

## 5.2 Skimming for Relevance

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*This activity develops research skills. Students will use several key components of a book to gather clues about whether that book is relevant to a particular research topic. This activity will help students collect information more efficiently by learning to sift out irrelevant material early in the research process.*

### **Time Allotment**

30-45 minutes

### **Objectives**

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to techniques of quickly determining relevance to a particular research topic.
- practice predicting the main idea and argument in a book by looking at specific parts of the text.

### **Materials and Preparation**

Several (6-8) different books related to the current debate topic or to a particular debate research assignment. These books will need to be screened before class: you should have a degree of familiarity with them before beginning the activity. Some books should contain cards relevant to the position, and others should be less useful. If done in conjunction with an after-school meeting, this activity could potentially take place at a university (or significantly sized public) library. This activity can take place in the stacks of the library. If the activity is conducted in a library, it is possible to adapt the activity so that each student is looking through their own book, or to have students work in pairs rather than small groups. If done in conjunction with a class, the books can be brought to the classroom or it can take place at the school library.

### **Method**

Decide upon a topic for research. This can be an affirmative case, negative responses to an affirmative case, generic negative arguments on the resolution, etc. Because of the multiple internal links built into many disadvantages, a disadvantage related topic might have to center around a specific component of a position.

When you have decided upon a topic, divide the class into small groups and give each group a book that may be relevant to this research topic.

Give each group a limited amount of time (10-12 minutes) to determine whether their book is relevant. Together, the students in each group should read and discuss:

- The title
- The table of contents
- The index
- The preface, forward, and / or introduction
- The first and last paragraph of each chapter
- The author's credentials, if given
- A few pages (each group can randomly select a 2-3 pages to read)



Tell students that when the time is up, each group should be prepared to share their findings with the class. Students should decide whether the book is useful or not, or if the book must first be read more carefully to determine whether it is relevant. If only part of the book is relevant (for instance a particular chapter), they should identify this part. Groups should provide several reasons for their conclusion based on observations about the different components of the book.

**Variation:**

Conduct the same activity, but with photo-copies of articles rather than with books. Select some articles that have a large number of cards and some that are less useful. With this variation, it is possible to give every student their own copy of an article, rather than having 4-5 students share a book.

**Possible follow-up activity:**

Based on student's presentations, compile a list of books that the groups considered useful for future reading. You can use this list as part of a research or brief-writing assignment.