

# Journal Club

85 minutes, weekly or as scheduled

In a small group (at least three members), students take turns to play a different role at each meeting of the club: Chair, Presenter, and Discussant. A facilitator observes the structured discussion and, only at the end, offers brief comments.

Give careful thought to the journal papers and other articles that you choose for journal clubs. How to run a journal club is a useful exercise in itself, but in addition the form and/or content should also be useful for the students.

Watch this video to prepare for the session:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.pub/cartacurricula/?p=2201#oembed-1>

Download the [curriculum](#) for this session.

## Outcomes

After a series of journal-club meetings, students can:

- Participate in and organise a journal club.
- Critically read and discuss a paper.
- Present a ten-minute overview of a journal article.
- Offer peer review and discussion.

## Selecting articles

Give careful thought to the articles you choose for the journal club. An article is unlikely to meet every criterion but look for those that meet at least one of the following objectives. The article:

- Demonstrates very good writing.
- Illustrates how to write up quantitative research well.
- Illustrates how to write up qualitative research well.
- Is an example of a good mixed-methods paper.

really bad and made errors that can be discussed (such as methodological errors or unethical practices).

- Demonstrates a useful approach in action – for instance a good case-control study, a good implementation-science study, or how a project dealt with gender issues

For CARTA, criteria included that the piece:

- Illustrates that excellent research can and does come from African researchers in Africa.
- Demonstrates an issue that is relevant to African research leadership.

As in the video, you might choose pieces that are not journal articles – op-ed columns, for example, or newspaper features that focus on research findings or needs related to your students' area of study.

## Preparation

### Facilitators

Identify and distribute articles for discussion, to include accessible pieces such as blogs and magazine articles as well as academic papers.

Allocate roles (Chair, Presenter, and Discussant) for each meeting, ensuring that each participant has a turn to play each role in subsequent journal club meetings.

### Presenter

Reads the article thoroughly.

Seeks help for anything they do not understand.

Outlines what the article says, noting:

What is the background to the topic of the paper? Why does the topic matter?

Who are the authors and where do they come from?

How was the study funded?

What was the research question or objective of the study?

What methods were used?

What in summary were the key results?

What did the author/s conclude?

*Discussant*

Reads the article thoroughly.

Seeks help for anything they do not understand.

Outlines their critique of the article, noting:

How might the funding and/or authorship affect the study conclusions?

Were the methods appropriate?

Are the author's conclusions justified by the results presented?

What are the implications of the study results and conclusions?

*All participating students*

Read the article/s, noting:

Are the objectives of the study clear?

Are the methods clearly described?

Does the results section give you all the information you need to understand the data?

Do you agree with the conclusions the authors draw from the data?

**Assessment**

The facilitator grades participants from 1 to 10, according to this rubric.

**Steps**

8-10 Excellent	Chair: Ensured optimal room layout, began and ended session on time, ensured that speakers kept to time, actively solicited participation from all group members, summarised discussion thoroughly. Presenter: Contextualized the paper well, discussed authors of paper, gave cogent summary of methods, highlighted important results, summarised conclusions comprehensively. Discussant: Provided a thorough critique of the methods, explored whether conclusions were justified, thoroughly discussed implications of results and conclusions, explored potential conflicts of interest, identified 2-4 points for group to discuss.
4-7 Average	Chair: Arranged reasonable room layout but could be improved, kept time in most instances, made some attempt to stimulate discussion, summarised one or two of the main points. Presenter: Provided some background for the paper, but omitted important elements, gave cogent summary of methods but omitted important aspects, reported results without highlighting key information for wider group, summarised only some conclusions. Discussant: Provided a reasonable critique of the methods used, gave somewhat superficial account of implications of results and conclusions, identified only one point for group discussion.
1-3 Below Standard	Chair: Made no attempt to reorganize the room despite non-conducive layout, started and ended session late, made no attempt made to restrict Presenters to allotted time nor to stimulate discussion, deferred to facilitator, failed to summarise discussion. Presenter: Did not contextualise the paper, read methods as written rather than summarising, read results verbatim, failed to report author conclusions, summarised only some conclusions. Discussant: Did not critique methods, failed to discuss wider implications of results and conclusions, failed to identify points for group discussion.

The Chair, Presenter, and Discussant arrive early to arrange the room for a group discussion.

The Chair opens the session, keeps time, ensures participation by everyone, facilitates discussion by posing questions or summarising points, closes the session and thanks the Presenter, Discussant, participants, and facilitator.

The Presenter has ten minutes, without PowerPoint slides, to outline what the article says.

The Discussant has ten minutes, without PowerPoint slides, to critique the article, stimulating discussion by highlighting concerns and uncertainties about the article

After 45 minutes of discussion, the facilitator can intervene, if necessary, to comment on:

If the discussion is in fact focused on the merits/ content/ interpretation of the article.

If key points are being missed.

At the end of the session, the facilitator has five minutes for brief feedback, as constructive as possible, noting potential for improvement and possibly drawing on this checklist:

Room layout allowed eye contact for everyone.

Journal club started and finished on time.

Presenter kept to time.

Presenter gave a clear and accurate description of the paper.

Presenter provided appropriate background information.

Discussant kept to time.

Discussant drew out points of concern and/or uncertainty that stimulated discussion.

Discussant understood what points to critique.

Everyone in the room contributed to the discussion.

Chair was able to stimulate discussion (if necessary).