Analyzing Disciplinary Expectations Tool

Step 1: Skim reading

☐ Skim through the paper in 3-4 minutes. That means finding (but not reading) major sections like the introduction and conclusion, headings, where references come, etc.

☐ Then, quickly read the introduction and conclusion to roughly identify the topic of the paper. Don’t stop to use a dictionary, re-read complicated sections, or try to read every word.

Step 2: Analyzing structure

☐ What is the paper’s main argument or contribution to the discipline (or thesis statement, if you can find one)? Where is this argument/contribution stated? How often is it repeated?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

If there are headings, what are the heading titles (e.g. “Introduction,” “Conclusion,” “Results,” “Discussion” etc.)? Approximately how long is each section as a percentage of the article?

1. ___________________________ % of length: ______
2. ___________________________ % of length: ______
3. ___________________________ % of length: ______
4. ___________________________ % of length: ______
5. ___________________________ % of length: ______
6. ___________________________ % of length: ______

☐ How does the writer signal the start of a new section? Do they use discursive markers such as “to conclude...,” “first, second, third...,” “however,...” etc.? (Find a useful list of these at http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/summary-and-transition/).

This is especially useful to consider if there are no headings.

Example signal phrases for section openings:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

© 2018 Student Academic Success Services, Joseph S. Stauffer Library, Queen’s University, 101 Union Street, Kingston, ON K7L 5C4 Canada. Email: academic.success@queensu.ca; online: http://sass.queensu.ca.
This handout is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada License.
Does every section or part of the article contain an equal number of references? Do some sections include many or very few references?

☐ Yes, referenced are used equally throughout.
☐ No, references are used more in certain sections than others.

Sections with many references: ________________________________
Sections with few references: ________________________________

Step 3: Assessing argumentation

Does the writer highlight similar studies, related articles or books, or other scholarship in the area? If so, where?

☐ Yes. Where? ________________________________
☐ No

Does the writer state exceptions or limitations to their argument? If so, in which sections?

☐ Yes. Where? ________________________________
☐ No

Does the writer state plans for future research?

☐ Yes
☐ No

How often does the writer make claims – conclusions based on their argument – and how often does the writer use evidence to back up those claims?

_________________________________________________________

What kinds of evidence does the writer use to support their ideas?

☐ Books
☐ Articles
☐ Government reports
☐ Statistics
☐ Experimental data
☐ Theories
☐ Other ________________________________

How is the evidence presented?

☐ Writing description
☐ Graphs/charts
☐ Tables
☐ Appendix
☐ Mathematical Calculations
How much evidence is included? Is it in every paragraph?

Does the writer explain the evidence, or leave it in a long list (or e.g. include graphs without any commentary)?

What style of referencing is used? (If you don’t know the proper name, write an example).

- Chicago
- MLA
- APA
- IEEE
- Other: ________________________________

Is there a references or bibliography list? What is its title, and what material does it include?

- Title: __________________________________________
- Includes: _______________________________________

Step 4: Understanding Style

Does the writer use a large amount of technical vocabulary that only experts would understand?

- Yes
- No

Aside from technical terms, is the language so complex that a regular reader (a smart undergraduate student) wouldn’t understand it?

- Yes. Example sentence: ______________________________
- No

How long are the paragraphs? How long are the sentences?

- Paragraphs: _________________________________
- Sentences: _________________________________

© 2018 Student Academic Success Services, Joseph S. Stauffer Library, Queen’s University, 101 Union Street, Kingston, ON K7L 5C4 Canada. Email: academic.success@queensu.ca; online: http://sass.queensu.ca.
This handout is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada License.
Does the writer use “I,” “we,” both, or neither?
- I
- We
- I and We
- Neither

Does the writer include an engaging opening - a hook, an anecdote or sense of story?
- Yes
- No

Is the title purely descriptive or does it include some wordplay, sense of mystery, etc.?
- Descriptive title (e.g. “A study of X in...” or “A history of Y...”)
- Engaging title