

READING SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH RESEARCH ARTICLES: A GUIDE FOR CLINICAL CHAPLAINS

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- 1) How old is the research? (—This may or may not be indicated by the publication date.)
- 2) Where does it come from? (—Look at the authors' affiliations.)
- 3) Read the Abstract (—Does it sound like it's worth your while to read further?)
- 4) Read the Introductory section carefully, looking especially for:
 - what's motivating the authors (Where is their enthusiasm?) and the *ideas/thinking* behind their work
 - basic concepts involved in the study (e.g., Is there a definition of spirituality?)
 - a review of what is already known about the subject
 - the authors' explicitly stated purpose, goals, and/or research hypotheses
- 5) Look at the Methodology section, but don't get bogged down in it. Is the methodology qualitative, quantitative or mixed; and what kind of sample was used (—especially how large and how it was selected). Also, is there a big discrepancy between the date of data collection and the date of publication?
- 6) The Results section may or may not be easily readable. If not, just skip to the Discussion section. You can always come back to the Results section later, if you want to dig further into particulars.
- 7) Read the Discussion section carefully, watching for:
 - summary statements (often at the beginning of the section) and a conclusion (at the end)
[—Note: in Discussion sections, often each paragraph is a major point.]
 - words touting the special value of the study (e.g., “first,” “strong,” “surprising,” or “differs from”)
 - authors' *speculations* about the results (—often insightful, but different from the results themselves)
 - acknowledgement of limitations of the study (which may be paired with suggestions for future study)
 - comments about clinical implications

[Many articles have separate sections for Clinical Implications, Limitations & Future Research, and a Conclusion; but some combine several of these into a general Discussion.]
- 8) What precisely are the *claims* of the authors about the research and the *generalizability* of the findings?
- 9) What does the article make you think about --make you want to know more about? How might it expand your thinking about your own chaplaincy practice? (Consider not only the results of a study but the *ideas* underlying the research.)

If the article is a *REVIEW* of research rather than a report of original research, then it may be efficient to move directly from the Abstract to the Discussion section (and any Conclusion paragraph), and then go back into the paper to fill in the details.