Academic Reading & Note-Taking Toolkit

A practical printable workbook for reading scholarly sources, evaluating evidence, and organizing your notes.

01 Read with a purpose

Before opening an article, write your research question and decide what you need: background, a method, an argument, or evidence. Scan the abstract, headings, tables, and conclusion first. Then read the relevant sections closely.

A useful reading sequence

Step	What to do
Preview	Record the title, author, year, publication, and main topic.
Question	Write one question the source should help answer.
Read actively	Mark the central claim, method, findings, limitations, and unfamiliar terms.
Summarize	Close the source and explain the key point in your own words.
Verify	Reopen the source to check the accuracy of your summary and page numbers.

02 Source quality quick check

☐ Is the author or institution identifiable and relevant to the subject?

☐ Does the source provide evidence, methods, or references?

☐ Is the publication date appropriate for the topic?

☐ Are limitations or competing explanations acknowledged?

☐ Have I distinguished peer-reviewed research from commentary or promotional content?

Tip: Peer review is useful but not a guarantee of quality. Judge the evidence and methods, not just the journal name.

03 Article Notes Template

Complete one copy for each paper, chapter, report, or credible source.

Field	Your notes
Full reference	_____
Research question / purpose	_____
Main claim or finding	_____
Methods / sample	_____
Evidence worth using	_____
Limitations / caveats	_____
How it relates to my work	_____
Page numbers / DOI / URL	_____

04 The difference between summary and analysis

Summary: “The study reported a relationship between study time and test performance.”
Analysis: “The reported relationship is relevant, but the observational design does not establish that additional study time caused higher scores.”

These are invented teaching examples, not findings from a real study.

05 Ethical note-taking

☐ I used quotation marks for exact wording and recorded the page number.

☐ I paraphrased by reconstructing the idea, not merely swapping a few words.

☐ I recorded full source details before using an idea.

☐ I will cite the original source where appropriate and follow institutional rules.

06 Literature Comparison Matrix

Use this matrix to identify agreements, differences, and gaps across sources.

Source	Question / method	Key finding	Limitation / gap
Author A (year)	_____	_____	_____
Author B (year)	_____	_____	_____
Author C (year)	_____	_____	_____
Author D (year)	_____	_____	_____

07 Synthesis prompts

☐ Which findings are consistent across multiple studies?

☐ Where do authors disagree, and could their methods explain why?

☐ Which populations, settings, or variables are underrepresented?

☐ What question remains unanswered?

☐ What evidence would strengthen my own argument?

My three-sentence synthesis

Across these sources, the strongest shared finding is: _____

A meaningful difference or limitation is: _____

This suggests a question for further research: _____

Final review

☐ My notes clearly separate authors' findings from my own interpretation.

☐ I can locate every quoted or paraphrased claim in its source.

☐ I have a complete citation for each source.

Educational resource only. Follow your university's academic integrity and referencing requirements.