

## Critical Reading

### Summarizing information

When reading through a paper, you should consider the following questions:

1. What question is the author asking?
2. What answer does the author propose?
3. In what ways does the study improve on previous research?
4. How does the proposed answer compare with that provided by previous research?
5. What are the major logical or theoretical reasons for the author's argument?
6. What empirical evidence does the author provide?
7. What assumptions is the author making in his reasoning?

Once you've identified the papers you plan to cite in your research, there are some things you can do take notes more effectively. When you take notes, this forces you to read it more carefully – looking ahead to how you will summarize and use this information in your literature review.

Instead of taking notes on each paragraph, force yourself to read an entire section, then ask yourself: what did it say? Only after you can articulate the point in a concise way should you go back and take notes on the details.

To be an effective reader, you will vary the speed and depth of your reading to match your purpose. For example, if you've interested in the general ideas, you may read more quickly because you aren't as concerned with understanding all of the nuances. However, if you're trying to replicate the same techniques or use the same theoretical framework, you will read more slowly, paying more attention to detail.

When taking notes, whether general or specific, you want to paraphrase the information. This is a good way of testing whether or not you really understand it. Writing down direct quotations from articles won't help you in writing your literature review, because you're simply transcribing the information.

You will probably highlight papers as you read through them. If you find yourself highlighting a lot, you want to make an effort to think more about what you're reading. Another strategy would be to read through the paper once, then go through and highlight.

### Evaluating the analysis

Evaluating scholarly work can be somewhat daunting, especially if it is in an area that you're not familiar with. Consider the following questions when taking notes and evaluating an argument:

1. Does the theoretical analysis make sense?
2. Are the data used adequate to the task? Are there other data sources that would help to improve the analysis?
3. Does the empirical methodology adequately test the hypothesis?
4. Are the assumptions reasonable?
5. Is the analysis (theoretical and empirical) clearly explained?
6. Do the conclusions follow from the evidence?
7. On balance, is the author's convincing to you? Would you feel comfortable supporting this argument to another person?