

- Aims**
- ✓ recognize the key features of a textbook
  - ✓ understand how journal articles and reports are organized
  - ✓ learn how to use monographs and edited volumes

## Aims

### ? Quiz Self-evaluation

How confident do you feel about reading the types of texts below? Rate each one from 1 = not at all confident to 5 = very confident.

1	A textbook (= a book containing facts about a particular subject)	
2	A monograph (= a book which is a detailed study of only one subject)	
3	A journal article (= a piece of writing in a magazine which deals with a specialized subject)	
4	A report (= an official document produced after investigating something)	

## Types of academic texts

### Glossary

**commentary**  
A commentary is an article or book which explains or discusses something.

Source texts can be classified in different ways. One common way is to divide them into 'primary' and 'secondary' sources. Primary sources are original materials on which other research is based. These might include letters, government documents, works of literature and so on. Secondary sources are commentaries or interpretations of primary sources. Textbooks are normally considered secondary sources as are most other books and articles which are the products of research. Depending on your subject discipline, you may need to read secondary sources only, or a combination of secondary and primary sources.

Primary source texts vary enormously and can take many different forms; however, the types of secondary sources you are likely to use in your research have some predictable features. As you become more familiar with these features, it will become easier for you to read them and find the information you need.

## Textbooks

### Glossary

**topic sentence**  
A topic sentence is a sentence which states the topic or main point of a paragraph.

**subheading**  
Subheadings are titles that divide part of a piece of writing into shorter sections.

It is often a good idea to start your research by looking at textbooks. Textbooks are written specifically for learners, and are designed to be easy to read. Paragraphs are often clearly structured with topic sentences and clear examples to illustrate the points made. Key words are frequently defined within the text or listed in a glossary. Chapters typically begin with a statement of aims and conclude with summaries and/or questions for reflection. Textbook writers also use a number of strategies for making important information stand out:

- Headings and subheadings
- Bold, italicized or coloured fonts for key words and concepts
- Bulleted or numbered lists
- Pictures and diagrams
- Text boxes

### Glossary

**index**  
An index is an alphabetical list that is printed at the back of a book and tells you on which pages important topics are referred to.

**survey**  
If you survey a text, you look quickly through it to discover its main features.

You can use these features, along with the table of contents and index to help you survey the text before you read it in detail. Surveying the text will help you:

- identify which parts are relevant to your essay topic
- give you a mental map of the text so that you can understand the detailed information more easily
- stimulate your curiosity by giving you 'clues' about the contents – this can help you read more actively and with greater focus.



### Exercise 1

This book has also been designed to assist learning. What features can you identify that make this a 'learner-friendly' text?



## Exercise 2

Choose a textbook related to your subject of study. Select a chapter and read only those parts that are designed to stand out, starting with the chapter summary, if there is one. Focus on:

- a headings and subheadings
- b information in bold, coloured or italicized fonts
- c lists
- d pictures and diagrams
- e text boxes

Try to form a mental map of how the information is laid out. Then read the chapter from start to finish and answer questions 1–3.

- 1 Which of the features a–e did you find?
- 2 Which features were most useful in drawing your attention to important information?
- 3 To what extent did surveying the chapter help you understand the content?

Try reading a chapter without surveying it first and compare your experience.

## Monographs

### Glossary

**substantial**  
Substantial means large in amount or degree.

A monograph is an in-depth study of a specialized topic. Monographs can be challenging to read because they often require substantial background knowledge. Also, there is no set or typical pattern of organization for this type of book.

Before investing your time in reading an entire book, it is important to survey the text to determine whether it is relevant to your essay. Surveying the book will also allow you to check whether the material is too dense or difficult for you to read. If most of the sentences you read contain words that are unfamiliar to you, you may be better off looking for an easier text.

### Glossary

#### scan

When you scan written material, you look through it quickly in order to find important or interesting information.

#### annotate

If you annotate written work or a diagram, you add notes to it, especially in order to explain it.

Begin by looking at the back cover, which may give a brief summary of its contents, and then the table of contents. Sometimes the order of chapters will give you an idea of the author's argument or 'line of reasoning'. Scan the index, if there is one, for key words related to your topic and note the page numbers.

For more information on scanning, see Chapter 5.

Next read the introduction for information about the author's aims and how the book is structured. This information often comes towards the end of the introduction.

Once you have a reasonable understanding of the writer's aims and line of argument, you can focus on those chapters which are most likely to contain the information relevant to your essay. Remember that, because academic monographs are often difficult to read, you may need to use a variety of strategies to help you understand the information.

If you own the book or you have a photocopy of the parts you want to read, you can use a marker to annotate it with the features that are commonly found in textbooks to make the key information stand out.

- Highlight the writer's aims.
- Highlight key words and write their definitions in the margins.
- If there are no section headings, add them yourself in the margins.
- Number key points or stages in the argument.
- Draw boxes around the most important passages.



