Read a paper without getting lost

Use this with any journal article, report, or research claim. The goal is to ask good questions, not to pretend we know everything.

Title, author(s), year, and link/DOI

What is the main question, in your own words?

What kind of source is this?

[ ] Original study [ ] Review [ ] Qualitative research [ ] Theory / essay [ ] Guidance / other

Who or what was studied? Include sample, setting, and who is missing.

What did the researchers actually measure, compare, or analyze?

Reality check
Does the methods section match the claim in the headline or abstract? Underline anything that deserves a second look.

The results, and their limits

Keep what the researchers observed separate from how they interpreted it. Give yourself permission to write "not answered".

What did they actually find? Include numbers or examples if available.

What could explain the findings besides the authors' favorite explanation?

What are the limitations? Who or what might this NOT apply to?

What do the authors conclude? Is that narrower or broader than the evidence?

What would I do differently, or what would I need to see next?

One last question
Could you explain the study and its main limitation to someone who has not read it? If so, you understood the important part.