Tips for Reading Scholarly Articles

1. If there is an abstract, don’t skip it. **Read it!** The abstract is a short summary that describes the purpose and findings of the article.

2. Before you begin, take a few minutes to look through the entire article. Just a brief glance will help you to identify major sections and significant terms or concepts. Look at section headings and any terms in bold or italics.

3. Do not try to start at the beginning of an article and read straight to the end without stopping. Scholarly articles can be very dense, and trying to read straight through usually results in lost concentration. It’s best to break the article into sections and tackle these one at a time, with short breaks in between. It’s not a magazine article, so don’t try to read it like one.

4. Although students find it odd to do so, it can be a good idea to read the sections of the article out of order. **Start with the introduction, and then read the conclusion.** These are the parts of the article where the author most explicitly states her thesis or major points. It’s important to have these clearly in mind when reading the rest of the article.

---

This study investigates the perceptions of 207 college students in early childhood education and child and family studies (future professionals) regarding the role of play in early childhood classrooms. The results indicate that future professionals in their freshman and sophomore years in college held relatively positive perceptions of play in early childhood education. However, starting with juniors in college, these perceptions followed a notably different pattern. Although participants generally perceived play in early childhood classrooms as important, these students possessed different perceptions about the role of play in relation to childhood learning and play as a curriculum. Upperclass participants expressed lower positive perceptions, a viewpoint that seemed to begin in 3rd-year students and was particularly evident in seniors. Taking play-related courses in college appeared to help education students maintain positive perceptions about play until their senior year. Given that after graduation, these future professionals will soon enter the education field where child-initiated play-based curriculum, standards-based curriculum, and accountability issues frequently collide, the results of this study will shed light on important elements for preparing future professionals for early childhood classrooms. Implications of the study are discussed, and recommendations for future research are also provided.

Keywords: future professionals, play, perceptions, early childhood classrooms
5. After each section, or even after each paragraph, write notes to yourself to indicate what was most important. In some cases, all you will need to do is jot down a few terms or short phrases. In other cases, you may want to write a paragraph summarizing each section in your own words. If you can’t explain the section in your own words, you may want to read it again until you can.

You are probably worried that this will take a lot of time. But, many students find that because they have to reread less by using this method, it also takes less time.

Among the few studies that have explored the perceptions of future professionals, Klein (1996) investigated changes in student teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about play and practice in classrooms based on the education received in their college programs. However, she did not specifically explore future professionals’ beliefs or perceptions toward play on a more personal level. Meanwhile, Sherwood and Reifel (2010) studied preservice teachers’ beliefs on the definition or categorization of play, and yet they did not look at preservice teachers’ beliefs about the role of play in classrooms. In addition, their study did not acknowledge the possible variability in individual teacher beliefs across time. Calderhead and Robson (1991) studied potential changes in the concepts of learning and teaching among student teachers through the teacher education curriculum, but their study focused exclusively on student teachers’ perceptions of teaching and learning in general, not just early childhood education. Given that play in early childhood education is of increasing importance and still the subject of intense debate (Ortlieb, 2010; Ranz-Smith, 2007), this relative lack of focused research regarding future professionals’ perceptions of play in early childhood classrooms is regrettable and thus the focus of this study.

A clarification of the terms early childhood classrooms, perceptions, and future professionals as used in this study is warranted. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 2011) described early childhood as birth through age 8. Preschool programs (for 3- to 5-year-olds) have different expectations about student outcomes than do programs for older

6. Remember that most scholarly articles include a literature review. This section usually comes immediately after the introduction, or is included in the introduction. Be careful not to mistake a description of someone else’s argument for the author’s actual argument.

7. After you have finished reading, try to explain the article to someone else. It doesn’t even have to be a real person. Just pretend you are talking to someone and try to explain the article to them in your own words. If you have trouble remembering or clearly explaining the article, this is a good sign that you need to go back and reread.