



# Writing a Critique or Review of a Research Article

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## Starting a Review

At the basic level, a critical analysis begins with questions like those set out by Taylor (2009):<sup>1</sup>

- What is the author's motivation in writing this work?
  - Agreeing with, defending or confirming a particular point of view
  - Proposing a new point of view
  - Conceding to an existing point of view, but qualifying certain points
  - Reformulating an existing idea for a better explanation
  - Dismissing a point of view through an evaluation of its criteria
  - Reconciling two seemingly different points of view
- How does the author approach the subject matter? What kinds of words does he or she use?
  - Observing and identifying objects for analysis
  - Describing features
  - Defining, referring, classifying, distinguishing, or comparing terms
  - Illustrating or exemplifying a general point to explain or apply it
  - Theorizing about or explaining why things are the way they are
  - Conjecturing or speculating about explanations
  - Evaluating the adequacy of our observations
- What is the overall structure of the author's work? How do the separate parts fit together?
  - Look at points in the article that feature repetition or summary. These are moments when authors often focus on their larger argument or thesis.

In fact, the process of critical evaluation lies at the heart of what we might call knowledge creation. When researchers submit research papers to peer-reviewed journals in their fields, their papers are reviewed anonymously by other researchers, who critically assess each study in terms of

- The study's contribution to knowledge, theory, or practice in a field
- The study's research design and methodology
- The study's findings, in particular, how they are presented and interpreted
- The researcher's conclusions
- The writing quality, clarity, and style, and the organization of the information presented

If you are asked to write a critique of a research article, you should focus on these issues. You will also need to consider where and when the article was published and who wrote it. This handout presents guidelines for writing a research critique and questions to consider in writing a critique.

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## Guidelines for Writing a Research Critique

1. Begin your critique by identifying the article's title, author(s), date of publication, and the name of the journal or other publication in which it appeared. In your introduction, you should also briefly describe the purpose and nature of the study and, if applicable, its theoretical framework (see Table 1). If the paper was not published in a peer-reviewed journal, consider the credibility of the publication in which it appeared and the credentials (and possible biases) of the researchers.
2. If you are reviewing a research study, organize the body of your critique according to the paper's structure. See Table 1 for specific suggestions about questions to ask in critiquing the various elements of a research article. Start with a brief description and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design and methodology and then critically review the presentation

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, G. (2009). *A student's writing guide: How to plan and write successful essays*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

and interpretation of the findings and the researchers' conclusions. If the research topic is time sensitive, consider whether the data used in the study was sufficiently current.

3. Use headings to structure your critique. In each section, provide enough descriptive information so that your review will be clear to a reader who may not have read the study.
4. Aim for an objective, balanced, and well supported critique. Polit and Beck (2008) advise<sup>2</sup>:
  - a. Balance your analysis to include both strengths and weakness
  - b. Justify your criticism by giving examples of the study's weaknesses and strengths
5. Conclude your analysis by briefly summing up the strengths and weaknesses of the study and by assessing its contribution to the advancement of knowledge, theory, or practice. Consider suggesting research directions and methodological considerations for future researchers.<sup>3</sup>
6. Use past or present tense consistently whenever you refer to completed research. Check if your discipline has a preference.
7. Use a standard citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, or Chicago/Turabian) to format references in your critique, and be sure to cite page numbers for all quoted passages.

**Table 1: Elements of a Research Critique and Questions to Consider in Writing a Critique**

Elements of a research critique	Questions to ask/Information to include
Identifying information to include	Where and when was the article published? Who wrote the article? What was the purpose of the study? What was the nature of the study (e.g., a case study, ethnography, a content analysis, or an experimental study)? What is the analytical approach or theoretical framework (e.g., a feminist analysis, a critical analysis, an application of a specific theoretical model)?
Research design and methodology <sup>4</sup>	How does the method reflect or augment other studies of the same topic? What makes this method feasible? How realistic is it? Why will this method produce data that will answer the research question? How does the method address questions of validity? How does the researcher overcome the limitations of the method? Are there large limitations or minor ones? How will these limitations affect your ability to use this data to answer your research question? Was the research conducted ethically and following tri-council guidelines?
Interpretation of findings	Did the researcher find a correlation (relationship) or a cause? Are there alternative interpretations of the findings? How "generalizable" are the findings? Can the findings be applied to other populations or situations?
Writing quality, clarity, & style, and the organization of information	Does the source reflect the genre of the source's discipline(s)? Does the source offer sufficient detail? Are there gaps in the description or places with unnecessary description? Does the source present the information logically? Do the sources present an objective viewpoint? Does the author seem to have a bias or blind spot?
The value of the study	Is the research problem significant? What contribution does the study make to the advancement of knowledge, theory, or practice?

<sup>2</sup> Polit, D. F., & Beck, C.T. (2008). *Essentials of nursing research: methods, appraisal, and utilization* (8th ed). Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.

<sup>3</sup> University of New South Wales. (2013). Writing a critical review. Retrieved September 9, 2013 from: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/writing-critical-review>

<sup>4</sup> Lab Space, Open Learn. (n.d.) Critical review of research approaches. Retrieved September 9, 2013 from : <http://lbspace.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=449239&section=>