READING FOR WRITING STYLE

Learn how to read a paper in your field to get a better idea for how to write your research paper.

Stylistic rules and conventions vary greatly across academic disciplines. Before you start writing your paper, find a few representative articles in your desired field to analyze. Ask yourself the following questions to make sure your own writing aligns with disciplinary conventions.

1. **Person and tense**
   - What tense does the author use? Past, present, or future? Does it change in different sections of paper?
   - What person does the author write in?

2. **Organization**
   - Is the paper organized thematically? Chronologically?
   - Does the paper have an abstract? Y / N
   - Does the paper have a formal introduction section? Y / N
   - Does the paper have a formal conclusion section? Y / N
   - Does the paper use formal section headings? Y / N
   - If not, how does the author indicate the separation between sections?
Evidence

• What types of evidence does the article use?

• How does the article incorporate this evidence? For example, does it summarize sources or use direct quotation?

• If the article uses direct quotations, are these block or single-word quotations?

Citations

• How densely populated are the citations in the paper (1-5 citations per paragraph… etc.)

• What are some commonly used verbs/language to describe sources, e.g. “observe,” “argues,” “suggested”… etc.

• What citation format does the author use?

What’s next?

☐ Be sure to repeat this process with one or two more papers in the field to confirm that the profile you have gathered is representative.

☐ Get feedback on early drafts of your paper. Ask questions about your writing style and use of evidence.

☐ Come visit us at one of our many library locations or the UCLA Writing Center and get one-on-one research and writing assistance tailored to your topic and questions: library.ucla.edu/support/research-help

☐ For more help with your writing, check out our website: uclalibrary.github.io/research-tips