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Some Things To Think About While Reading Papers

Does the introduction and literature review:

- State clearly what the question or problem is and why it is important?
- Use the author's ideas as the guide, drawing in other theories and research as they are applicable? Or does the review summarize theories or studies one at a time, without a guided argument?
- Say how past research and/or theorizing bears on the central question or problem?
- Say what is wrong with or missing in past work that the present paper is addressing? What gaps are being filled? Where does this work fit in the larger scheme of theory and research on this issue?
- Lead up to predictions that, by the end of the review, seem evident?

Does the methods section:

- Include a discussion of the data collection, the sample characteristics, the measures, and the analysis?
- Include a statement about the reliability and validity of the measures?
- Say how the measures are related to the concepts in the literature review?

Does the findings section:

- Include tables or figures that are clearly interpretable without the text?
- Present a translation of findings into real people doing real things?
- Address how the results of each analysis bear on the particular prediction being tested? Do the findings support the prediction or support it partially, and in what ways?
- Suggest possible reasons when the data do not support a particular prediction? Is there some limitation of the particular measure or sample that could produce contrary findings?

Does the discussion/conclusion:

- Summarize the argument and the findings?
- Indicate the ways that the findings support the author's overall perspective?
- Discuss the ways that the results contradict the author's general perspective (as opposed to the negative evidence for particular predictions discussed in the findings section), and the possible reasons for the inconsistencies?

- Discuss the limitations of the research, the reasons that the work is believable anyway, and the questions that remain for future work?
- Address alternative interpretations or explanations? Does the author present convincing counter-arguments to the alternatives, based in theory or research? Or, at the very least, does the author acknowledge the existence of competing explanations and add their investigation to the call for further research?
- Point out the implications of the present research for the original question/problem?

In general, does the paper:

- Present a plausible and convincing argument? Would it convince someone who was skeptical in the beginning?
- Present an organized argument in which all the steps are clear?
- Define the central concepts?
- Take an active rather than passive voice?
- Use present tense rather than past, if possible?
- Have as few extraneous words as possible?
- Have clear, straightforward sentences?