

Research-Paper Reading Worksheet

Read one paper with one question in mind, then connect your notes to the passages, figures, and files you actually inspected. This worksheet brings the research-literacy guides into a single working record. It does not rate a paper automatically or supply a conclusion. Use it for non-clinical literature documentation, and preserve the difference between the authors' statements and your reading of their evidence. Every result and conclusion field starts blank.

Prepared October 12, 2026. AI-assisted organizational editorial content; not independently scientifically, medically, or legally reviewed.

Reading reference

Date read / recorder's actual role

Non-clinical question prompting this reading

Files and locations available to the reader

1. Identify the work and the version

Record the paper's full title, authors, publication venue, DOI if present, and the version you accessed. Keep publication dates with their displayed labels. Check the publisher's notice area and Crossmark where provided, recording the destination and date checked. Crossref describes Crossmark as a route to publisher-supplied status updates and expressly states that its presence is not a guarantee. No visible notice, or no Crossmark button, should become an assurance that a paper has no corrections.

- ☐ Compare title, authors, and DOI with the accessed publication record.
- ☐ Identify whether the file is a preprint, accepted manuscript, or publisher version.
- ☐ Check accessible publisher notices and Crossmark where available.
- ☐ Record an inaccessible destination or absent status feature as a limitation.

Full paper title

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Authors as displayed / publication venue

DOI or other identifier / publisher URL

Publication date and its label / version accessed

Notice or Crossmark destination / date checked

Status wording actually displayed / access limitation

2. Define the question and study setting

Write the authors' research question in your own words and cite the passage supporting that account. Then record the model or dataset, comparison groups, and outcome being investigated. Keep the study setting attached to every later finding. Identify whether the article reports original observations, synthesizes other papers, or presents a method or proposal. A familiar material name does not connect a published study to a purchased item or lot.

- ☐ Locate the stated aim or hypothesis rather than inferring it from the title.
- ☐ Record the model or dataset and the named comparisons.
- ☐ Identify the outcome that the paper actually examines.
- ☐ Separate this paper's evidence from any supplier or catalog claim.

Article type as identified / supporting location

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Authors' stated question / supporting location

Model or dataset / methods location

Comparison groups or conditions as named

Reported outcome and its definition / source location

Difference between this setting and the reader's question

3. Trace the design and reporting details

Locate the independent units, the reported repeats, and the units used in analysis. Record what the paper says about controls, allocation, blinding, exclusions, and sample-size rationale when relevant to its design. NIH's preclinical reporting principles provide the background for these prompts; their presence here does not establish that a paper follows them. Distinguish a reported procedure from an accessible result. If a detail cannot be found, name the sections checked and leave the question open.

- ☐ Identify what was counted as an independent unit and what each plotted observation represents.
- ☐ Record the reported repeats without treating repeated readings as additional independent samples.
- ☐ Locate each relevant control and the outcome reported for it.
- ☐ Record allocation, blinding, exclusions, and sample-size information only where described.

Independent unit / reported count / source location

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Repeat type and analysis unit / supporting location

Control name / purpose as described / outcome location

Allocation or randomization description / location

Blinding description / location

Exclusion criteria and changes in analyzed counts / location

Sample-size rationale / location

Reporting gaps and sections checked

4. Build a finding-to-evidence entry

Choose one finding relevant to your question and connect it to the exact figure, table, or results paragraph. Record its direction, reported estimate, uncertainty description, and statistical comparison where provided. Keep graph labels and caption definitions with the entry. PLOS One's publication criteria call for appropriately described analyses and conclusions supported by data; these are publisher criteria, not proof that any particular result is correct. Repeat the block for additional findings rather than combining unlike outcomes.

- ☐ Record the finding in bounded language with its figure, table, or paragraph location.
- ☐ Preserve the reported scale, uncertainty description, and comparison.
- ☐ Read the caption before interpreting symbols, error bars, or counts.
- ☐ Keep the observed finding separate from the authors' proposed explanation.

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Finding being recorded / exact source location

Outcome scale and direction as reported

Reported estimate and uncertainty description

Statistical comparison or test as reported / location

Caption definitions needed to read the finding

Authors' explanation / source location

Reader's interpretation and its stated limits

5. Record data access and disclosures

Follow the data availability statement and supporting-file references for the finding you selected. Distinguish a repository page, a downloaded file, and data you could actually inspect. Record access restrictions or unexplained columns without filling them in. PLOS's data policy describes underlying data, supporting files, and restricted-access cases in its own publishing context; it does not verify any paper's deposit. Record funding and competing-interest disclosures separately, without treating either their presence or absence as a verdict on the finding.

- ☐ Locate the data availability statement and any finding-specific supporting files.

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- ☐ Record the exact repository or attachment identifier and what was accessible.
- ☐ Identify whether accessible files contain observations, summaries, or explanatory material.
- ☐ Transcribe the funding and competing-interest disclosures with their locations.

Data availability statement / source location

Repository or attachment identifier and URL

Access date / file actually opened / accessible content

Relationship of that file to the selected finding

Access restriction or unexplained data field

Funding disclosure / location

Competing-interest disclosure / location

6. Write an evidence-bounded reading note

Describe what the inspected material supports in this study setting, then list what remains unresolved. Separate limitations the authors report from questions raised during your reading. Include an alternative explanation only when you can explain its basis; uncertainty is not evidence that the alternative is true. State which additional record could change your interpretation. A single paper does not establish a literature-wide conclusion, and this worksheet does not verify any supplier's material.

- ☐ Tie the reading note to the original question and inspected evidence.

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- ☐ Distinguish author-reported limitations from the reader's questions.
- ☐ Avoid filling access or reporting gaps with assumed findings.
- ☐ Record the next source or clarification needed and why it matters.

Finding supported within the documented setting

Authors' limitations / source locations

Reader's unresolved questions and their basis

Evidence not accessed or not located

Further source or clarification needed

Reading note in the recorder's own words

Recorded by / actual role / date

7. Professional-review limitation

This worksheet is a literature-reading record, not peer review, statistical validation, or professional scientific advice. If an institutional decision depends on study design, analysis, or interpretation, obtain review from an appropriately qualified research or statistical professional with access to the relevant evidence. A completed worksheet does not show that the experiment was reproduced, that a result generalizes beyond its setting, or that any commercial material has been evaluated.

- ☐ Keep the literature note and any professional assessment as separate records.
- ☐ Identify the actual scope and evidence of any additional review.
- ☐ Leave broader claims open when the inspected evidence cannot answer them.

Question requiring specialist review, if any

Reviewer / actual role / review scope

Assessment reference and date, if available

Source references

NIH: Principles and Guidelines for Reporting Preclinical Research

<https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/reproducibility/principles-guidelines-reporting-preclinical-research>

PLOS One: Criteria for Publication

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/criteria-for-publication>

PLOS One: Data Availability

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/data-availability>

Crossref: Crossmark

<https://www.crossref.org/services/crossmark/>

A completed checklist is not proof of identity, purity, sterility, safety, legal compliance, or project suitability. Keep missing information visible; obtain qualified review for consequential decisions.