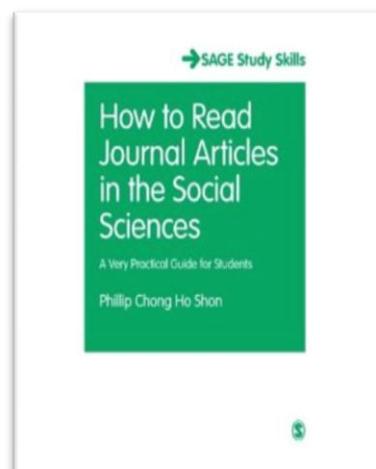

**REVIEW: HOW TO READ JOURNAL ARTICLES
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: A VERY PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR
STUDENTS**

Parima Kampookaew

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

Shon, P. C. (2013). *How to read journal articles in the social sciences: A very practical guide for students*. London: Sage Publication.



Wading through a sea of journal articles is an inevitable part of conducting research. No one can escape this arduous task as researchers cannot propose their own ideas without firstly conducting a thorough investigation of the literature. A literature review is difficult in itself, but it is particularly perplexing for novice researchers like undergraduate and graduate students working on their first thesis. Having recently entered the academic world, most lack the critical reading skills to deal with the sheer volume of journal articles being published. While struggling to understand different components of research articles, students might gain useful tips by reading this brief volume by Shon.

In fact, finding one's way through research may not be as difficult as it seems. What is needed are tools and direction from a more experienced researcher. *How to Read Journal Articles in the Social Sciences: A Very Practical Guide for Students* can provide both.

It is a suitable supplement for undergraduate and graduate students who are striving to develop their reading skills to thoroughly and critically understand the articles they read.

The book's primary goal is to equip student readers with the critical skills essential to analyze the prolific amount of information in the Social Sciences today. To help them achieve this, a tool is given at the beginning and clear directions on how to read critically through the use of techniques are elaborated throughout the book. The author believes that only through an effective reading tool and explicit guidance can critical reading be achieved. From the outset, the author succeeds in spelling out in detail what student readers should do while reading articles and readers can no doubt benefit from these detailed, step-by-step directions.

The reading tool presented initially is the Reading Code Sheet for Social Science Journal Articles, which appears on page 3. The Reading Code Sheet encompasses fourteen codes, which can be divided into two categories, critical reading codes and strategic reading codes. There are ten critical reading codes in all, each of which represents a component of a journal article such as SPL (Summary of Previous Literature) and ROF (Results of Findings). There are four strategic reading codes such as POC (Point of Critique) and MOP (Missed Obvious Point) which are useful for classifying different parts or gaps in research articles and clarifying structural organization while also providing student readers with tools to allow them to begin a critique of the article.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first and second chapters are dominated by the author's anecdotes that explain the origin of the reading code sheet. In the third chapter, the author examines certain myths about writing and argues that, for instance, writer's block is attributable to two factors: students' failure to read the literature sufficiently and to organize and systematize the information gathered.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, the author directs the student to read and analyze different sections of journal articles. Readers are provided with step-by-step instructions on how to use

the Reading Code Sheet to analyze an abstract, an introduction, the methodology, literature review, a result section, a discussion, and a conclusion in a critical manner. The seventh chapter provides strategies to use external reading tools i.e. a ruler, a pen, and a highlighter. It includes effective methods of organizing and managing information acquired from readings by inserting it into the Reading Code Organization Sheet.

In the eighth chapter, the author analyzes several examples of journal articles in the field of Humanities to demonstrate that the Reading Code Sheet proposed can be applied to read journal articles in other disciplines critically. He then ends the book with concluding remarks in the ninth chapter in which it is argued that reading and writing are tightly interwoven skills.

How to Read Journal Articles in the Social Sciences: A Very Practical Guide for Students is of value to readers in many ways. First, it is concise at only 104 pages which is a manageable length for student readers burdened with the task of wading through dozens of journal articles. If the book were much longer, it might be deemed less approachable by many students already taxed for quality reading time. Shon provides an alternative that provides comprehensive yet succinct instructions on how to read articles critically.

Second, the book successfully presents critical reading skills in a light which the reader can see as less abstract and theoretical than concrete and practical. The volume includes clear, concrete, and practical steps to acquire critical reading skills, for instance, the reader is instructed to analyze a group of sentences performing a particular function. Then a reading code representing the function is to be written next to these sentences in the margin of the paper. To make steps clearer, the author uses a number of examples as well as pictures to illustrate how reading codes can be employed. The effective use of illustrations makes the procedures clear to the audience.

Third, in addition to critical reading techniques, Shon also provides the reader with writing tips. In fact, the goals of this book are twofold. First, it aims to teach readers how to read journal articles

in a critical manner. Second, it intends to enable them to recognize the structural organization of articles, for example, a summary of past literature always precedes its critique, so that when they write their own articles, student researchers can keep these structures in mind and follow this organizational format.

In addition to these strengths, the book also has some weak points. First, most article samples used are drawn from the fields of sociology and criminology. Readers not familiar with these fields or their terminology might experience difficulty trying to understand the contexts. In fact, the sample articles are not entirely incomprehensible, but they may not be straightforward for readers who are not well versed in these fields. Moreover, as this book is designed to be a very practical guide for students, it might have been better if some exercises and suggested answers were included in the book.

Overall, *How to Read Journal Articles in the Social Sciences: A Very Practical Guide for Students* is a good book for any student reader looking for clear, concrete, and comprehensive instructions on how to read journal articles critically. Moreover, teachers looking for effective tools to enable students how to analyze different parts of technical articles to enhance their critical reading skill might also find this book extremely useful.

The Reviewer

Parima Kampookaew is an English instructor at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute. Her interests are in the areas of applied linguistics and teaching English as a foreign language, particularly in the fields of ESP and EAP.