## Exercise 3

Photocopy a section of a book related to your essay topic. Practise annotating it in the ways suggested above. Look at the text again after a few days, focussing on your annotations. Answer questions 1–3.

- 1 To what extent do your annotations help you recall the information?
- 2 Which of your annotations are most useful?
- 3 What changes (if any) would you make to your annotations to make them more effective?

## Edited books

### Glossary

#### scope

The scope of an activity, topic, or piece of work is the whole area which it deals with or includes.

Books consisting of chapters written by different authors (or groups of authors) are called 'edited' books or volumes. An edited book is put together by one or more editors who write the introduction, sometimes called a 'preface'. The introduction gives information about the subject, aims and scope of the book. Often brief summaries of the chapters are provided along with explanations of why they have been chosen. These can help you choose what to read.

Edited books can be particularly useful to you when you are researching an essay. Firstly, the texts have often been brought together because they offer different perspectives on the topic. This is important if you are thinking, and writing, critically about your subject. Secondly, the chapters are often reprints of articles which have been written by experts in the field and previously published in journals. Articles reprinted in this way are often considered to be important or influential.

The organization and typical features of chapters within edited books can vary enormously. However, on the whole they can be approached in the same way that you would approach a journal article.

## Empirical journal articles

Journal articles can be broadly categorized into two main types: empirical or source based. Even if you do not have to read journal articles for your essay, it is useful to know how they are structured because they are often summarized and/or referred to in textbooks.

Empirical articles report on research studies which are based on observation or experimentation. They are common in the sciences and social sciences. Most empirical articles follow a standard structure, commonly referred to as IMRAD, which stands for Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion. They contain the following elements:

**Title** – The title usually describes the focus of the paper and contains carefully chosen key words. This ensures that the article will appear in the database search results of other researchers looking for information about the topic.

### Glossary

#### corroborate

To corroborate something that has been said or reported means to provide evidence or information that supports it.

#### A hypothesis

is an idea which is suggested as a possible explanation for a particular situation or condition, but has not yet been proved to be correct.

#### rationale

The rationale for a course of action, practice, or belief is the set of reasons on which it is based.

#### validity

The validity of something such as a result or a piece of information is whether it can be trusted or believed.

#### replicate

If you replicate someone's experiment, work, or research, you do it yourself in exactly the same way.

**Author(s)** – Empirical research articles are often written by teams of researchers. The name of the researcher who has made the greatest contribution usually appears first in the list. The authors' affiliations are also given making it easy to evaluate their credentials.

**Abstract** – The abstract gives a summary of the article and is normally between 150 and 250 words long. The structure of the abstract usually follows the structure of the paper.

**Introduction** – The main purpose of the introduction is to present the context of the research and explain why the research has been done. The introduction usually states the topic of the paper, gives a review of previous research on the topic (usually referred to as a 'literature review'), and explains how the article relates to that research. The article is usually described as corroborating previous research, extending previous research, or challenging previous research. The researchers will usually state the key research question or questions they are trying to answer. In some papers, this is presented as hypotheses. Sometimes introductions will contain a summary of the most important results or 'findings'.

**Methods** – In the methods section the researchers describe how the research was done. They provide information about the materials or subjects used and the procedures followed. They also normally give a rationale for their choice of methods as well as an explanation of how the findings were analysed. This information is important because it allows other scholars to judge the validity of the results and/or replicate the study.

**Results** – In this section, the findings are presented, often in the form of graphs and tables. The key findings are described and highlighted in the accompanying text but generally not interpreted.

**Discussion** – In the discussion section, the researchers explain their findings. They indicate the extent to which their findings answer the research questions they posed in the introduction. They offer an interpretation of their findings and an assessment of their significance in relation to previous research. Recommendations for future research are also made. Sometimes there is a separate conclusion section in which the main points are emphasized and recommendations are made.



### Exercise 4

Extracts 1–4 below have been reprinted from the abstract to a journal article. Indicate whether each extract refers to the introduction, methods, results or discussion section of the article. In what order did the sentences appear in the abstract?

- 1 We argue that this effect may be the result of a feedback loop whereby using Facebook exposes people to often ambiguous information about their partner that they may not otherwise have access to and that this new information incites further Facebook use. Our study provides evidence of Facebook's unique contributions to the experience of jealousy in romantic relationships.
- 2 The social network site Facebook is a rapidly expanding phenomenon that is changing the nature of social relationships. Anecdotal evidence, including information described in the popular media, suggests that Facebook may be responsible for creating jealousy and suspicion in romantic relationships. The objectives of the present study were to explore the role of Facebook in the experience of jealousy and to determine if increased Facebook exposure predicts jealousy above and beyond personal and relationship factors.
- 3 Three hundred eight undergraduate students completed an online survey that assessed demographic and personality factors and explored respondents' Facebook use.
- 4 A hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for individual, personality, and relationship factors, revealed that increased Facebook use significantly predicts Facebook-related jealousy.

