

# Analyzing Disciplinary Expectations

As you develop your authorial voice, it's helpful to understand how scholars in your academic field follow conventions around structure, argument, use of evidence, style, etc. This tool can help you produce a list of writing conventions to adopt.

To use this tool, first **choose some articles** that your instructor or graduate supervisor has recommended as being particularly good examples of writing in your field. Then **use our template** to guide you as you skim these articles. As you read and write throughout your degree program, you will start to notice and follow these academic writing conventions on your own, but our template can help you get started in thinking this way.

Learn more about how to use [the disciplinary analysis toolkit for graduate students](#) on [the SASS YouTube](#) page.

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ % 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 here](#).) This is especially useful to consider if there are no headings.
  - Example signal phrases for section openings:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 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?
- Does the writer state exceptions or limitations to their argument? If so, in which sections?
- Does the writer state plans for future research?
- 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? (e.g., books, articles, government reports, statistics, experimental data, theories, other)
- How is the evidence presented? (e.g., 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? (e.g., Chicago, MLA, APA, IEEE, other) If you don't know the proper name, write an example.
- Is there a references or bibliography list? What is its title, and what material does it include?

### Step 4: Understanding style

- Does the writer use a large amount of technical vocabulary that only experts would understand?
- Aside from technical terms, is the language so complex that a regular reader (a smart undergraduate student) wouldn't understand it?
- How long are the paragraphs? How long are the sentences?
- Does the writer use "I," "we," both, or neither?
- Does the writer include an engaging opening—a hook, an anecdote or sense of story?
- 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