

How to Approach the Assignments – Get Them Done More Quickly & with Less Pain

The following section provides some guidance about how to complete the assignments for this course. I think you will be able to complete the assignments more quickly and perform better if you use this approach

Step 1: Know What I Want You To Answer

Each of your assignments has a detailed list of questions that you must answer. Read them and think about them **before** you read articles in detail. My motto is “Know what you need before you read.”

Step 2: Read for Overall Content First

Do not try to answer the questions in the assignment the first time you read the article. Do not spend time marking up the article and looking for details. Simply read it through to get the content of the article fixed in your mind. Focus on overall comprehension, not details.

Step 3: Use the “Cheat Sheets”

Read for detail the second time. I developed “cheat sheets” for reading and understanding research reports based very closely on those of Locke et al. They help you get at the key information in a logical order and quickly. I encourage you to use them. They are linked to the course home page. There is one for reading and understanding research reviews, too.

Step 4: Develop Answers for Factual Questions

Your assignments include two kinds of questions. The first are simple factual questions. For example, I will ask you how the study participants were selected, how many subjects were included in the study and such. Usually you will put this information into a flow chart. Answer these questions and complete the flow chart before moving on to the discussion or analytic questions. You should be able to find the information you need to answer them quickly once you have read the article and especially if you used one of the cheat sheets as you read the article.

Step 5: Develop Answers for Analytic or Discussion Questions

Other questions ask you to **apply** the concepts that we learn about in class. Most of the grading rubric focuses on your responses to these analytic or discussion questions. Answer these questions last. For example, I will ask you to explain the implications of sample selection approach for internal and external validity. Explain your conclusions thoroughly. I want to understand your logic and see that you can apply concepts. Questions of this type require that you integrate what you have learned in class. While you may need to re-read certain portions of an article to answer these questions, the answers are not in the article. They are in your head. You will usually be better off spending your time consulting your text, other readings, and class notes than searching for details or explanations in the article itself. Remember that part of your grade for each assignment includes using additional published literature about research design to answer these questions. If, for example, the article used a purposive sampling technique, you may have questions about the statistical generalization of the results, one aspect of external validity. You will need to think about the pros and cons of purposive samples in general, how the specific sample for this study was taken, and whether the sampling technique used does raise questions in your mind about the statistical generalization of the results. You will probably want to consult literature about purposive sampling before you answer this question.