

How to Read an Academic Article

31 August 2010 at 10:31 pm (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/2010/08/31/how-to-read-an-academic-article/>) | *Peter G. Klein* (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/author/pklein/>) | *52 comments* (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/2010/08/31/how-to-read-an-academic-article/#comments>)

| Peter Klein |

This fall I'm teaching "Economics of Institutions and Organizations" to first-year graduate students. The reading list is rather heavy, compared to what most students are used to from their undergraduate courses and their first-year courses in microeconomics, econometrics, etc. I explain that they need to become not only avid readers, but also efficient readers, able to extract the maximum information from an academic article with the least effort. They need to learn, in other words, the art of the skim.

When I've explained this in the past, students have responded that they don't know how to skim. So a couple years back I put together a little handout, "How to Read an Academic Article," with a few tips and tricks. I emphasize that I don't mean to be patronizing, and that they should ignore the handout if its contents seem painfully obvious. But students have told me they really appreciate having this information. So, I reproduce the handout below. Any comments and suggestions for improvement?

How to Read an Academic Article

1. Caveat: no single style works for everyone!
2. Klein's basic steps for skimming, scanning, processing...
 1. Read the abstract (if provided)
 2. Read the introduction.
 3. Read the conclusion.
 4. Skim the middle, looking at section titles, tables, figures, etc. — try to get a feel for the style and flow of the article.
 1. Is it methodological, conceptual, theoretical (verbal or mathematical), empirical, or something else?
 2. Is it primarily a survey, a novel theoretical contribution, an empirical application of an existing theory or technique, a critique, or something else?
 5. Go back and read the whole thing quickly, skipping equations, most figures and tables.
 6. Go back and read the whole thing carefully, focusing on the sections or areas that seem most important.
3. Once you've grasped the basic argument the author is trying to make, critique it!
 1. Ask if the argument makes sense. Is it internally consistent? Well supported by argument or evidence? (This skill takes some experience to develop!)
 2. Compare the article to others you've read on the same or a closely related subject. (If this is the first paper you've read in a particular subject area, find some more and skim them. Introductions and conclusions are key.) Compare and contrast. Are the arguments consistent, contradictory, orthogonal?
 3. Use Google Scholar, the Social Sciences Citation Index, publisher web pages, and other resources to find articles that cite the article you're reading. See what they say about it. See if it's mentioned on blogs, groups, etc.

4. Check out a reference work, e.g. a survey article from the *Journal of Economic Literature*, a Handbook or Encyclopedia article, or a similar source, to see how this article fits in the broader context of its subject area.

Entry filed under: - Klein - (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/category/klein/>), [Syllabus Exchange](https://organizationsandmarkets.com/category/syllabus-exchange/) (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/category/syllabus-exchange/>), [Teaching](https://organizationsandmarkets.com/category/teaching/) (<https://organizationsandmarkets.com/category/teaching/>).

[Two Economics Papers About Culture](#) [Chris Coyne's Austrian Course](#)



52 Comments [Add your own](#)

1. Christos | 31 August 2010 at 10:46 pm

I didn't appreciate this handout at first (how naive I was...) but it proved to be extremely useful as I started to develop dissertation ideas and later on. The only task that is not included and I always perform when I skim articles is to take a quick look at the data sources (that is for empirical papers). A lot of times the data sources can reveal strong and weak points of the paper fairly quickly. The typical example is when surveys suffer from selection bias and the empirical part(s) do not take account of it...hence I see the results with more caution.

2. [Andre Sammartino](#) | 1 September 2010 at 12:25 am

For an empirical piece, I'd suggest at 2.e. that a reader might be better advised to look at the equations/hypotheses/propositions first, as these may be very effective shortcuts to understanding the premise and approach of the paper.

But, as a generalisable plan of attack these steps work very well, and are a more systematic form of the advice I throw around to inexperienced students.

3. [Les liens du matin \(62\) « Rationalité Limitée](#) | 1 September 2010 at 1:32 am

[...] « How to Read an Academic Article » – Organizations and [...]

4. [gabrielrossman](#) | 1 September 2010 at 4:54 pm

in sociology at least i've found that i usually get a much better idea of what an article is about by reading the *works cited* section than anything else, even the abstract. consider it a case of how networks define identity.

5. Rafe | 1 September 2010 at 7:55 pm

Pete is talking about papers with content. With a lot of sociology papers when you identify the provenance you don't need to read the paper.



