Reading Search Results from a Library Database

Once you’ve done a search in a library database, you need to scan your results page and ask some critical thinking questions to decide which ones are a good fit for your assignment.

Is the article relevant?

Just because an article matches your search terms doesn’t mean it will provide the information you need for your assignment. The two things to look at to determine relevance to your topic are the title of the article and the abstract. In most library databases, when you click on an article’s title, you can get more information about it, including an abstract. An abstract is a summary of what the article is about.

Is the article the right length?

Some articles in library databases are half a page long. Others are forty pages long. It’s a good idea to look at how many pages the article is to ensure it’s not too short or too long for your current assignment.

Can I read and understand the article?

Many library databases contain a mix of newspaper articles, magazine articles, and scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. Scholarly articles are written for an expert audience...
and can be extremely technical. If an article is full of jargon and technical terms you can’t understand, it’s not a good fit for your assignment. Usually the title will be a good clue about how technical the article will be, but you might also want to check the abstract. Below is an example of a more technical, scholarly article.

Is the article current enough?

For some topics, it isn’t really important when the article was written, but for others topics like medical issues or current affairs, you’ll want something that was published relatively recently. Look for the publication date of the article.

Is this article potentially interesting to me?

You’re going to have to spend a lot of time working with the articles you select, so it’s worth spending time to find something you might really want to read. The abstract usually provides good clues about whether an article is interesting and readable.

If you’re not finding good articles on your topic as you scan the results page or if you’re not sure whether or not a source is a good fit for your assignment, contact a librarian.

Get help from PCC Librarians

Call, Chat, Text, or Email a Librarian

- Cascade: 971-722-5269
- Rock Creek: 971-722-7239
- Southeast: 971-722-6289
- Sylvania: 971-722-4500

- Y!, AIM, Gtalk: pcclib
- Text Message: 971-259-TEXT (8398)
- Email: refer@pcc.edu