

## FINDING THE CLUES IN THEORETICAL SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

**So, what is a theoretical scholarly article?** Theoretical articles do not contain information about a study or experiment the author(s) completed. Instead in theoretical articles, authors examine existing ideas and/or theories about their subject area and talk about how the theory:

- applies (or doesn't apply) in certain situations
- needs to be thought about in a different way and why
- is impacted by newer ideas or theories



You probably have heard this a million times, but when reading difficult material like scholarly articles you should:

- 🔍 Read with a pen in your hand
- 🔍 Use that pen to write on the article
- 🔍 Highlight facts, but **DO NOT** over highlight
- 🔍 Re-read the article
- 🔍 Work someplace quiet and without distractions

### 1. **Pre-read** and look for **clues** in:

- 🔍 Title
  - \*This should give you an idea of their main topic
- 🔍 Abstract
  - \*The author will summarize the entire article in this section, so look for what was examined and what the findings were.
- 🔍 Headings
  - \*This will tell you the way the article will progress
- 🔍 **BOLD** or *Italic* words
  - \*These are words that the author think are important or they might indicate the article progression like headings do

Now that you've done this, ask yourself what do you think the article is arguing?

\*\*Let this guide the way you begin to read and think about the article\*\*

## ***2. FIND THE ARGUMENT***

- 🔍 Remember that the author is arguing something; you just need to figure out what that is
- 🔍 The argument will be in the beginning of the article
  - 🔍 Authors frequently summarize their argument at the end of their article as well!
- 🔍 Read the introduction **CAREFULLY**
  - 🔍 Look For:
    - The Thesis Statement - usually the last sentence of the introductory section
    - Words such as “but” or “although” might show that the author is arguing against something

## **WHY DOES THE AUTHOR THINK HIS/HER ARGUMENT IS IMPORTANT?**

Knowing **why** the author is writing can help you understand **what** he/she wrote

- Did the author write to:
  - Share ideas
  - Share findings
  - Summarize past research
- 🔍 Look for evidence as to why it matters
  - How might his/her ideas change the way others in the field think or act?
  - Is the author the first to study this idea in this way?
  - Phrases like “the purpose of this study...” will lead into why the author wrote the paper

## ***3. HOW DOES THE AUTHOR SUPPORT HIS/HER ARGUMENT?***

- 🔍 As you read look for evidence supporting the claim.
  - 🔍 When you find evidence ask yourself:
    - Is it valid?
    - Is it reliable?
    - Can I trust it?
  - 🔍 To answer these questions consider things like:
    - Is the evidence cited?
    - Do you trust that source?
    - Does it make sense?
    - Is the “whole picture” presented through the evidence or are there important issues overlooked or ignored?
- 🔍 In the margins write the main ideas or supporting evidence of the argument
  - 🔍 Think about:
    - How does it connect to the argument?
    - Does the evidence make sense with the argument?
    - Are counter arguments mentioned?
      - How does the author disprove or argue against these points?

#### 4. CLARIFYING WHAT YOU READ

- 🔍 UNDERLINE key ideas and words
  - 🔍 Make notes about why they're important or what they are in the margin
- 🔍 Look up unfamiliar words
- 🔍 Every few paragraphs stop and ask yourself what you just read
  - 🔍 Explain what you read in your own words
    - Write this down in the margins or in your notes
      - If you do this by time you finish you will have detailed notes in your own words about what you read

#### 5. WHEN YOU FINISH READING

- 🔍 Ask yourself what you read
  - How does what you read match what you thought you would read?
  - Did what you read support the author's argument?
- 🔍 Re-read
  - If you re-read the article you will be able to understand it better now that you have an idea of what the article is trying to say.
  - On a second read, more of the complex ideas will begin to make sense to you and you will have a better understanding of the details in the article
- 🔍 Paraphrase the important ideas in your own words.
  - What are the important ideas and why?
  - Focus on smaller sections of the article.
- 🔍 Summarize the article in your own words.
  - Here is where you explain everything that is in the article.
  - You should focus on main ideas and why they are important.
  - There is much less detail in a summary than the article had.
  - Keep the summary safe so that when you need to remember what the article is about you can use it!

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The following resources were used in the design of this handout:

Driscoll, Dana Lynn, and Allen Brizee. "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University, 14 Dec. 2011. Web. 21 Sept. 2012.

Rosenberg, Becky, Ph.D. "How to Reach an Academic Article." *University of Washington*. Ed. David S. Goldstein, Ph.D. University of Washington, 01 Apr. 2009. Web. 10 Sept. 2012

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The College of Saint Rose, 2012 Designed by Nicole Stallman