Some students can under-perform for years for want of basic study skills. A colleague failed a third year unit, the teacher took him aside to look at the paper submitted by student X, then he went to student X to borrow his lecture notes for the supplementay exam and he saw a a glance the way he should have been taking lecture notes. BTW that shows the value of lectures over roneo handouts, the active process of listening and note-taking. Remeber the gondola kittens!

On the craft of scholarship, don't miss the Appendix to C Wright Mills "The Sociological Imagination".

6. Vincent Amanor-Boadu | 1 September 2010 at 11:52 pm

Glenn Fox has an adaptation of Mortimer Adler's classic. I'm sure he will share it with you. Adlers advises reading everything three times, which is not very different from what Peter advises. But if you are interested, you may want to pick up Adler's 1972 book with Charles van Doren.

7. [How to Read an Academic Article « Organizations and Markets | Suffolk Economics Ph.D. incoming class of 2010](#) | 2 September 2010 at 6:03 pm

[...] How to Read an Academic Article « Organizations and Markets. [...]

8. [Guest post: How to read an academic article « Wasatch Economics](#) | 5 September 2010 at 7:13 pm

[...] found the following short guide(link to original) created by Dr. Peter Klein of the University of Missouri very useful. Professor Klein kindly [...]

9. [¿Cómo leer un artículo académico? « Notas marginales](#) | 6 September 2010 at 1:54 pm

[...] En uno de los blogs que suelo leer, Organizations an Markets, encuentro una entrada sobre cómo leer un artículo académico. Ellos de hecho hacen una detallada guía sobre cómo [...]

10. [How to Review a Literature « Code and Culture](#) | 7 September 2010 at 4:00 am

[...] the reader service model of O&M's recent "How to Read an Academic Article" and OT's long running grad skool rulz, I figured I'd describe the proper way to [...]

11. [How to read an academic article « International Education & Development](#) | 7 September 2010 at 5:29 am

[...] 7, 2010 Over at the Organization and Markets blog, Peter Klein posts a useful guide on 'how to read an academic article.' Here are the first two tips; go to the blog for the full discussion. How to Read an [...]

12. [Writing "One-Pagers" – Anthony J. Evans](#) | 8 September 2010 at 4:14 pm

[...] can grasp the key points of a particular work, and contribute constructively to scholarly dialogue (for advice on how to read an academic paper, see Peter Klein). I first encountered this method through Roger Congleton, and have found it to be a highly [...]

13. [Some Links « Truth on the Market](#) | 8 September 2010 at 4:54 pm

[...] to read an academic article (Peter Klein), though what seems missing are decision-rules for when articles should be "rejected" [...]

14. Consejos para leer y escribir mejor « Procesos de aprendizaje » | 10 September 2010 at 1:48 pm

[...] Klein ofrece un guión de pasos recomendados para la lectura de artículos académicos. Habla de la importancia de no solo [...]

15. Cómo leer un artículo académico « Caótica economía » | 14 September 2010 at 1:54 am

[...] 13, 2010 por Miguel Dejar un comentario He encontrado esta página con un pequeño esquema sobre cómo se debe leer un artículo académico. Paso a traducirlo para aquellos que les [...]

16. shalini | 14 September 2010 at 7:49 am

Great article really useful

17. Things to Do Before Graduate School | 27 December 2010 at 9:50 am

[...] [...]

18. Bob from Business Courses | 24 August 2011 at 1:50 am

My students sometimes get overwhelmed when I give them a lot to read but I feel that those academic articles are necessary for them to have a better understanding of how to do business. Hopefully with the use of your guide, they can skim through the articles more effectively and learn more in less time.

19. Natalia Fdz | 11 September 2013 at 10:20 am

Could someone please explain more carefully 3.d? What does referenced work mean? If the article I'm reading has a chart in it, does that mean I should go and check where that chart comes from? Could you clarify what does the author mean by "see how this article fits in the broader context of its subject area"? Thanks !

20. Peter Klein | 11 September 2013 at 11:13 am

Natalia, I meant a reference work like an Encyclopedia — there are lots of Handbooks, Companions, and Encyclopedias in most academic areas. See what an expert in your field thinks of the article (or theory or construct or whatever) in question. Forward citation searches can help too — see what other people said about your article when they cited it.

21. Natalia Fdz | 11 September 2013 at 8:53 pm

Thanks!

22. Rafe's Roundup 4 October | Catallaxy Files | 3 October 2013 at 6:26 pm

[...] jargon generator. Under the flapdoodle tree and other examples of jargon. Peter Klein on how to read an academic article and academic [...]

23. r2bl0g | 19 March 2014 at 4:01 pm

Reblogged this on Tech Ren.

