

BG-5.3 Introduction to Reading and Understanding Research Articles in Psychology and Social Sciences (Seminar)

When: WiSe 2019, Thursday, 14:00 – 16:00

Where: Q114

Instructor: Dr. Adrian Stanciu, [adrian.stanciu\[at\]uni-vechta.de](mailto:adrian.stanciu[at]uni-vechta.de)

Office hours: Mondays, 14:00 – 15:00

Description

Reading and understanding research articles is a requirement for becoming proficient in theories and research techniques. A research article is the outcome of—usually—a long process of study preparation, data analysis, and results interpretation. One can say that it is a skill to read and understand a research article properly.

The seminar will introduce techniques on how to read and understand research articles in Psychology and the Social Sciences.

The seminar is structured around the following questions:

1. (Why) Are research articles necessary?
2. Is there a page structure that can allow me to skip ‘irrelevant’ text of an article?
3. Are all articles empirical (data based) or can they also be theoretical (no statistics reported)?
4. Can I be critical of an article? If yes, then why was the article published?
5. How can I prepare and write an article myself?

Materials

The main study material is (I will provide copies in class):

Son, PC. (2015). *How to read journal articles in the social sciences*. (2nd edition). SAGE Study Skills

We will use these articles as examples *during* our meetings:

1. Vauclair, C.-M., Hanke, K., Huang, L.-L., & Abrams, D. (2016). Are Asian cultures really less ageist than Western ones? It depends on the question asked. *International Journal of Psychology*, *52*, 136-144. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12292> [for survey research]
2. Coudin, G., & Alexopoulos, T. (2010). ‘Help me! I’m old!’ How negative aging stereotypes create dependency among older adults. *Aging and Mental Health*, *14*, 516-523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607861003713182> [for experimental research]

The rest of study materials can be found on StudIp, via the university journal data base or via google scholar.com.

Assessment

Assessment is compulsory only for students who require the study credits. Students should work together (max. 3 per group) in preparing an oral presentation of one article that addresses one topic chosen together with the instructor.

The contribution of each student must be made clear.

The presentation should be less about the content itself and more about how the content – the information that is conveyed by the article – is structured in the article: what information is included in what section, how content of one section builds on content of a previous section, etc.

Students have **30 minutes** in total for their presentation: 20 minutes for the presentations and 10 minutes for Q&A.

You should be able to answer questions of clarification to each of the separate sections of the article. Presentations may be made beginning with week 5. For further information on this and on how to prepare for the presentation, students can address further questions during the office hours.

Agenda

Week 1 – 17.10.2019 Introduction (materials can be read in subsequent weeks too)

1. Shon P.C. (2015). The challenges of reading. In P.C. Shon, *How to read journal articles in the Social Sciences: A very practical guide for students* (pp. 13-26). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
2. Frederique L. (2013). How to read (and Understand) a Social Science Journal Article. Retrieved from www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/instructors/How_to_Read_a_Journal_Article.pdf

Week 2 – 24.10.2019 On the ‘Why’ and ‘What’ of Titles and Abstracts

1. Shon P.C. (2015). Should I even read this? How to read the Abstract, General Introduction and Results sections. In P.C. Shon, *How to read journal articles in the Social Sciences: A very practical guide for students* (pp. 48-64). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
2. APA Manual Section – ‘Title and Abstract’ (p. 23; p.25)
[also, a practical super brief intro on how to search for academic articles]

Week 3 – 07.11.2019 Why Should We Read the ‘Introduction’ of An Article

1. Shon P.C. (2015). Should I even read this? How to read the Abstract, General Introduction and Results sections. In P.C. Shon, *How to read journal articles in the Social Sciences: A very practical guide for students* (pp. 48-64). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
2. APA Manual Section – ‘Introduction’ (pp. 27-28)

Week 4 – 14.11.2019 Hypotheses and Research Questions

1. Lammers, W.J., & Badia, P. (2005). Developing research questions: Hypotheses and variables. Retrieved from:
http://uca.edu/psychology/files/2013/08/Ch4-Developing-Research-Questions_Hypotheses-and-Variables.pdf [briefly on what research questions and hypotheses are and how one arrives at them]

Week 5 – 21.11.2019 What is the ‘Methods’ All About and Why Should One Read It?

1. APA Manual Section – ‘Methods’ (pp. 29-32)
2. Munafo, M., Nosek, B.A., Bishop, D.V.M., Button, K.S., Chambers, C.D., Percie due Sert, N... Ioannidis, J.P.A. (2010). A manifesto for reproducible science. *Nature Human Behavior*, 1. Retrieved from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-016-0021>

Week 6 – 28.11.2019 ‘Participants’, ‘Procedure’, ‘Study Design’ – Why Bother?

1. Heinrich, J., Heine, S.J., & Norenzayan, A. (2017). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33, 61-135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>

Week 7 – 05.12.2019 Scales, Instruments, Tests, etc. – A Key in Understanding Them

1. Sturm, T., & Ash, M.G. (2005). Roles of instruments in psychological research. *History of Psychology*, 8, 3-34.

Week 8 – 12.12.2019 What is the Purpose of the ‘Results’ Section?

1. Shon P.C. (2015). Should I even read this? How to read the Abstract, General Introduction and Results sections. In P.C. Shon, *How to read journal articles in the Social Sciences: A very practical guide for students* (pp. 48-64). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
2. APA Manual Section – ‘Results’ (pp. 32-35)

[also, a practical brief intro on significance levels, *p* values, and other basic statistic concepts]

Week 9 – 19.12.2019 Figures and Tables – Some Tips on Reading Them

Week 10 – 09.01.2020 ‘Discussion’ - Bridging Together All the Other Sections

1. APA Manual Section – ‘Discussion’ (pp. 35-37)
2. Shon P.C. (2015). Becoming a part of the scholarly community: How to read the Discussion and Conclusion. In P.C. Shon, *How to read journal articles in the Social Sciences: A very practical guide for students* (pp. 65-79). London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Week 11 – 16.01.2020 ‘Limitations’, ‘Implications’ and ‘Future Research Directions’

[for an impression of what problematic research can lead to, check this website:
<http://tylervigen.com/spurious-correlations>]

Week 12 – 23.01.2020 A Personal List of ‘Tricks’ in Reading a Journal Article in Psychology

1. Online resource: <https://www.lib.purdue.edu/help/tutorials/scientific-paper>

Week 13 – 30.01.2020 Miscellaneous, Open Questions, and conclusion

1. Coughlan, M., Cronin, P., & Ryan, F. (2007). Step-by-step guide to critiquing research. Part 1: quantitative research. *British Journal of Nursing*, 16, 658-663. Retrieved from: <https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/abs/10.12968/bjon.2007.16.11.23681>