & revisit later

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet titled 'Workbook1' with a table containing two rows of glossary entries. The table has five columns: 'Word/phrase', 'Found in: Article Title', 'Found in: Article Author/Yr', 'Example usage (authors' words)', and 'Meaning'. The first row is for 'Theory of Mind' and the second row is for 'valence'. The spreadsheet interface includes the ribbon (Home, Insert, Page Layout, Formulas, Data, Review, View) and various toolbars.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Word/phrase	Found in: Article Title	Found in: Article Author/Yr	Example usage (authors' words)	Meaning
2	Theory of Mind	Multiple roles for executive control in belief-desire reasoning..	Hartwright, C. E. et al., 2012	The capacity to reason about the mental causes of action, termed 'mentalising' or exercising a 'Theory of Mind' (ToM), has received considerable interest from social neuroscientists over the last decade.	Having an understanding of the mind states of other agents
3	valence	Multiple roles for executive control in belief-desire reasoning..	Hartwright, C. E. et al., 2012	We use the term "valence" to refer collectively to these variations, so that true beliefs and desires for foods are described as "positively valenced" and false beliefs and desires to avoid foods are described as "negatively valenced".	positive or negative value assigned to an emotion or cognitive stage
4					

Preparing to read a journal article: Startup Toolkit

JOURNAL SCRAPBOOK | direct your reading & keep a record of each article

ARTICLE: [REDACTED]

KEY POINTS [REDACTED]

METHODS [REDACTED]

QUESTIONS OF INTEREST [REDACTED]

LIMITATIONS [REDACTED]

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Download this Scrapbook
for free from
<https://osf.io/eqjfh/>

READING GOALS & NOTES PAGE | print on the back of the Scrapbook

KEYWORDS:

READING GOALS NOTES

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How to read a journal article: My 6 stages of reading a journal article

STAGE 1 | Jargon busting

STAGE 2 | Authors' perspectives

STAGE 3 | Methodology

STAGE 4 | Results

STAGE 5 | Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading Goals

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Skim read the entire article, making no effort to understand the content. As you go, highlight any unfamiliar terminology

Add the terminology to your **Glossary**

Look up those unfamiliar terms & write out their meaning in *your own words* in your **Glossary**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Read the article's Discussion section. Take enough time so that you can write what the authors' conclude in 1 or 2 sentences

Add your summary of their conclusions to the **Key Points** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Read the article's Introduction section. Take enough time so that you can summarise the authors' main research question in 1 or 2 sentences

Add your summary of their core research questions to the **Questions of Interest** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Consider how **you** would address the article's research question. Take enough time so that you can state your ideas in 1 or 2 sentences

Add your ideas on how you would address the research question to the **Notes** section of your **Scrapbook**

Make clear that what you are writing here are your ideas, e.g., by opening with "My approach to the QoI would be to..."

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Read the article's Method section. If the article has made the materials Open Access, you will find it helpful to review these too

Write a paragraph outlining how the research was conducted. Include core information about the design, experimental manipulation and outcome variables

Add your summary of the method to the **Methods** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Revisit your earlier reflection on how you would address the authors' research question (see the [Notes](#) section of your [Scrapbook](#))

Consider how the methodology has been formulated to address the research question

Write out in 1 or 2 sentences your thoughts on the authors' approach

Add your thoughts regarding the method to your [Scrapbook](#) - note any strengths in the [Methods](#) section and any weaknesses in the [Limitations](#) section

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

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Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Consider the sort of data that their methodology will generate

In bullet points, write what data types you expect to see in the **Notes** section of your **Scrapbook**

Make clear that what you are writing here are your ideas, e.g., by opening with “I expect to see these sorts of data: ...”

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Read the article's Results section. If there are several analyses, read through each section one at a time

For each chunk of results, write 1 or 2 sentences to outline what the data show – use the article's figures and any Open Access data and supplementary material to aid your understanding

Add your summary of the results to the **Key Points** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
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Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

For each chunk of results, write 1 or 2 sentences on what you believe the theoretical meaning of the results are

Add your perspective on the theoretical meaning to the **Notes** section of your **Scrapbook**

Make clear that what you are writing here are your ideas, e.g., by opening with “I believe that the theoretical relevance of result X is...”

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Revisit your earlier reflection on what types of data you thought would be acquired (see the [Notes](#) section of your [Scrapbook](#))

Work through each chunk of the Results section to compare what is reported with your expectations

Pay attention to whether all of the data you expected to see are reported

Check any supplementary and Open Access materials. Check the Method section to see if the authors report reasons for missing data

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

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Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Write in bullet points your observations regarding missing or unreported data

Add your bullet points regarding omitted data to the **Limitations** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Consider whether these omissions make it more difficult for you to draw conclusions about the research question. Take enough time so that you can state your ideas in 1 or 2 sentences

Add your thoughts regarding omissions and interpretation to the **Limitations** section of your **Scrapbook** - make clear any aspects of missing data that the authors have highlighted

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

STAGE 4 |
Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Revisit your earlier reflection on your interpretation of the theoretical meaning of the results (see [Notes](#) section of your [Scrapbook](#))

Re-read the Discussion section of the article and determine the level of agreement between yourself and the authors

For each sentence you had about the theoretical meaning, examine any contradictions or disagreement

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

STAGE 2 | Authors'
perspectives

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Methodology

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Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

If, after re-reading the Discussion, you believe that this incongruence reflects your own misinterpretation, summarise in 1 or 2 sentences the authors' perspective

Add your thoughts regarding theoretical implications to the **Key Points** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
busting

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perspectives

STAGE 3 |
Methodology

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Results

STAGE 5 |
Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

If, after re-reading the Discussion, you believe that this incongruence reflects the authors' misinterpretation, summarise in 1 or 2 sentences how your perspectives differ

Add your thoughts regarding differing interpretation to the **Limitations** section of your **Scrapbook**

STAGE 1 | Jargon
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Discussion

STAGE 6 | Reading
Goals

Now you have a good grasp of the article, you can tackle your **Reading Goals**

You may be able to address these without much in-depth reading, or you may need to re-read parts of the article again

Different sections of the article will be more or less relevant for different sorts of Reading Goals – so allow yourself to focus on the parts that are relevant, now that you know the article well

Final thought: Why is a guide to reading a journal article so complex?

Do you ever feel overwhelmed reading papers, and how do you deal with that?

“ All the time. If the paper is relevant to a problem I am trying to solve, you can be sure that there are key things in the paper that I do not understand. That confusion is not a threat; it is an opportunity. I am ignorant; I need to become less ignorant. This paper may help me.

Prof Brian Nosek

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Cited in Pain (2016)