



## Scholarly Reading Guide: Reading Efficiently

Academia requires a great deal of reading. You might have several classes or projects at once, and each could require reading several articles or texts. Scanning and skimming are two reading strategies that will help you pull key information from the articles and text in a timely manner.

### Scanning<sup>1</sup>

Scanning a text means you look for key information without reading each section or paragraph of an academic article.<sup>2</sup> Here are ways to scan a journal article:

- Analyze the organization of the content before starting to scan. If the material is familiar or fairly brief, scan the entire article in a single search. However, if the material is long or difficult, it may be necessary to determine which part of the article to scan according to your background knowledge.
- Always keep in mind what you are searching for.
- Let your eyes run rapidly over several lines of print at a time.
- Read the entire sentence when you find the information you seek.

Before you scan the article, you can ask yourself key questions that determine if an article is related to your research or if you should read the article fully. For example, asking two specific questions can help you determine what articles you should read first and what articles you might save for future reading:

- What is it about? (topic)
- Who wrote this and why? (purpose)

### *Finding Topic and Purpose*

You can often find the **topic** in the abstract section of a scholarly article. The **purpose** can often be found in the abstract or introduction of an article. The actual topic or purpose is not always directly stated in some academic articles. Some disciplines use jargon and specialized language which can make finding the actual topic or purpose difficult.

Sometimes, you may not be able to identify the audience, topic, or purpose before you read, but you can scan the text and make a reasonable guess based on what you see. You could also look for clues by reviewing:

- The journal's title
- The author's educational degree or title
- Words or phrases in the article's title

### Skimming<sup>3</sup>

Skimming is a common strategy to help readers know which articles they should read and which ones to save for later. When skimming scholarly articles, you generally look for information in two places: at the beginning of paragraphs and in specific sections of articles. Here are some common ways readers can skim a scholarly text:

- Read specific sections of articles only: Abstract, Introduction, and Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Skimming and Scanning* by Reading and Study Skills Lab, Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, MD

<sup>2</sup> *Real Reading and Writing* by Anker & Moore, 2015, Bedford/St. Martin's

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from *Skimming and Scanning* by Reading and Study Skills Lab, Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, MD

- Read the headings of the article: Some journals make authors use standard headings such as introduction, methods, or findings. However, some journals let authors use creative titles. If this is the case, skimming the headings can give you a good idea of how the reading is organized and what the material is related to.
- Look for other information that helps tell you about the article. Do you recognize the author's name? Is there an author biography or description that tells you who this author is and what types of topics they generally write about?

## **While Reading**

Skimming and scanning scholarly articles can help you understand the purpose, author, and topic of course. While you are reading, consider doing these strategies to help you retain the information and understand what the author is saying.

Revisiting the article's information—instead of rereading the entire article—helps readers retain and remember the information.<sup>4</sup>

Here are strategies to help you while reading:

### ***Focus on Key Words and Phrases***

Pay attention and take notes on words and phrases that are mentioned several times in the text. For example, if you notice that a specific word or phrase is mentioned several times, the author might be using that a term or word on purpose. Important points are generally emphasized through repetition.

### ***Notice Section Headings***

While reading, keep reminding yourself of where you are in the article by looking at the section headings. Section headings, especially when reading lengthy articles, can help you make sense of what you are reading.

### ***Reread Only Specific Passages***

Reread only the passages that are directly related to the main claims of the research, such as the conclusion section. Purposefully rereading only specific parts of the article is a good way to master the topic without having to read the whole article again.

## **Summary**

Our Scholarly Reading Guide resource series was developed as a way to provide English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners the opportunity to better read and comprehend scholarly texts.

We hope this guide will provide you with strategies for more productive scholarly reading. If you have questions, please contact [elc@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:elc@vanderbilt.edu).

**Find this guide and more online at:** <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/scholarly-reading-guide/>

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<sup>4</sup> *Making it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* by Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014, Harvard University Press  
[The Vanderbilt University English Language Center](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/)