Hello! My name is Jody, and I am a librarian at MacEwan University Library. I will be talking with you today about reading scholarly articles, and share some tips for getting the most out of your reading.

**Why read scholarly articles?** It exposes you to the larger conversations important in your discipline, including debates, perspectives, and evidence supporting best practice and decision making!
This workshop will provide you with some tips and strategies. Working through the activities with the scholarly article included will give you hands-on practice.

Scholarly article for practice:
Tip #1: Read more than once.

It is often hard to make sense of a scholarly article! We have learned to read in one specific way – linearly – from beginning to end! Sitting down to read a scholarly article like you would read a book – just doesn’t work. It is a different kind of writing / reading – must be approached differently! To really make sense of what is going on, and to save yourself time, effort, and grief – you will want to Read more than once – at least twice (maybe more)! And each time differently / with a different goal.

NOTE, too: That it is best to set aside a block of time for this. Your first and second reading should take place in the same block of time!
First, get a bird’s eye view.

Read the introduction.
What is the purpose of the AUTHOR in writing this article? Look for clues in the title and introduction sections. What clues do they give about the kind of study? How might this relate back to your course themes?

Then scan through the rest of the article – looking at the different parts and headings.
Using the Anatomy of an Article handout as a map, think about the structure of the article – identify the different parts – and think about the role they play in the article. Hint: Sometimes these parts will be clearly labeled with meaningful headings, but not always.
Reading activity #1:
Read Background & Objectives in Summary (p.44):
• Underline what you see as the purpose of the study

NEXT: Flip through the article. As you go:
• Star or circle the headings that divide up the article.
• Next to each heading in the article, note:
  1. Where it maps to the Article Anatomy handout (may use different terms; may not be 1-to-1).
  2. Think about what you can expect in this section.
Then take a closer look: Now you are reading through the article to develop an understanding. Ask questions as you go:

1. What is the author trying to do?
2. How are they conducting the study – try to understand the study design / methodology.
3. Where is the evidence / support? Look at the Findings & Results rather than Discussion and conclusion.

For a class discussion, or for including an article as one among many in a research paper, reading twice might be enough!
Finally, if you are writing a literature review, an annotated bibliography, a critical appraisal, or have been asked to critique an article, you will now need to read the article a third time, paying attention to the **methodology, study description, and results**. This will be a close up examination & involve a critique of the article. NOTE: Thinking critically doesn’t mean picking fault or tearing apart! Develop a “friendly skepticism”.

1. Look for strengths and weaknesses: What is the article doing well? What are the limitations?
2. Does the article do what it sets out to do? Are the conclusions supported by the evidence? Point out how / if the results answer the questions asked.
3. Look at the methods and findings with a critical lens: Look for bias, gaps, missing information, other perspectives or angles that could have been included.
4. What are the findings? And are they applicable – to your context?
5. Think about limitations> No research study is perfect or complete. There is always room for broadening / deepening / taking a different angle or approach – this is why we keep doing research! Look for limitations in participant selection / recruitment / study design / data collection or analysis.
Tip #2: Trace the research conversation
Scholarly research does not exist in isolation!
A key piece in any research study is a literature review. The literature review provides context and a picture of what’s been done already.

Ask yourself: Where have the ideas come from? Remember that the literature review is not the study. You must look for the evidence in the other sections. If you find information about another study or article in literature review section, find that article citation in the reference list, and then go to the original source. If you need help with that, please ask the Library!
Think about where this research could go next? What questions remain unexplored?
What do YOU want to know more about?
Often a scholarly article will mention possibilities for “future research” in this area.
Reading activity #2:
1. Remove references list & keep at your side.

2. From paragraph #3 of literature review (p.45):
   Find 1 author listed in the paragraph, circle the corresponding citation in reference list.
Tip #3: Trade in your highlighter!
A highlighter— is for surface reading – might help you memorize facts from a textbook, but doesn’t help you remember the thoughts and questions you had as you were reading.
Instead of using a highlighter try a pencil! Mark up the article, and insert your thoughts.
Read actively & Develop note taking skills: Make notes as you read – keeping the purpose in mind. Ask questions! What is confusing to you? What is surprising?
Use a dictionary. Scholarly articles are using the language of the specific discipline, and you are not expected to know all of the words. It takes a long time to understand the vocabulary of the scholarly conversation in your discipline – and you won’t learn the language over night. To really understand the article, though, you will need to find out what the words mean. So, look them up!
Find strategies that work for you to develop an understanding of the article. Here are some ideas:
- Keep a journal – log as you read.
- Make margin notes: Summarize each paragraph – and make a note as to what it contributes to the article.
- Q&A in the margins: imagine you are interviewing the authors – what did the author mean here? How is the author supporting ideas.
- If you are visual, try concept maps!
- There are also critical appraisal tools for different kinds of research – and these can help you critically evaluate (see resources list at the end)
Reading activity #4 involves reading through different section to get an idea of what’s going on in the article, then mapping the answers on a concept map.

Here are the guiding questions:

Read the Participants section: Who are they studying? Who else could they have included? Why? (p. 45).

Read the Intervention section: What is the intervention they are using? (p. 45)

What do they expect to change? What outcomes / results are they looking for?

Read the Data collection section: How did they collect data to measure effectiveness of the intervention? (p. 45-46).

Read the Findings section & skim the themes: What are the findings? What is one surprising / interesting finding? (p. 46-48).
Here is what an empty concept map might look like for this article [image of concept map].
And here is what a filled-in concept map might look like! This method can help you understand what is going on [image of concept map with answers to guiding questions]
Once you have your concept map drawn out, you can use it to ask yourself questions about the limitations of the study design, such as: Who else could have been included? Did recruitment methods impact who participated? Are the results generalizable?
Putting the pieces together:

Tip #1: Read more than once
- Skim: Understand big picture & how parts fit.
- Read: What is the purpose? What are the supports?
- Examine: Does the article do what it sets out to do?

Tip #2: Trace the research conversation
- Look for context in the literature review.
- Future research: What could we study next?

Tip #3: Trade in your highlighter!
- Make notes. Circle. Insert your thoughts.
- Look up terms you don’t know.
- Find other strategies that work for you: Checklists. Q&A. Concept map. Reading group.

Putting all the pieces together, here is a summary!
Here are some additional resources. Remember, you can always ask the Library for help!

**References & Resources:**


UBC iSchool. How to read an academic paper [YouTube video].
https://youtu.be/5Kxm2HF_k0

Critical appraisal tools, questions, checklists:
http://www.casp-uk.net/#!casp-tools-checklists/c18f8

**Library help:** http://library.macewan.ca/help
**Writing & Learning Services:** http://www.macewan.ca/wcm/StudentAffairs/WritingandLearningServices/