I developed a formative assignment designed to help students learn how to read and interpret scientific journal articles. I focused the assignment on articles in the disciplines of forestry and forest ecology. Questions were posed to help students learn where to find particular types of information. Students were asked to find “social information” such as authors’ institutional affiliations and sources of funding as well as “content information” such as study objectives, hypotheses tested, and findings. Students also practiced determining whether a paper was a primary research article, a meta-analysis, or a literature review. Each student also decomposed the Abstract of the article into the various sections of the paper: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. Students were given a set of journal articles from which to choose but had the option to find one on their own. A rubric was used to score student papers consistently. Although some students answered many of the questions appropriately, there were students who exhibited confusion over which claims in the article could be attributed to the authors and which claims were made by sources cited in the article. Although I had hoped this “learning by doing” approach would stimulate learners to gain an intuitive familiarity with the organization of a research report, it may be necessary for an instructor to provide more explicit instructions for where to find particular types of information. Overall, the exercise gave students practice reading and interpreting primary sources and improved the organization of the reports they wrote for lab activities.