Scholarly Articles: Reading for Understanding

**INTRODUCTION**

This activity/assignment was designed for a first year composition course in collaboration with an English/Writing instructor. It could be used in an information literacy credit course, First Year Experience course, or in another discipline-specific context.

Students are given instruction on reading a scholarly article and directed to look for key pieces of information. Class time can be used if the article is short enough, followed by class discussion about what students found.

The instructor then shows an infographic (prepared in advance) showing those key pieces of information in a concise, visual format. Students are introduced to an online infographic maker such as easel.ly or piktochart, and directed to create their own infographic on the article. Class time can be used to get started, and if time allowed, students could share and critique each other’s work on a different class day.

The graded assignment is for students to create an infographic on a scholarly article of their choosing, relevant to a larger research assignment in the composition (or other) course (e.g. an annotated bibliography).

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Students will be able to identify the components of a scholarly journal article in order to become familiar with common structures of research articles.

2. Students will be able to locate the key pieces of information (hypothesis or research question, methodology, participants or data sources, findings, and limitations) in a scholarly journal article in order to read for understanding.

3. Students will be able to present the key pieces of information from a scholarly article in a visual format using infographic or other online creation tools.

**LESSON PLAN**

**Before class:**

Choose a scholarly article that can be skimmed/read in under 15 minutes during class time, and that follows a traditional structure for the discipline (or, if not discipline-specific, a common structure including Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion).

Identify the following, and be able to discuss:

* Research question or hypothesis
* Data sources
* Methods used
* Findings
* Concerns

Prepare an infographic of this information using an online infographic maker like easel.ly or piktochart.

Make copies of the *Parts of a Scholarly Article* handout included with this lesson plan, or make your own. This could also be put on a slide instead of a handout.

**During class:**

1. Provide students with copies of a scholarly article and the *Parts of a Scholarly Article* handout. Direct students read the abstract of the article, and skim to find the elements listed under “What to Look For” on the handout. They may need to read some sections of the article in their entirety to find this information, so it’s best to choose an article that could be read in this way in under 15 minutes. Ask students to take notes as they read and be prepared for discussion.

What to Look For:

* Research question or hypothesis
* Data sources
* Methods used
* Findings
* Concerns

2. After students have had time to read, call them back together to discuss. Ask for each piece of information and correct any misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Explain that these are the elements one should look for when reading research studies or secondary sources about research studies, in order to be a more critical reader.

3. Show students the infographic you have created in advance, and ask whether it is easier to interpret than the article was. Discuss the elements of visual design that make it easier to interpret/read. Highlight each of the key pieces of information you extracted from the article (research question or hypothesis, etc.).

4. Demonstrate the online infographic maker you used, including:

* registering an account,
* choosing a template
* basic editing/modifying of the template
* any differences between a free and paid account
* downloading your final product

5. If you are in a computer classroom, students can begin work on a practice infographic using the article they just read.

**ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS**

Choose an article from a scholarly journal. Read the article, recording the following key pieces of information as you read:

* Research question or hypothesis
* Participants or data sources
* Methods used
* Key findings
* Limitations or Concerns

Distill this information into brief and concise statements without losing the main points. Think about how this information could be represented visually.

Use an online infographic maker to report on your understanding of the article and its key points or components.

The reader/viewer of your infographic should be able to quickly and easily identify what the study looked at, how it was conducted, and what it found.

Include a complete bibliographic citation for the article you chose on the infographic.

**Some tips for creating your infographic:**

* Choose a template that best matches the information you will present. If you have five sections, try to find a template with five sections. Try to find one that matches the theme or subject of the article, or at least already has some relevant images.
* Consider the flow of information. Most people read left to right, top to bottom. Put things in the order you want people to read them (e.g. don’t put *Findings* at the top).
* Use image objects from the infographic maker that relate to your article, and anchor the reader’s attention.
* Make all of your headings in the same format (e.g. same font size, boldness, etc.)
* Consider the [C.R.A.P. Principles of Graphic Design](https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/designing-business-information-systems-apps-websites-and-more/s07-01-c-r-a-p-principles-of-graphic-.html): Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity.

**GRADING/ASSESSMENT**

This will vary depending on the nature of the course (credit course, one-shot, etc.), but a well-done assignment should meet the following expectations:

* Design is uncluttered, easy to follow
* All required components are present
* Each component is easy to understand
* Each component correctly represents what was in the article