

12 Steps to Understanding Research Reports

Steps	Questions
Step 1 - Citation	What is the name of the study, who is (are) the author(s), and where and when was it published. Report the complete reference citation using APA format.
Step 2 – Purpose & General Rationale	What was the purpose of the study and how did the author(s) make a case for its importance? Is the study quantitative or qualitative in nature?
Step 3 – Fit & Specific Rationale	How does the topic of the study fit into the existing research literature and how is that information used to make a specific case for the investigation?
Step 4 – Participants	Describe who was studied (give number and characteristics) and how they were selected to participate in the study.
Step 5 – Context	Where did the study take place? Describe important characteristics of the environment and setting (e.g., group, demographics).
Step 6 – Steps in Sequence	In the order performed, what were the major procedural steps in the study? Describe or diagram in a flow chart. Show a sequential order and any important relationships among the steps.
Step 7 – Data	<p>If a quantitative study, what data sources were used (e.g., test scores, questionnaire responses, frequency counts), how were the data collected, and what was the role of the author(s) throughout the process?</p> <p>If a qualitative study, what data sources were used (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts, photographs, diaries), how were the data collected, and what was the role of the author(s) throughout the process?</p>
Step 8 – Analysis	What form(s) of data analysis was used and what specific questions was it designed to answer? What, if any, statistical operations and computer programs were employed?
Step 9 – Results	What did the author(s) identify as the primary results (products or findings produced by the analysis of data)? In general, 'what was going on there'?
Step 10 – Conclusions	What did the author(s) assert about how the results in Step 9 responded to the purpose(s) established in Step 2 and how did the events and experiences of the entire study contribute to that conclusion?
Step 11 – Cautions	What cautions does the author(s) raise about the study itself or about interpreting the results? Add here any of your own reservations, particularly those related to methods used to enhance validity and credibility (quantitative) or trustworthiness and believability (qualitative).
Step 12 – Discussion and Application	What interesting facts or ideas did you learn from reading the report? Include here anything that was of value in regard to: results, research designs and methods, references, data collection instruments, history, useful arguments, or personal inspiration. How can the information learned be applied to improve professional practice? Or, what were the implications of this study for a practitioner?
Adapted from Locke, L., Silverman, S., and Spirduso. (2004). Reading and Understanding Research. Thousand Oaks: Sage.	