

# Reading and Mining the Elements of a Research Paper

When reviewing research papers to conduct research for assignments, academic writers need to carefully read and mine (to gain access to or to dig beneath the surface of) the author's ideas, claims, opinions, conclusions, and arguments, as well as the data and statistics provided as support or evidence.

Academic writers read and mine research papers for several purposes:

- to focus or clarify a topic and any challenging concepts associated with the topic
- to understand opposing views and evidence provided to support those viewpoints
- to understand the rhetorical strategies used to appeal to readers/audience
- to understand the focus and information necessary to formulate their own thesis, claim, or main point
- to find relevant and credible evidence to support their claims
- to construct credible, relevant, and reliable arguments and evidence to convince the target audience

To achieve each of these purposes, academic writers should follow these important guidelines to carefully read and mine each and every research paper:

1. *Publisher Information and the Context/Occasion for the Paper.* Who published the paper? Is the publisher a respected source of academic scholarship? What precipitated the paper being published in the publication? Was the paper directed to a specific or a general audience? Was the paper written in response to an ongoing topic, discussion, or debate?
2. *Title:* How does title represent the essay? What does title suggest or hint about the paper's topic, focus, main idea, and/or the author's attitude toward the topic? Does the title effectively forecast the author's thesis/main idea?
3. *Thesis or Main Idea:* Identify the author's thesis or main idea. It may not be carefully placed in the introduction of the work, but there will be at least one specific sentence that best declares the author's main idea (i.e., the author's central claim, opinion, conclusion) about the topic. Did the author successfully declare and explain her or his main idea as it is developed in the paper? Does the thesis offer something worthwhile or relevant to the topic, issue, or debate?

4. *Supporting Points (e.g., claims, opinions, and conclusions) that correlate to the paper's Thesis/Main Idea:* Having identified the author's thesis, identify the supporting points the author presents in the paper to support her or his thesis. Do these claims, opinions, and/or conclusions directly correlate to and support the author's thesis? What do these supporting points tell readers about the author's thesis? That is, is the author's thesis based on relevant, credible evidence and examples, or is it merely based on opinion?
5. *Evidence and Examples:* Does the author provide relevant, credible evidence and examples to support each supporting point? What types of evidence or examples are provided (e.g., facts, testimony, data, personal experience, charts or graphs)? Are the evidence and examples convincing? Are there certain examples or pieces of evidence that are particularly effective and convincing?
6. *Methods of Development:* Concerning methods of development, how does the author develop, explain, present or argue the supporting points? Does the author use a specific method of development (e.g., comparing and contrasting two ideas/subjects, or explaining a cause and effect relationship between two or more ideas/subjects)? Or does the author mix methods of development? What methods of development seem most effective or convincing to the context of the supporting point that is being presented? How does each method of development aid in clarifying the author's supporting point, the author's logic, and/or the author's thesis?
7. *Organization and Rhetorical Strategies:* How effective is the paper's organization? Does the paper flow without any interference to the author's logic or coherence? Are the paragraphs clear, coherent and logical? Is the order of the paragraphs particularly effective or ineffective? Why? Concerning rhetorical strategies (i.e., exposition, description, narration, and argumentation), does the author utilize a single rhetorical strategy to achieve her or his purpose, or does the author mix rhetorical strategies? How effective is the writer's choice or choices for rhetorical strategy and for the primary or secondary sources? How is the paper used by other authors or referenced in other papers? Is the paper respected and valued in the field?
8. *Style, Tone, and Diction:* What types of words and phrases does the author use in or repeat often throughout the paper? Is there any specialized diction that is used throughout the essay? How does the use or repetition of these words phrases and specialized diction help to unify the author's text and ideas? What phrases or sentence patterns are particularly effective? How do all of these words and phrases define or project the author's tone? Is the tone appropriate for the author's purpose and audience? How does the author's style, tone, and diction compare to other scholars writing about this same topic or issue?