Friendly Advice about Reading Empirical Studies

Scholarly articles challenge the average reader. They are written by experts for experts. Articles are long, often using obscure words common to the discipline. They follow a fairly predictable format. The Title, Abstract, Introduction and Discussion or Conclusion are the key sections to read initially, but read on about the entire format—

*Title*
Titles of scholarly articles are usually descriptive and may be difficult to understand. Scan titles for important keywords.

*Abstract*
A brief summary of the study. Scan the first and last sentences, if it appears relevant to your need, read the abstract again, carefully. This is your framework for reading the rest of the article.

*Introduction*
Sets the stage for the problem under investigation, placing the problem in its historical and theoretical context. The author’s hypothesis is presented. The author may answer these questions:
- What is the problem? Why study it?
- How is this study related to other studies done in the past?
- How will this research further the study of the problem?
- Where does the hypothesis originate?
- What questions does the author hope to answer in this research?

Method*
Describes the method used in the investigation. Details the chronological procedures of the study.
- How is the hypothesis translated into a testable question?
- Who are the subjects? How were they selected? How many subjects are involved?
- What are the subjects asked to do? Or are they (their behaviors) just observed?
- How are the independent and dependent variables manipulated or measured?

Results*
Analyzes and reports the results of the investigation. Many statistics may be discussed here with tables and graphs that may help you to interpret the data. Usually after the statistical analysis is an interpretation of the statistics.

*Discussion / Conclusion*
Interprets the study and offers implications. The first few paragraphs here contain all the main ideas of the report.
- What conclusions are drawn from the study?
- What new information is provided about the problem?
- What practical and theoretical implications can be made from the study?
- How does the study support or contradict past research?

Forms of Scholarly Articles

Scholarly articles are different from articles you find in magazines and newspapers. Scholarly articles are written by educated experts who have new information to share with other experts.

Four Main Forms:

*Experimental, Empirical or Research Articles* - report original research done by the author(s).

*Review Articles* - summarize, critically evaluate or update what is known about a subject.

*Theoretical Articles* - present a new theory, expands upon or analyze existing theories using previous research.

*Case Studies* - document observations obtained while working with an individual or organization.

These articles are usually peer-reviewed by several experts in the same field of study.