

## PGR Tips on reading research papers

A major amount of your time during your doctorate will be spent reading papers containing findings from other researchers. Reading these critically is an important skill you will be developing. The following tips are arranged according to the different reasons for reading papers.

### Get to know the field

It is crucial to know what is current and what has already been done, to understand where your research fits in and what it will add to the field. There may be seemingly conflicting strands of opinion or evidence, which your research could reconcile or provide more evidence for. Don't leave this aspect of reading until you are writing the introduction of your thesis, although you will need to return to this type of reading then.

### Get to know the people

Apart from the substance, it is also useful to get a feeling for the people who play a role in your field and where their research fits in. You can contact authors of papers for more information or to start a conversation. This is a useful way to build up a network and one of these people may well become your external examiner.

### Find out about methods and techniques

When you are designing your research it is very useful to read how other people have designed theirs. The materials and methods sections of papers should provide enough detail and information for other researchers to replicate the described experiments.

### Find out related papers

Each paper, especially reviews, contains references that lead to more material to read. Online citation management tools like [PubMed](#), [citeulike](#) and [Bookends](#) (for Mac users) will also tell you which publications have cited the paper in question. Be aware that there is an unlimited amount of material out there. Focus your reading on a particular task every time.

### Check out different fields for parallels to your own research

One way to add value to your field of research is by transposing methods or ways of thinking that are used elsewhere to your own and in making connections between fields. Talking to other researchers is one way of doing this, reading widely another.

### Keep track of what you've read and why

As you will be reading a lot during your doctorate it is important to keep notes. You may well return to papers for some of the different reasons listed here. Online citation management tools or Refworks or EndNote will help you organise your references and keep track.

### Getting an idea of how to write a paper

You can also read research papers to see how they were written: what language is used, how the information is organised and presented. If you are planning to write for a particular journal, it is worth reading papers related to your research in that journal, in addition to following the journal's guidelines for authors.