

Reviewing the Literature: Examining the Content of a Research Article

Introduction

- Acquaints reader with research problem and its context
- Describes problem area under investigation
- Includes statement of purpose and research questions/hypothesis to be tested
- Briefly describes current knowledge relating to the study problem so the reader can understand how the study fits in with previous findings and can assess the contribution of the new study
- Presents the theoretical framework
- Explains the significance of and need for the study

Method

- Includes a description of the research design which focuses on the overall plan for the collection of data
- Often includes a section outlining the steps the researcher took to minimize biases and enhance the interpretability of the results by instituting various controls
- Describes the population under study, exclusion/inclusion criteria
- Describe the actual sample, including how the subjects were selected and the number of subjects
- Describes the methods and procedures used to collect the data
- May present information concerning the quality of the measuring tools
- Describes the procedures used to conduct the study, including a description of any intervention
- Efforts to protect the rights of the subjects may be included here

Results

- Research findings are presented
- Basic descriptive information is included here, including a description of the study participants
- Basic descriptive information for the key variables is included
- The names of statistical tests are given
- The value of the calculated statistic is given; this allows the researchers to draw conclusions about the meaning of the results
- The significance of the data is given; if a researcher reports that the results are statistically significant, it means that the findings are probably valid and replicable with a new sample of subjects
- Level of significance is given which is an index of how probable it is that the findings are reliable. For example, if a report indicates that a finding was significant at the .05 level, this means that 5 times out of 100 would the obtained result be haphazard (95 times out of 100, similar results would be obtained with a new sample)

- In a qualitative report, the findings are organized according to the major themes, processes, or categories that were identified in the data

Discussion

- The researcher draws conclusions about the meaning and implications of the findings
- This section tries to unravel what the results mean, why things turned out the way they did, and how the results can be used in practice
- Results are interpreted into practical, conceptual, or theoretical meanings
- Suggestions are given on how the findings can be used
- Study limitations are explored: sample deficiencies, design problems, weaknesses in data collection

References

- List of books, reports and journal articles that were referenced in the text are given

Tips on Reading Research Reports

- Read from a report that has been photocopied so you can make notes and use a highlighter.
- Read the article slowly. It may be useful to skim the article first to get the major points and then read the article more carefully a second time.
- On the second or later reading, become an active reader—this means that you are constantly monitoring yourself to determine whether you understand what you are reading.
- Try not to get scared by the statistical information—try to grasp the gist of the story without letting the numbers frustrate you.
- You may want to summarize the article and may need to look up definitions for key points.
- A critical reading involves an evaluation of the researcher's major conceptual and methodologic decisions—does the study make sense? Do the questions raised make sense? Was the sample reasonable and can the results be reproduced if you conducted the study?