

Journal Club: Student Leader Guide

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Assignment

As the leader of journal club, it is your responsibility to lead your peers in a discussion of the journal club article. To do this effectively, you will need to: become familiar with the details of the article, prepare a brief synopsis of what was done and what was found in the article, and prepare potential discussion questions. The faculty member facilitating your journal club will be prepared to help with leading the discussion, and your classmates are also expected to be prepared for the discussion, but as the student leader, it is your responsibility to keep the conversation going. The information below provides an outline to use for the structure of your discussion, recommendations to help you prepare, and a table of questions to ask yourself as you analyze the journal article. Some of these analysis questions might also be good discussion questions.

Example Journal Club Session Outline for Research Articles

1. Summarize the topic of the article.
2. Explain why this topic is important.
3. Describe what the authors were looking to do with this study.
4. Summarize the methods used in this study.
5. Summarize the primary findings of the study.
6. Discuss strengths and weaknesses for the study design.
7. Discuss which conclusions are most supported by the presented information.
8. Discuss questions recommended for group discussion of and reflection on the topic (presented by facilitator; see DIT Journal Club Article Recommendations)

Recommendations for Preparation

- 1. Keep the overview of the topic and summary of the article very brief.** This should take less than 5 minutes and should focus on what was done, what was found, and why this information is relevant.
- 2. Identify the strengths of the article.** It is easy for these discussions to get caught-up focusing exclusively on the weaknesses and limitations of the study. Every study has limitations and weaknesses, however that does not undermine the ability of a research article to make a useful contribution based on its strengths.
- 3. Draw your own conclusions by looking at the tables and figures presented in the results section.** The conclusions presented by the authors should not be treated as facts, but rather as augments. It is important for you and your classmates to decide whether the data (in the context of the study's methods) supports the authors' arguments.
- 4. Ask yourself if anything is missing that you expected to see.** Review the study's hypothesis/research question and think through how you would design a study and

analyze the data to test it. Then as you read the article, try to predict what information is coming next. Doing these two things will highlight any information that the authors left out that you might want/need, and it will give you opportunities to think through the potential reasons behind any difference between what you would have done and what the researchers did.

- 5. Review any supplemental materials.** Supplemental materials published with the article can provide answers to key methodological and data analysis questions. Usually these materials are available through the journal's online portal.
- 6. Reflect on the conclusions drawn by the authors.** It is often helpful to think through not only how the conclusions drawn by the authors are supported by the evidence, but also how they related to other articles you have read and even your own experiences. Reflecting on what you have learned from an article is another aspect of assessing a research article.
- 7. Consider the impact of this information on clinical practice.** How would the information in the article impact current clinical practice standards/recommendations? Think through how the information presented in the article would impact your future practice. Discuss how you would apply everything you have read and the conclusions of the journal club discussion in your future work as a health care professional.

Research Articles

Introduction

- What is the issue this study set out to investigate?
- Why is this issue important?
- What makes this study unique/novel?
- What is the hypothesis/research question this study set out to test/investigate?

Methods

- Generally, in 1-2 sentences, what did the authors do in this study?
- Do the methods allow for the authors to adequately test their hypothesis/answer their research question?
- What limitations exist based on the choices the authors made with respect to their methods for this study?
 - ◊ Who were the participants? How were they recruited?
 - ◊ How did the authors choose to define/measure their variables?
 - ◊ Are there any choices the authors made in how they conducted their study that could alter its outcome?

Results

- Do the types of analyses conducted make sense given the study's hypothesis/research question?
- What does the data tell you the study found?

Discussion

- Does the authors' summary of what was found in the study match your interpretation of what was found based on the data and methods?
- Do the authors adequately address any concerns you have with the design or findings of this study?
- Do you agree with the authors' conclusions about the implications of their work?
- What do the findings of this study mean for you as someone who will eventually be a health care provider?

Commentaries

- What is the primary point the author is trying to make?
 - Does the author provide compelling evidence to support the point being made?
 - Does the author accurately present the issue?
 - What assumptions are being made by the author?
 - What biases do the author seem to have?
 - Are there any parts of the author's conclusions or analysis with which you disagree?
 - Do you feel like this commentary will have any impact on the way you practice?
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