# **Searching and Reading the Psychological Literature**

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## **Overview {-}**

Welcome to Unit 2 of Research Methods! In this unit, we will be learning the steps of locating research literature, as well as how to read or critique a journal article. It is important to know how to evaluate a research article, understand why research is important, and be able compare and contrast the current research with similar research studies. As we go through Unit 2, we will also briefly review on what we learned in Unit 1 (Ch. 1 and 2 of the textbook), and how that connects to the overall picture of research. We want to continually build on the foundation of research methods!

### **Topics {-}**

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. Importance of Research Literature
2. Locating the Research Literature
3. Evaluating a Research Article

### **Learning Outcomes {-}**

When you have completed this unit, you should be able to:

* Describe the steps to locating and critiquing research literature, specifically journal articles
* Differentiate between the various types of research studies, like qualitative versus quantitative
* Critique the data that research journals and books provide
* Determine whether the data or research answers the research question(s) or hypothesis(es) stated by the researchers

### **Activity Checklist {-}**

Here is a checklist of learning activities that will help you deepen your understanding of the unit concepts. Activities are meant to be formative (unless otherwise specified), as in an ungraded opportunity for you to develop your thinking; however, many of these are designed to also help you with your summative assessments.

**Learning Activities**

**Activity 2.1: Read and Reflect**

* **Read Chapter 3 of the textbook**

**Activity 2.2: Example of Research in Psychology (optional)**

* **Watch Brené Brown's TED talk on vulnerability**

**Activity 2.3: Research Approaches**

* **Read pages 71-81 of Chapter 3 of the textbook and take notes**

**Activity 2.4: Finding Articles**

* **Watch a video and try different methods to search for articles in the TWU Library**

**Activity 2.5: How to Evaluate an Article**

* **Read p. 83-85 of Chapter 3 and take notes**

**Activity 2.6: APA 7 Guidelines**

* **Review APA 7 resources**

**Assessment**

* Assignment 4: Submit your research topic idea
* Assignment 2: Evaluate one Journal Article

### **Resources {-}**

* Dunn, Dana S. (2013). The Practical Researcher: A Student Guide to Conducting Psychological Research. 3rd ed., John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
* [APA Formatting and Style Guide](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html)
* [TWU Library](https://www.twu.ca/library)

## **The Importance of Journal Articles**

**We begin by learning why journal articles are emphasized and why they are an important resource. As we learned in Unit 1, research helps us to stay up to date and informs our professional (and personal) practice so that when we “know better, we do better.” So why are journal articles emphasized? What makes them so important? For example, School Psychologists (and other helping professionals) use a variety of tools in their practice, including journal articles and the latest research. The tools or instruments that school psychologist use today (cognitive assessment, behavior scales, etc.) are subjected to a rigid evaluation procedures and review in order to ensure that the instrument is not only valid, but a reliable means of measure. In short, such instruments or tools we use in the field are the result of long-term research and evaluation.**

**In the beginning of Chapter 3, you will learn several reasons as to why journal articles are emphasized. One reason is that journal articles address a specific question. In other words, there is a hypothesis that needs to be verified or supported. Journal articles are subject to peer review and only the top-ranked journals “make the cut” in being published – which is a big deal. This is basically an editing process to decide if a journal article is acceptable and can be published or not.**

Learning Activities

*Activities are meant to be formative (unless otherwise specified), as in an ungraded opportunity for you to develop your thinking; however, many of these are designed to also help you with your summative assessment so completing them is essential.*

### **Activity: Read and Reflect {-}**

Read pages 70-71 in Chapter 3: Searching and Reading the Psychological Literature in *The Practical Researcher: A Student Guide to Conducting Psychological Research.*

**Questions to Consider**

* What are some of the reasons journal articles are important?
* What is a difference between a book authored by a researcher and an article published by a journal?

### **Activity: Example of Research in Psychology (optional) {-}**

Brené Brown is a research psychologist and professor. In the field of psychology and in popular culture, she is known for her work on vulnerability, which is qualitative research.

Watch her TED talk on vulnerability.

<https://embed.ted.com/talks/lang/en/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability>

<div *style*="max-width:854px"><div *style*="position:relative;height:0;padding-bottom:56.25%"><iframe *src*="https://embed.ted.com/talks/lang/en/brene\_brown\_the\_power\_of\_vulnerability" *width*="427" *height*="240" *style*="position:absolute;left:0;top:0;width:100%;height:100%" *frameborder*="0" *scrolling*="no" *allowfullscreen*></iframe></div>

## **Locating the Research Literature**

Locating the research literature is the first step you will need to be able to take in order to conduct your own research or inform your practice. The steps to locating research literature may seem daunting at first, but once you get started you will find yourself going down the many rabbit trails of research!

There are multiple places to start, even simply Googling your research topic with the term “academic” or “scholar” can get results, but good results come from narrowing the online offerings and understanding how you are approaching the search.

If you are new to a field of study, you will find the "bottom-up" research strategy quite helpful. Starting with a few key words or "index" terms can produce a list of articles that you can start to comb through to decide if they fit with your research topic or question.

