

RESEARCH



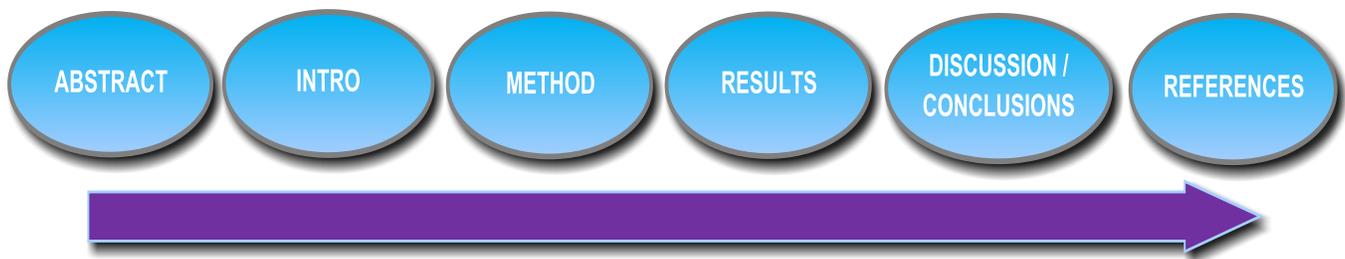
Reading & Assessing Research Reports

Tip Sheet

Patricia Lauer (2006) *An education research primer: How to understand, evaluate and use it.*

Research is based on the systematic gathering of empirical information (evidence). Understanding more about research can help policy makers and educators judge the accuracy of information from different studies and evaluate the research that researchers produce.

Reports that are primary sources on education research follow a common organization...



1. **Abstract or Executive Summary** gives a brief but comprehensive summary of the research report including:

- The research problem
- The research method
- Results
- Limitations
- Conclusions

Always read the abstract or executive summary of the report first because it is designed to orient the reader quickly to content. Use this section to determine if the research will be useful for your project.

2. **Introduction**

- Describes the problem, the background of the problem, related prior research on the topic, the purpose and the rationale for the study.
- It also gives a brief overview of the research method used, and usually concludes with specific research questions and sometimes with the research hypothesis.
- Reference is also made to prior research on the topic – sometimes refers to this description as a literature review.

3. **Method** provides information on how the study was conducted, hopefully with enough detail that the study could be replicated and typically includes the following sections:

- Research design or plan for gathering the data
- Characteristics of the participants and how the researcher selected the sample
- Procedure or implementation steps that were used
- Materials and data collection instruments used in the study

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4. **Results / Findings** describe the results or findings of the research study and the following sections although not always in this order:

- Data Analysis Plan
- Summary of Findings
- Qualitative and Quantitative Results

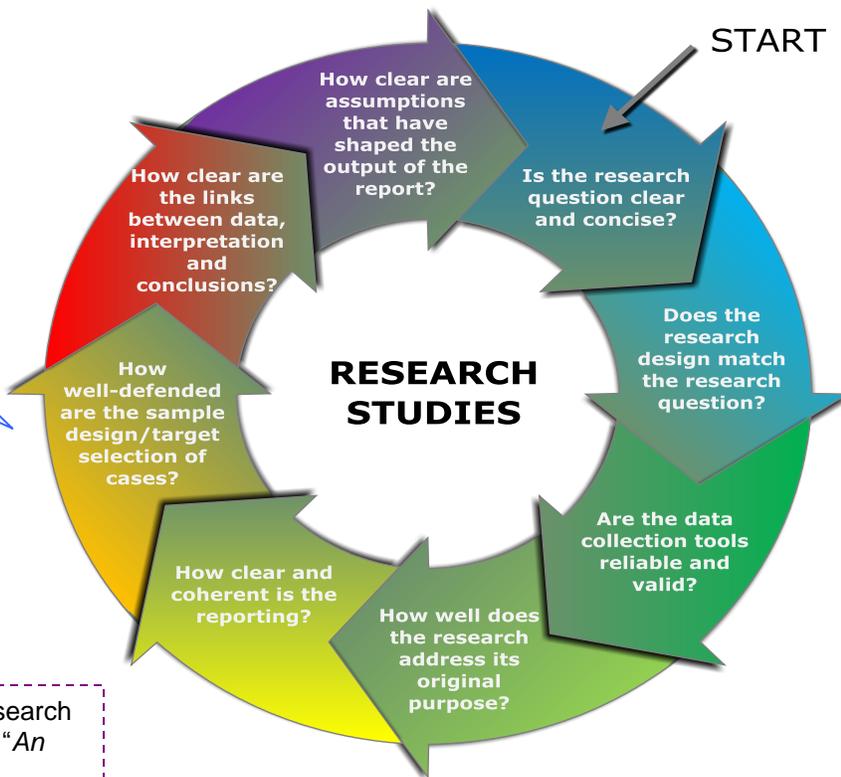
Conclusions often include the author's opinion and should therefore be carefully scrutinized.

5. **Discussion and Conclusions** summarize the results and relate them back to the research questions and hypotheses described in the introduction. In this section should be the rationale for why the results either do or do not support the initial hypotheses. This is also where the researcher should list and explain any limitations to the study including resources, confounds, and any other issue that may have hindered the research.

6. **References** list a bibliographic reference for every citation that occurs in the report. This is a good section for finding other resources related to the topic you are researching.

Check references to see how current they are to help determine if they are appropriate. Also, determine if information has come from sources with a special interest in the outcome as this may have an influence on the material.

This graph contains examples of other questions you should be considering when reading a research report...



For more help with reading research studies, consult: Lauer (2006) "An education research primer"