Source: Extract from Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More Information than You Ever Wanted: Does Facebook Bring Out the Green-Eyed Monster of Jealousy? *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(4), 441–444.

Empirical journal articles are often relatively long and can be difficult to read. In many cases you will not need to read the whole article in detail in order to find the information you need for your essay.

#### Tips

To access the most important information first, read the sections of an empirical journal article in the following way:

- ✓ read the abstract carefully
- ✓ read the introduction relatively quickly
- ✓ look briefly at the graphs and tables in the results section
- ✓ read the discussion (or conclusion) carefully
- ✓ skim the methods section.

# Tips

## Source-based journal articles

### Glossary

#### theoretical perspective

If you examine something from a theoretical perspective, you consider the ideas and abstract principles relating to it rather than its practical aspects or uses.

The other broad category of journal articles can be described as source-based. These are commonly found in the humanities and social sciences, such as history, languages, or sociology.

This type of article varies widely in form and does not follow any set pattern. However, it generally interprets some aspect of culture or society by examining it from a theoretical perspective. The purpose is not to solve a particular problem or reach a definitive conclusion, but to expand the debate around the topic under consideration.

When students write essays based on source materials they are essentially training to write this type of article. Therefore many of the criteria used to judge student essays are present in source-based journal articles.

### Tips

When reading a source-based journal article, it is often helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ What theme, issue or question is the author seeking to explore?
- ✓ What is the author's theoretical perspective?
- ✓ What new understanding or 'insights' do we gain by looking at the topic in this way?



### Exercise 5

Read the abstract below from an article. Then answer the questions in the Tips box above.

This paper analyzes four animated films in order to explore themes of leadership crises and leadership emergence. Drawing on psychoanalysis and structuralist film studies, this paper explores leadership emergence as mythic structure within the four films, arguing that these myths are structured around a struggle of a young novice against an evil power figure, and the overcoming of this figure through a process of self-discovery and maturation. Central themes include the relations between self-realization of leaders and the social harmony, the battle with evil leaders as an ego-struggle, and exile and journey as a precursor to mature leadership competence. [...] More generally, it is argued that treating popular culture such as animated allegories as contemporary myth offers scholars a view into popular conceptions of leadership, possibly illuminating the relationships between leadership and social organization.

Source: Extract from *Animating Leadership: Crisis and renewal of governance in 4 mythic narratives* by Islam, G. (2009). *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(5), 828–836.

## Reports

### Glossary

#### executive summary

An executive summary is a summary of a report, generally long and more detailed than an abstract, which may be read in place of the full report.

If you are studying a subject that has a strong practical focus, for example engineering, business, or public policy, you may be required to refer to professional reports. These are generally written by professionals or academics, often with the aim of providing practical solutions to a problem. The intended readers might be academics but are more likely to be decision makers or professionals in the field.

Reports can be long and detailed. However, they usually follow a fairly standard form within each discipline and contain features that make them easy to read quickly. A typical report is likely to have elements which are similar to the elements found in an empirical journal article. There is generally:

- a brief but descriptive title
- an abstract or executive summary
- an introduction explaining the context, the reason for the report, and how the investigation was done
- the main text, often clearly divided into sections, where the findings are described, analysed and evaluated
- conclusions and recommendations which specify what actions should be taken.



### Exercise 6

Look at the headings of a report on the funding of older people's social care in the United Kingdom. Which section do you think most clearly describes a problem? Which sections probably describe solutions?

Care in Crisis 2012

Summary

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The funding crisis to date
- 3 Tracking the effect of government spending
- 4 The architecture of reform
- 5 Future funding of care

References

Source: Extract from Care in Crisis 2012.  
<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/poor-quality-care-services-big-q/care-in-crisis-2012-report/>

Like empirical research articles, reports can often be read selectively. Start by getting the main ideas, then read as much of the detail as you need to for your particular essay. Often, it is sufficient to focus on the executive summary, headings, introduction and recommendations.

## Remember

- ✓ Begin your research by reading learner-friendly texts, such as textbooks.
- ✓ Before reading a textbook chapter in detail, survey it by looking first at the elements that have been designed to stand out: headings, italicized words, diagrams and so on.
- ✓ Where possible, read selectively from single-author academic books – survey the back cover, table of contents and the introduction to find the most useful sections.
- ✓ Use edited volumes to read about your subject from different perspectives.
- ✓ To read an empirical journal article, focus on the abstract, the introduction, tables and figures, and the discussion or conclusion. Read the other sections if necessary.
- ✓ To read a source-based journal article, focus on identifying the issue, the author's theoretical perspective, and the new understanding or interpretation put forward.
- ✓ Where possible, read selectively from reports – focus on the headings, executive summary, introduction, conclusion and recommendations. Read the other sections if necessary.