

Article Summary

Article information Record this first.

Use this box to record the class, project, date, etc., to help you remember WHY you recorded this particular article.

Title: Write the title of the article here. Titles will tell you a lot about the content of the article: the geographical focus, period, subject, and, sometimes, something about the author's approach or interpretation (which may be indicated by a play on words or a question mark). You can also use this space to comment on what the title leads you to expect from the article.

Author(s): Note the authors of the paper. If you know who he or she is, then make a note of that, too. What is the author's discipline?

Source: Where and when was this article published? Note the original source of the article. The publication it appeared in can lend or deny the material credibility.

Type: Record the type.
Journal article? Chapter?

Analysis information Fill in this section BEFORE you start reading! Examine the article as a whole and in its published context.

Purpose: Why did the author write this paper? Does it seem to be refuting someone else's interpretation of some event or phenomenon? Is it offering new information? You'll usually find clues to the answer to these questions in the first few paragraphs. That's where authors usually try to show why their paper is useful and worth reading.

Audience:
Who is the article directed to?

Content: What does it seem the article is about? Look at the first couple of paragraphs; they should give you some hints. Refer to the title. Some disciplines include an abstract that precedes the text. This will give you an uncritical summary of the paper's subject/content. Knowing what is IN the article and what it's about will help you focus on what is important in the next step of the analysis.

Sources used: Where is the author getting the basic information? Is it mostly from other books or articles? Is it based on research, interview, archival or survey data? Knowing where the author got the information will tell you whether the author is looking at something new, taking a new look at something old, or pointing out holes in what is already known.

Primary content details Start reading. Note labelled (or unlabelled) sections that should guide you through the article.

Thesis: If the article has a labeled introduction, you should find the author's statement of purpose, or thesis statement, before the end of that section. Copy the thesis statement as you find it in the article. It is sometimes only one sentence; sometimes more. Sometimes the sentences are separated from each other. An author might be obvious about it: "This paper will argue ..." or subtle, giving only a statement of the interpretation followed by a summary of the evidence that will support it.

Evidence: Note here what evidence the author claims will be used to support her/his argument. This question may well have been answered in the first step, by checking the notes. Use this step to expand your grasp of the evidence.

Limits: Writers of articles rarely tackle big topics. There isn't room to write a history of the world or discuss big issues. Articles generally focus on a particular event, change, person, phenomenon, or idea. It may be further limited by geographic focus, period, or a particular group of people. Note what limits the author places on the article.

Point of view: This is sometimes easy to detect; sometimes you have to feel it out by looking at what things are described positively and what are described negatively. Note what you learn about the author's point of view.

Illustrations, tables, etc: Note what other information the author provides. Illustrations elaborate on the argument, tables summarize data. Both are intended to help make the author's point. Web pages and sites may also be used.

Use this box for additional information or notes you make while you read the article. Page numbers keyed to highlighted text on a copy can help you find specific sections when you're discussing the reading in class or writing a summary or review.

Presentation and argumentation Keep reading but watch what the author is doing. This step requires that you read the article to gain an understanding of how the author presents the evidence and makes it fit into the argument.

Concepts/words: Use this space to note the words or concepts you had to look up. Did the author coin his/her own terms, or use common terms in unusual ways?

Use of evidence: How well did the author rely on his/her evidence? Was everything mentioned at the outset referred to in the article? Was quoted material used to illustrate or substantiate points? You may not have much to say for this section, or you might notice that materials listed in the bibliography or reference were not used in the paper.

Conclusion: You can either write out the author's conclusions (though they're often a paragraph or so long), or you can summarize where the author went with the paper. You may refer to the thesis statement to help you phrase your summary.

Implications: This is where you might note what the points the author has made might mean in a larger context. What might government officials make of this paper? Who might find it useful? Would anyone change the way they work, or approach an issue if they read this article? What difference has it made for you? You might also consider why your instructor has asked you to read this article. What new course-related information did it contain? Was the article assigned because it illustrated ideas or concepts covered in the course? Perhaps the author advanced thinking in the discipline. What do you think?

Evaluation Consider your personal and academic reaction to it; Now that you've finished reading, consider your personal reaction to it. First impressions are often "I liked it," or "It was hard to read." First impressions are usually opinions and not particularly reasoned. They can be useful in that those opinions can be a starting point, but remember that they are your own, personal, reactions to the effort of the task of reading the article. Rarely are your first impressions the best evaluation you can give of the article or title. Dense or technically complex is not necessarily bad and easy to read is not necessarily anything more than a nice summary.

Strength of case: Did the author persuade you that the point/argument she/he was making was true, or at least convincing? Did you feel, at any time, that the author was just hoping you'd agree? Use this space to note how convincing you thought the article was.

Personal reaction: This is where you note your personal reaction to the paper. Your comments might be one or two words, or might be longer. Remember, too, that these notes will allow you to quickly review the article later on. You might do well to write your future self fairly detailed notes. Remember that your first reaction is probably an opinion. Opinions can guide you in useful directions, but they must be substantiated by evidence to be raised to the status of critique.

Quality: Use this space to record your sense of the quality of the paper. In most published articles, the quality will be quite high. Many people contribute to helping an author revise and refine a paper and what you see published is rarely what the author originally wrote. There may be some technical problems, like spelling mistakes or formatting problems that you might note.

Language, grammar, structure, logic: Use this space to note left-over problems like spelling or usage errors, grammar or logic errors and structural weaknesses. These are less likely to show up in well-edited material, but they can occur everywhere. Be on the look-out.

Last-minute notes/ideas: