

Summarizing a Research Article

Research articles use a standard format to clearly communicate information about an experiment. A research article usually has seven major sections: Title, Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and References. Sometimes there are minor variations, such as a combined 'Results' and 'Discussion' section, or an overall General Discussion section in which multiple experiments are presented in one article.

Reading the Article

Allow enough time: Allot at least half the time that you spend on this assignment to reading and understanding the article. Before you can write about the research, you have to understand it. This takes more time than most students realize. Does the author's study make sense to you in lay terms (could you explain the study to your roommate)? When you can clearly explain the study in your own words, then you are ready to write about it. Here's how to proceed.

Scan the article first. If you try to read a new article from start to finish, you'll get bogged down in detail. Instead, use your knowledge of APA format to find the main points. Briefly look at each section to identify:

- the research question and reason for the study (stated in the Introduction)
- the hypothesis or hypotheses tested (Introduction)
- how the hypothesis was tested (Methodology including sample, variables & technique)
- the findings / Results and how those were interpreted (Discussion)

Underline key sentences or write the key point (e.g., research gap) of each paragraph in the margin. Although the abstract can help you to identify the main points, you cannot rely on it exclusively, because it contains highly condensed information.

Read for depth, read interactively: After you have highlighted the main points, read each section several times.

Writing the Summary

Like an abstract in a published research article, the purpose of an article summary is to give the reader a brief, structured overview of the study. To write a good summary, identify what information is important and condense that information for your reader.

The better you understand a subject, the easier it is to explain it thoroughly and briefly.

Important points should be considered for writing a summary

Use the same order as in the article itself. The number of suggested sentences given in parentheses below is only a rough guideline for the relative length of each section. Adjust the length accordingly depending on the content of your particular article.

- State the research question and explain why it is interesting. (1-2 sentences)
- State the hypothesis/hypotheses tested. (1-2 sentences)
- Briefly describe the methods (Appropriateness of proxies used for measuring dependent and independent variables, Mention the names of the statistical tools used in this research). (2-4 sentences)
- Describe the results. What differences were significant? (2-4 sentences)
- Explain the key implications of the results. Avoid overstating the importance of the findings. (1-2 sentences)
- Any deficiency/limitation found in the article. (1-2 sentences)

The results, and the interpretation of the results, should relate directly to the hypothesis.

For the first draft, focus on content, not length (it will probably be too long). Condense later as needed. Try writing about the hypotheses, methods and results first, then about the introduction and discussion last. If you have trouble on one section, leave it for a while and try another.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is always a risk when summarizing someone else's work. To avoid it:

- Take notes in your own words. Avoid writing complete sentences during note-taking.
- Summarize points in your own words. If you find yourself sticking closely to the original language and making only minor changes to the wording, then you probably don't understand the study.

Edit for completeness and accuracy. Add information for completeness where necessary. More commonly, if you understand the article, you will need to cut redundant or less important information. Stay focused on the research question, be concise, and avoid generalities. The Methods summary is often the most difficult part to edit. See the questions under 'Reading interactively' to help you decide what is important to include.

Edit for style. Write to an intelligent, interested, naive, and slightly lazy audience (e.g., yourself, your classmates). Expect your readers to be interested, but don't make them

struggle to understand you. Include all the important details; don't assume that they are already understood.

- **Eliminate wordiness**, including most adverbs ("very", "clearly"). "The results clearly showed that there was no difference between the groups" can be shortened to "There was no significant difference between the groups".
- **Use specific, concrete language**. Use precise language and cite specific examples to support assertions. Avoid vague references (e.g. "this illustrates" should be "this result illustrates").
- **Use scientifically accurate language**. For example, you cannot "prove" hypotheses (especially with just one study). You "support" or "fail to find support for" them.
- **Rely primarily on paraphrasing, not direct quotes**. Direct quotes are seldom used in scientific writing. Instead, paraphrase what you have read. To give due credit for information that you paraphrase, cite the author's last name and the year of the study.
- **Re-read** what you have written. Ask others to read it to catch things that you've missed.

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