

Suggestions for the Analysis of Research Papers

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Here are some questions that may be useful in analyzing any research paper. You do not have to use them, they are merely a guide.

Introduction

What is the overall purpose of the research?

How does the research fit into the context of its field? Is it, for example, attempting to settle a controversy? Show the validity of a new technique? Open up a new field of inquiry?

Do you agree with the author's rationale for studying the question in this way?

Methods

Were the measurements appropriate for the questions the researcher was approaching?

Often, researchers need to use "indicators" because they cannot measure something directly--for example, using babies' birth weight to indicate nutritional status. Were the measures in this research clearly related to the variables in which the researchers (or you) were interested?

If human subjects were studied, do they fairly represent the populations under study?

Results

What is the one major finding?

Were enough of the data presented so that you feel you can judge for yourself how the experiment turned out?

Did you see patterns or trends in the data that the author did not mention? Were there problems that were not addressed?

Discussion

Do you agree with the conclusions drawn from the data?

Are these conclusions over-generalized or appropriately careful?

Are there other factors that could have influenced, or accounted for, the results?

What further experiments would you think of, to continue the research or to answer remaining questions?