24. #4 How to read an academic article | missmiki2014 | 4 August 2014 at 12:28 am

[...] Taken from: Peter Klein (2010) [...]

25. [Papers We Love | Rushi's](#) | 21 December 2014 at 12:14 am

[...] How to read an academic article [...]

26. [For Friday, 9/11 | Preyer 207](#) | 14 September 2015 at 3:21 pm

[...] Schutt, Chapter 4, and Appendices A and B (Chambliss and Schutt Chapter 2 and 307-312; here's a usefully concise online version of much the same kind of advice about reading academic articles) [...]

27. [어떻게 학술 논문을 읽어야 하는가 - Haruair](#) | 28 October 2015 at 7:03 pm

[...] 글은 Peter G. Klein가 작성한 How to Read an Academic Article을 번역한 포스트로, 학술 논문을 어떻게 읽어야 하는가에 대한 전략을 [...]

28. [Academic Papers – DiscVentionsTech](#) | 15 December 2016 at 4:52 pm

[...] How to read an academic article [...]

29. [Como ler um artigo acadêmico? | Prof. Alexandre Alcantara](#) | 19 January 2017 at 8:52 am

[...] Klein, em How to Read an Academic Article apresenta algumas dicas para aproveitar melhor a leitura de um artigo acadêmico. Adaptando as [...]

30. [For Friday, 2/16 \(AMSR\) | Staring into the Middle Distance](#) | 9 February 2018 at 5:11 pm

[...] You might want to look at the following helpful essay before reading Zukin et al.: Peter Klein, 'How to Read an Academic Article'. [...]

31. [Source](#) | 13 December 2018 at 7:40 am

Useful information.. videos engraçados e curtos para whatsapp Fortunate me I recently found your website inadvertently, that i'm amazed the reason why this kind of twist of fate didn't transpired ahead of time! My spouse and i book marked that.

32. [程序员练级攻略 \(2018\) : 技术资源集散地_脚本宝典](#) | 28 June 2019 at 4:53 pm

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33. [Read the Full Post](#) | 21 March 2020 at 6:38 am

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34. [Click the Following Post](#) | 31 March 2020 at 9:30 am

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35. [Jiang_yun](#) | 8 April 2020 at 10:42 pm

i do not know why i should to leave my name in there

36. [Management Assignment Help](#) | 25 April 2020 at 1:09 am

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37. [visit](#) | 6 May 2020 at 4:27 pm

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38. [파워볼예측](#) | 21 June 2020 at 10:10 pm

파워볼예측

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

39. [www](#) | 2 September 2020 at 2:40 am

www

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

40. [Nickolasharlow.bravesites.com](#) | 1 November 2020 at 8:33 am

Nickolasharlow.bravesites.com

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

41. [video animation company](#) | 29 January 2021 at 2:31 pm

video animation company

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

42. [Tronsr.Org](#) | 8 February 2021 at 4:09 am

Tronsr.Org

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

43. [Papers & PDFs - Product Manager Academy](#) | 30 April 2021 at 8:17 am

[...] interested in getting some foundational exposure to some well-known papers, first read one of How to Read an Academic Article by Peter Klein or How to Read a Paper by S. Keshav, and then jump into this list of [...]

44. [s128](#) | 16 October 2021 at 7:47 pm

s128

WordPress.com 400 Error

🔊 45. [Como ler um artigo acadêmico? – Prof. Alexandre Alcantara](#) | 13 October 2022 at 6:52 am

[...] Klein, em How to Read an Academic Article [confira ao lado o texto completo] apresenta algumas dicas para aproveitar melhor a leitura de um [...]

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M Quinas Incr Veis Para Madeira

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🔊 47. [dodactal.pw](#) | 22 April 2023 at 8:57 pm

dodactal.pw

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🔊 48. [10 Werkzeuge F R Profi Heimwerker](#) | 25 April 2023 at 10:59 am

10 Werkzeuge F R Profi Heimwerker

How to Read an Academic Article | Organizations and Markets

🔊 49. [certhewoth.online](#) | 30 April 2023 at 12:45 pm

certhewoth.online

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🔊 50. [Raboteuse Lectrique Versus B Che De Merrandier](#) | 5 May 2023 at 3:18 pm

Raboteuse Lectrique Versus B Che De Merrandier

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🔊 51. [9 Ideas Con Palets De Madera En Hormig N](#) | 6 May 2023 at 6:55 am

9 Ideas Con Palets De Madera En Hormig N

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🔊 52. [Awesome NLP Resources: A Comprehensive Guide - fxis.ai](#) | 7 October 2024 at 1:32 pm

[...] How to read an academic article [...]

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