

Getting the most out of your readings

One cannot expect to read a semester's worth of reading and retain all of the information. Instead, you should strive to be able to recall certain main "big picture" questions about each reading. The answers to these questions should be easily located in well written articles. For your ease, I have identified the most likely location to find answers to 'big picture' questions in an article by putting that location in parentheses. If you can answer these "big picture" questions about the assigned readings, you have what you need to be successful on the exams.

"Big picture" questions include:

1. What is the main purpose of this article? What is the author(s) interested in? What is the research question(s) being investigated? (Intro/lit review)
2. Why is the issue of interest important to consider? How does any information gleaned from this work help us? How does it inform us? This is a "who cares?" (intro/lit review and your brain)
3. What is the main theoretical perspective used? Not every article discusses a theory. If the research is guided by theory, that theory should be discussed in a theory section. In general, the bulk of victimology research is atheoretical. (theory)
4. What data are used in this research article? How were data gathered? What time period does the data cover? What is the sample size? What are advantages and disadvantages of the data for the problem examined? (methods and your brain)
5. What are the variables the article is examining? What is the dependent variable? What are the independent variables? How are these measured? Is that measurement reasonable? Not every article has specific dependent and independent variables. Many pieces are descriptive – those generally do not identify such variables. (methods and your brain)
6. What are the findings of this research? Do the findings support the authors hypotheses (if any hypotheses were presented)? If you had to summarize the outcome of this work in a few sentences to a friend, what would you say? What are the three most important things this article offers you? (conclusions and your brain)
7. What surprised you most about these findings? Generally all research offers some surprising outcome. What surprise you? (your brain)
8. What other research does this article suggest needs to be done? The authors may state this explicitly or the article may prompt you to ask certain questions that would be interesting to know (conclusions and your brain)