

An Introduction to Reading & Understanding Journal Articles

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Academic Journal Article Structure

- Introduction
 - sections identify key concepts
- Studies
 - Introduction
 - goal, hypothesis, and study design
 - Method
 - Results
 - Discussion
- General Discussion
 - review of the study findings, implications, future directions, limitations, conclusions

Hypothesis vs. Theory (in social psych)

- Theory: An organized set of principles used to explain observed phenomena.
- Hypothesis: A testable, specific prediction.

Types of Research

Type of Study:	Descriptive	Correlational	Experimental
Goal:	To describe how people typically think, feel, and behave.	To discover the relationship between two variables.	To discover the causal relationship between variables.
Method:	Observation, Archives, Surveys	Observation, Archives, Surveys	Manipulate one variable and measure the effect on another variable.
Important to note:	Random sampling	CANNOT DETERMINE CAUSATION	Causation determined if: Experimental Control and Random Assignment

- Location of study: lab, online panel (from what source?), “field” (field sample, field experiment, intervention)

Experimental & Correlational Research

- **Conceptual Variables:** The researchers' idea of what they intend to manipulate or measure.
- **Operational Variables:** The specific way the idea (or construct) was measured or manipulated in the study.
 - how well is this translation done?

Correlational Research

- Predictors: variables that are hypothesized to drive certain outcomes
- Outcomes: variables that assess an effect of interest
 - does not capture non-linear relationships
(*always need to plot variables)
 - vulnerable to outliers(*)
 - vulnerable to common method variance

Experimental Research

- Independent Variables (IV):
 - variables you manipulate
- Dependent Variables (DV):
 - variables you measure
 - cannot manipulate everything (e.g., demographics)
 - difficult to conduct experiments in certain contexts/on certain topics

Construct Validity

- The extent to which experimental manipulations influence the variables they were designed to manipulate.
- The extent to which study measures accurately assess the conceptual variables they were designed to measure.
- Internal validity: The degree to which the independent variable(s) caused the effect on the dependent variable(s).
- External validity: The degree to which the results are generalizable.

Always consider

- confounds
- relevant third variables
- the question of why a relationship between variables emerges
- experimenter demand
- the subjective experience of participants
- ethical considerations
- sample size and replicability

Reading the (basic) Stats

- Are these groups different from one another?
 - t-test (2 groups) (t)
 - ANOVA (> 2 groups) (F)
 - Chi-squared (categorical responses) (X)
- Do these two variables relate to one another (positively or negatively)?
 - correlation (r)
 - regression (B)

Reading the (basic) Stats

- Main Effects - do the conditions differ based upon a variable
- Interactions - does the relationship between conditions differ across another variable
- Simple effects, pairwise comparisons, simple slopes - comparisons within an interaction
- Controlling for variables - holding that variable constant to see if the analysis holds above and beyond the influence of that variable

Discussing Research Studies

- What was the question/goal?
 - theory & hypothesis
- What did they do?
 - design, independent and dependent variables
- What happened?
 - procedure and results (for each IV & DV)
- What does it mean?
 - conclusions, implications

Discussing Research Studies

- Ask questions and offer criticism that is development-oriented
 - what new knowledge would your critique generate
 - why would your suggestion improve the study
 - how would your comment reshape our understanding of the results
 - is there reason to question *this* result
 - can you think of other ways for them to investigate the idea or test the hypothesis?

Next time: let's put this into practice by reading a paper and discussing both its content and findings, and the process of reading a paper!