

# Scholarly Research for Dummies, part 2

(Reading this out of order? See [part 1. \(https://cogdebate.wordpress.com/2009/07/22/scholarly-research-for-dummies-part-1/\)](https://cogdebate.wordpress.com/2009/07/22/scholarly-research-for-dummies-part-1/))

Okay, so you found a few (or hopefully, a lot) studies that look promising. Now what? They're, like, 60 pages each. Nobody wants to read all the way through that much just to get a few good quotes. (Well, except for people like us, anyway.) On to Part 2 of the series: **Now What?**

## Finding the Core

Usually, when confronted with a large stack of digital paper, there are several places you should look first before embarking on a tour of the whole document. In roughly the order most people would/should look, they are:

1. The abstract and/or summary. Obviously, it's supposed to summarize what the rest of the paper is about. Reading the abstract usually won't get you very useful quotes, but it gives you an overview of the issue that's useful in building your arguments. Sometimes, however, the most succinct quotes *are* in the abstract, so keep an eye out.
2. The conclusion (or the closest section – like “results” – if it doesn't have a conclusion.) Naturally, this is almost always at the end of the paper, before the references. Since the conclusion usually wraps up and summarizes the findings of the paper, it's usually one of the best places to look for quotes if you don't have time to read the whole thing.
3. Scan through the table of contents (or, if it doesn't have one, scan through the paper glancing at each section.) If anything looks useful, read the section. You usually don't need to read it very thoroughly – skimming is fine, unless you're really bad at skimming. (Learning to read fast, incidentally, is a very useful skill for research. WikiHow has some good tips: <http://www.wikihow.com/Learn-Speed-Reading> (<http://www.wikihow.com/Learn-Speed-Reading>).

## Things to Look For

First, here's tip that seems obvious, but nearly everyone ignores to some degree: adapt to the terminology. Suppose you start by searching for "overpopulation bad", just to get an idea of what's out there. That's fine, but once you've found out what's out there, *don't keep searching for the same things*. Adapt to the way the experts talk. Examine the terminology of the articles you read to find to look for search terms that might be more productive (in the example cited above, researching Malthusian theories would be a good start.) Different people use different terms to describe the same things. Find out what terms the most credible sources use, and build your research around them.

Second, another obvious tip that many people ignore: take advantage of new lines of argumentation. Don't get so obsessed with trying to find a good quote proving the Mirininzky Hypothesis wrong that you fail to pursue more useful lines of argumentation that crop up along the way. If you need to, write down the new ideas somewhere and come back to them, but don't forget them.

Finally, be careful what you're looking for. Scholarly articles are often best for facts and details. If you want an impassioned rant about why Plan Y will destroy the planet, you're going to have a harder time finding it, simply because real scientists don't usually talk that way. Remember that scholarly research is by nature fact-oriented. It may require shifting your research attitude, but ultimately, in the round, relying on facts and figures is usually more powerful than relying on rhetoric.

Next up: **Extending Your Research.**

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## One Response to *Scholarly Research for Dummies, part 2*

Scholarly Research for Dummies, part 3 « COG 2009 says:

July 27, 2009 at 2:17 pm

[...] Scholarly Research for Dummies, part 3 (Reading this out of order? See Part 1 and Part 2.)

[...]

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