

The background features a light gray geometric pattern of overlapping triangles. In the foreground, there are two dark gray silhouettes of human heads in profile, facing each other. Between them are two overlapping speech bubbles, one light green and one light blue, both with a darker shade at the bottom where they would connect to a tail.

Searching the scientific literature

PSYC 11: Laboratory in Psychological Science

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Why search the literature?

Science Is Cumulative

- You don't want to re-invent the wheel
- Contextualizing your work makes it more impactful
- Writing a good Discussion section requires knowing what others have found

How to find relevant papers

Key Tools

- **Google Scholar:** broad, includes citations and "cited by" links
- **Semantic Scholar:** AI-powered recommendations, related papers
- **Reference chaining:** find one good paper, then follow its references (and who cited it)

Evaluating what you find

Not All Papers Are Equal

- **Recency:** Is this finding current, or has it been superseded?
- **Source:** Peer-reviewed journal? Preprint? Blog post?
- **Sample size and methods:** Does the study actually support its claims?
- **Citations:** How has the field responded to this work?

How deeply should you read?

Matching Depth to Relevance

- **Quick skim (30 sec -- 2 min):** title + abstract + key terms (10--50 papers)
- **Quick read (5 min):** abstract + figures + captions + discussion (5--10 papers)
- **Deep read (hours):** multiple passes, method-by-method, figure-by-figure (1--3 papers)

Discussion: Finding the right papers

Breakout Groups (10 min)

- Pick a research question your group is interested in
- Each person: spend 3 minutes searching Google Scholar
- Compare what you found: did you use the same search terms? Find the same papers?
- Which paper looks most relevant, and why?

The Discussion section

What Goes in a Discussion?

- Summarize what you did and what you found
- Describe how your work **fits in with the broader literature**
- Describe what you think the **next steps** are
- Be honest about limitations

This week's lab: literature review

Lab Assignment

- Find a "template" paper and several related papers
- Re-factor the template's Discussion section, taking the other papers into account
- Goal: practice synthesizing findings across multiple sources