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IMLS Sparks Ignite IL Framework Cooperative Project Teaching Materials: Scholarly vs. Popular

Jessica Barbera
McDaniel College, jbarbera@mcdaniel.edu

Jim Huff
Goucher College, jhuff@goucher.edu

Christine Iannicelli
Ursinus College, ciannicelli@ursinus.edu

Marianne Sade
Washington College, msade2@washcoll.edu

Samantha Martin
Washington & Jefferson College, smartin@washjeff.edu

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How to Read a Scholarly Article

STEP 1: Journal and Author

- Is the journal refereed/peer-reviewed? To find out whether the journal is refereed, how often it is published and who publishes it, do a Google search to find the journal web site. Does it call itself peer-reviewed?
- What are the authors' credentials? Are they affiliated with a university, research organization, or government organization? Are they from a corporation?

STEP 2: Skim

- Read these first:
 1. **Abstract**
 2. **Introduction**
 3. **Discussion/Conclusions**
- Based on that first skim, answer these two questions:
 1. **What is the article about?**
 2. **What point are the authors trying to make? What is their argument?**

STEP 3: Take Notes

- After skimming, read through the whole article.
- In the margin, summarize each paragraph using only a couple of words or a short phrase.
- Question what you read. Ask yourself, does this seem right? Who did the researchers study? How did they analyze it? Did they learn anything meaningful? Sometimes your answers to your internal questions will be positive, yet other times you will come across articles that seem very weak. Make a note of that.
- Number three or four of the most important points in the article; this will help you find those main points later and will help you organize your own thoughts.
- Circle jargon, unusual phrases, technical terms, etc. You can look for definitions/examples or you can use them as keywords to search for more articles later.
- **Highlight** only quotations that you just can't word better (or paraphrase) yourself. Those will be the cited quotations you use in your own paper. Be *very* selective about what you highlight.
- Put a check mark next to references (in the bibliography, works cited, or reference section) that relate to your project; you can look those up later.
- At the top of each article, **jot down two points**: 1. What is useful or important about this article? 2. What are the article's biases, limitations, weaknesses, or omissions?