Scholarly Journal Articles

Why use scholarly journal articles?

**Currency**  The information in books can be years old before they reach you in the library. Journals publish quickly and the information is current.

**Replication**  Articles published in scholarly journals give you so much information that you (or other scholars) can re-do the experiments and studies yourself.

**Data**  Articles from scholarly journals provide you with the raw data and methods.

**Conclusions**  The authors explain their conclusions and how they reached them, giving you the opportunity to decide if you believe it or not.

How to read scholarly journal articles
Most scholarly articles will be clearly broken up into specific sections. Reading the first three sections as described below, and then skimming the rest will help you to focus on the main points without becoming too overwhelmed by the academic or scientific language. Use a dictionary for key unknown words.

1. Read the **abstract** first. The abstract is a summary and will describe the question posed, how the experiment or study was done, and what conclusions, if any, the author(s) reached. Normally abstracts are under 250 words, but some can be really long.

2. Next skip to the **discussion, analysis, or conclusions** which should be at the end, right before the references. The authors will say if their original question or problem was proved correct. The authors will make any conclusions and say if there is a need for further study.
3. Third, read the introduction which will tell you what motivation and background the authors have for doing this research. It might include an overview of other similar research. Often this has its own section of the paper called the literature review.

**Methods** This section describes what methods the authors used to study and analyze the data. This can be hard to understand because of the technical language. Skim this section and try to figure out basically what the authors did. If you don’t get it, don’t feel bad, these are written for graduate students. Ask your instructors, librarians, or a specialized encyclopedia for meanings.

**Results** or Data explains what the authors found out. Often there are graphs and charts. Sometimes this is combined into the discussion/conclusion section. Often this section can be hard to understand. But don’t feel bad, we’re not all statistics wizzes.

**References** always appear last and list all the other research the authors used. They have to give credit for using other people’s ideas, too. References can be in any number of formats, APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.