**Make Sure You Understand the Material**

You can’t write or think critically about what you don’t understand! Whether summarizing, synthesizing, or critically assessing material, the first step is ensuring you’ve understood the material.

To ensure you understand the material you are reading, try answering the following questions:

- According to the author(s), what is already known about the topic of the paper? (stick to the main points)
- What is the main objective/argument in the paper?
- What is the authors’ rationale for the argument in the paper? Questions to consider here could include:
  - Do the authors plan to fill in gaps in the current understanding of the topic being addressed? If so, what are the gaps?
  - Do the authors plan to improve on existing studies by using a new approach? If so, what do the authors identify as limitations of earlier studies?
- How do the author(s) plan to meet their objective or support their argument?
  - Are they conducting a literature review?
  - Are they conducting an experiment or observational study? If so, what are the main methods they will use?
- Did the author(s) meet their objective or support their argument?
  - What evidence did they use?
  - If not, why not?
- What are the authors’ main conclusions?
- Are any suggestions offered for future work?