### **Activity: Research Approaches {-}**

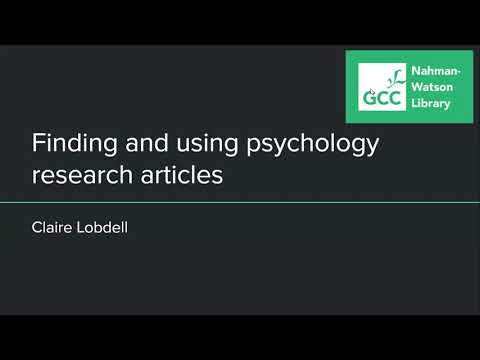
Read pages 71-81 of Chapter 3 and take notes on different approaches to research, specifically the top-down versus bottom-up approaches.

Determine which method will work best for you as prepare for Assignment 2.

### **Activity: Finding Articles {-}**

Begin by watching this video on Finding and using psychology research articles.

<https://youtu.be/BRYPuQpBw6I>

[](https://youtu.be/BRYPuQpBw6I)

Now it's your turn. Take the research question or topic that you have settled on from Unit 1 and develop a few key words to search with.

Provided below are two options to find articles. Please give both a try to figure out what works best for you. This will help you with Assignment 2.

Option 1:

1. Visit the TWU Library at: https://www.twu.ca/library
2. In the main search bar, click on the link "Advanced Search"
3. On this page, you will notice multiple boxes and dropdown options to help you search. Enter a key word or index term into one of the boxes. Then scroll down a little and be sure to click the box “Scholarly (Peer-Reviewed)” before hitting the "Search" button.

Option 2:

1. Visit the TWU Library Research Guide for Psychology: https://libguides.twu.ca/PsychologyCounselling. Research Guides are super helpful because they are curated by the librarians. It's like getting a head start in narrowing the field! Also notice the various ways that you can ask for help, including the librarian's email. The TWU librarians are always happy to respond to emails asking for research help. Don't be afraid to ask them!
2. Click on the "Jornals/Articles" tab
3. Select a database to start your search in (e.g. PsychInfo)
4. Enter a key word or index term into the box. Then scroll down a little and be sure to select "Peer-Reviewed Journal" in the Publication Type box. Now click the "Search" button.

Keep in mind alternate key words to enter in when searching for articles. It may also be helpful to keep an eye on the references page of a research article. This could lead you to additional research articles of interest.

## **Evaluating a Research Article**

It is important to know how to evaluate research articles, understand why research is important, and be able compare and contrasts the current research with similar research studies. Consider what happens if you replicate a research study, but with some minor tweaks. Would you expect the results to be the same or different? Or what would a research study on the same topic look like with different methods and how will the findings be different, and maybe even similar? An important aspect of learning more about research is to review or evaluate journal articles in order to be able to determine its significance to society.

“Evaluation is the systematic process to determine merit, worth, value, or significance.” (American Evaluation Association, 2014)

In Chapter 3, we will go through the steps of evaluating research and using our critical thinking skills. Questions we may asked during this critical thinking and evaluating stage is:

* What is the hypothesis or question at stake?
* What procedures were use?
* What conclusions does the author draw from the data and does it make sense?
* How does this research contribute to its field?

### **Activity: How to Evaluate an Article {-}**

Read pages 83-85 of Chapter 3. Pay special attention the questions here as they will help you complete Assignment 2, which is to evaluate two journal articles.

### **Activity: APA 7 Guidelines {-}**

For all assignments in this course, you are expected to follow the APA 7 Guidelines. Please check out the following resources below to help you with APA formatting:

* Chapter 4 of The Practical Researcher: A Student Guide to Conducting Psychological Research
* [APA Formatting and Style Guide](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html)

## **Unit Summary {-}**

In this second unit, we learned about the importance of research journals and how to locate and review the research literature. Hopefully you will feel more confident in your own personal research journey. Research is a very broad field with endless possibilities! Sometimes research can seem overwhelming and that is a very normal part of the process. However, the good news is that research can also be narrowed down and an area of interest can be focused in on. It is our hope that you will not only enjoy this learning experience and cultivate curiosity, but also have the opportunity to pursue a research area that is most meaningful to you.

## **Assessment {-}**

**Assignment 2: Evaluate One Journal Article**

An important side of learning about research is to participate in article reviews or evaluations to learn how to read articles. It is important to know how to evaluate research articles, understand why research is important, and be able compare and contrast the current research with similar research studies.

You will be asked to evaluate (1) journal article of your choice. The purpose of this assignment is to read an article and complete the questions below that evaluate the article. This assignment will also aid you in preparation for your research proposal.

**Instructions:**

1. Find 1 research article related to the helping profession or area of your interest in psychology (to find articles, see Activity 2.4)
2. Use the provided questions to evaluate each of your articles separately (notice the questions are very similar to questions on p.85 - “Evaluating Research a Research Article”).
3. Submit to the dropbox 1 document (one evaluation per article)

**Questions:**

1. What study report is this? Please record a complete reference citation of this journal article using APA format.
2. What is the central question addressed by the article? What is the study’s hypothesis?
3. Briefly outline the most important procedures the author used to test the hypothesis (2-3 sentences minimum).
4. Summarize the major findings of the study (2-3 sentences minimum).
5. What major conclusions does the author draw from these findings? (2-3 sentences minimum).

Please see the Assessment tab for more details and the grading criteria.

## **Checking your Learning {-}**

Before you move on to the next unit, you may want to check to make sure that you are able to:

* Describe the steps to locating and critiquing research literature, specifically journal articles
* Differentiate between the various types of research studies, like qualitative versus quantitative
* Critique the data that research journals and books provide
* Determine whether the data or research answers the research question or hypothesis stated by the researchers