Strategies for reading academic articles
Learning Outcomes

• By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:

  • Identify how to speed up your academic reading
  • Develop techniques to be more effective in your reading
  • Identify how to focus your reading on the key points of a journal article.
This workshop is:

• practical – based on reading a journal article
• not discipline-specific
Student attitude to reading

“I believe if you read every single journal article, from start to finish that you’ve used in an assignment, you would have no life. I probably shouldn’t admit that as a student, but you just wouldn’t.”

(Psychology student, 2015)
Reading for a purpose

• Before you read an article, you should have an idea of where it fits in with your assignment plan
  • Why are you reading this? What do you want to know?
• Need to step back to see overview
  • See ‘Structuring your assignment’ workshop for more advice

• Imagine that we’re looking for research on peer learning
  • What is peer learning?
  • How (if at all) does it help students?
  • What can this article tell us?
Sections of a typical journal article

1. Abstract (summary)
2. Introduction
3. Methods
4. Results
5. Conclusion and discussion
6. References
Activity 1

• Write on the whiteboards the order in which you’d usually read a journal article.
Suggested reading order for sections of a journal article
1. Abstract (summary)
2. Introduction
5. Conclusion and discussion
4. Results
3. Methods
6. References
Abstract

• Summary of whole article
• Key points
• Lot of information in a few lines
• Worth reading in depth
Activity 2

- Read the abstract
- Does the article relate to peer learning?
- Has it investigated any benefits?
This study aimed to evaluate the implementation of a same-year peer-assisted learning (PAL) scheme, introduced in the first year of an undergraduate degree. The students participated in voluntary timetabled PAL sessions which encouraged a cooperative approach through student-directed activities. An action research design was used, and evaluation at each stage led to subsequent modifications over three years of implementation. Evaluation showed that the majority of students agreed that PAL helped with social aspects of learning but not that PAL contributed to improved study skills or assignment preparation. Between stages 1 and 2 small yet significant improvements in satisfaction occurred, and these continued in stage 3 when clearer guidance was provided. Based on our experience, PAL may provide effective learning environments; however, those interested in implementing it should be warned that it is not an easy option, and students need help to structure sessions effectively.
Initial reading order

Start - read

Middle - skip

End - read

(From Godwin, 2012)
Introduction

• Background - sets the scene
• Key ideas for this area as a whole
• How closely you read will depend on how much you know already
  • New area – very useful for overview and key writers
  • Familiar area – skim through
Conclusion and discussion

• Key section of the article
• May be in one section or separate
• Main findings
• Reasons underlying findings
• Limitations of study
Activity 3

• Skim through the discussion and conclusion section

• From the results of this research, write a limitation of the study on your whiteboard
Limitations

There are some limitations of this study. Firstly the students were from one health professional programme, and therefore results may not be representative of other institutions or fields of study. In addition the evaluation was carried out in the first year of undergraduate study and may reflect the students’ level and less mature approach to learning. Caution should also be taken in generalizing the findings from this study as this comparison was made from different student cohorts and the convenience sampling method used may not provide a balanced representation of each of the PAL groups...... Although we provided a case scenario for the first two sessions to help reduce some of the initial tensions there were only a relatively small number of sessions timetabled, let alone attended, and these factors may have influenced the results.
Results

• Can appear off-putting
• Look for main points
• Tables of data
Methods

- How the research was carried out
- Important for appraisal of evidence-based practice
Where next?

- You need to find way of noting and storing what you find, and making sure that you paraphrase from the article
- Other useful workshops:
  - Critical appraisal (for SoH&SC students)
  - How to use references
  - Structuring an assignment
  - Writing a literature review
References and further reading

  • Available at: 378.170281/GOD

  • Available at: 371.91443/GOD
Questions?