

How Do You Read a Journal Article?

John Kennedy

Editor-in-Chief

One of my responsibilities as editor in chief is to read all the articles before publication. One reason that I read them is to help improve the readability of the articles. I have read just about every word in every article AJPOR has published. Yet, when I read articles in academic journals such as *Public Opinion Quarterly* or the journals of the American Sociological Association, I rarely read them so carefully.

How do you read journal articles? In general, I read the abstract, some of the introduction, skim the lit review, look more carefully at the methods, read through the data analysis, and pay most attention to the discussion and conclusion. The discussion and conclusion usually provide the most interesting information to me. If an article is important to my research or teaching, I read it more carefully. Yet, I often wondered if my journal reading practice causes me to miss something important and if I am giving the authors appropriate attention based on the author's efforts.

When I started another journal, *Survey Practice*, I wanted shorter articles that would be brief and easy to read. Shorter articles reduced the effort required of researchers to have their articles published yet provided the important information. In addition, the readers would be able to read the entire article quickly thereby allowing them to read what the author wrote.

Academic journals such as *AJPOR* provide an opportunity for researchers to demonstrate their scholarship and their research and analysis skills. Often that cannot be done with short articles. Herein lies the dilemma – should journal articles be short and focused, which makes them easier to read, or longer and more developed but not necessarily read carefully?

What do you think? I'm certain that all of you have written articles that were not read carefully and read articles less than carefully. I welcome your thoughts – kennedyj@indiana.edu.

Biographical Note

John Kennedy directed the Indiana University Center for Survey Research for 24 years. He also directed the University of Hartford Institute of Social Research for two years and was employed at the US Census Bureau for four years. He earned a PhD in sociology from the Pennsylvania State University. He has been involved in the development of a number of professional journals and was the founding editor of *Survey Practice*, an e-journal published by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He has also been actively involved in professional research ethics including chairing Indiana University Social Behavioral IRB for 12 years and he served on two committees that revised the American Sociological Associations Code of Ethics. He teaches a graduate course in Survey Design.

He can be reached at Smith Research Center 123, 2805 E 10th St, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47408, USA or by e-mail at kennedyj@indiana.edu.