

# A quick student guide to reading/evaluating academic journal articles (in finance/economics)

## Draft!

Reflecting my personal views and recommendations for students trying to get to grips with academic journal articles for the first time (or so).

## Quality of source

How can we actually ensure that the article we are considering is actually of sufficient quality? This is one of the hardest questions right at the start, in particular for students with little prior knowledge in the discipline. And it continues to be a challenge even for experienced researchers.

First off, ideally, your source is an academic journal in your field of study. It is easy to come across papers on finance topics, for example, published in journals linked to quite different disciplines. While possibly valid contributions, one has to ask why these articles were not published in their actual field of study. Should you only come across your topic of interest in journals outside your discipline, I would see this as a warning sign. Of course, it might well be possible that a specific topic is not properly picked up in a discipline, but I would say that such a situation is rare. More likely, you did not find the right sources.

Second, journals and journal articles differ in quality, which is why journal ranking lists have been established, that evaluate the quality of those journals. Now, all these ranking methods have shortcomings and won't be perfect, but they are a good starting point for someone new to a discipline. For example, the [ABDC Journal Quality List](#) can be used to identify higher versus lower quality journals. And if your source's journal does not feature on such a list, it is a possible warning sign (but there are known omissions in some lists, so again, not a 100% reliable assessment). In the UK the [ABS list](#) is often referred to for journal rankings across business school disciplines.

If you can't find a journal on any of the ranking lists, you might want to check that the journal or its publisher are NOT included in lists of so-called predatory pricing journals and publishers (there are various lists, just do a web search if you ever need one). These journal/publishers publish more or less anything for money, so quality is extremely dubious.

Finally, a word on working papers. Working papers are typically early versions of articles that are made available before publication. They are a great source for very recent research (as the publication process at journals can take quite a while). However, they often have not undergone external quality checks. As a result, they need to be considered with some caution, as there can be mistakes and results/conclusion might be wrong. As anyone can publish a working paper on some platform, use with discretion (e.g. find out about the author(s) and their background/institution).

These checks and considerations are not perfect, and possibly disadvantage / discard valid academic sources just because they don't meet the criteria. With academic publishing practices changing, you will have to adapt your approach and keep an open mind, while at the same time being aware that there is dubious research out there.

## The simplest start

- Title and authors

- Abstract

## **Topic exploration**

- Introduction
- Theoretical or empirical research?
- Literature review (plus references)
- Aside: Forward and backwards literature search

## **Diving into the empirical analysis**

- Hypotheses
- Data, sources and time frame(s)
- Variables
- Tables / Figures

## **The full paper**

## **Note taking**