

Notes for critiquing a research article
A Writing Resource created by Dr. Vidya Natarajan

1) Overview of the research problem, thesis, or aim of the study:

Identify these and evaluate them for: a) relevance and significance b) timeliness c) filling in of research gaps and unique contribution. Does the article fit in with your own research plans?

2) Theoretical framework if any, or concepts or traditions in the research field:

Is there a theoretical approach or framework identified in the study's literature review? Evaluate or at least identify it. Do the theories and methods conform to the broad approaches common in the field, or do they depart from them?

3) Method:

a) What kind of data is being used? Is the article reporting on a survey? Is it interpreting the responses or writing of the research subjects? Is it analyzing a set of historical or literary archival texts or documents? Does the study employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, and are these methods suited to the research problem?

b) How was the data gathered or selected? If a survey, for e.g., comment on the size and representativeness of the survey sample. Does it leave out anyone? Is the data set or sample skewed in any way (e.g., demographically)? E.g., is there too much generalization from too small a sample? Were the instruments for data collection (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, etc.) well-designed? (e.g., did a multiple-choice questionnaire have enough choices? Were the questions worded well in relation to the target audience, and did they flow naturally from one to the next? Were the choices clear?)

c) Are the research methods appropriate for the specific aims of the study? Will they yield reliable results and findings? Is there a rationale for the choice of method?

d) Were any methodological limitations or problems anticipated, and were any steps taken to minimize them? Were there any ethical concerns, and if so, was a Research Ethics Board's approval obtained?

e) Can the method be replicated by other researchers?

4) How was the data analyzed or processed? Were statistical methods used? What provision was made to get an accurate picture based on relationships, trends and patterns,

distributions and anomalies, if any? Was close reading or textual interpretation used? Was the data weighed against theoretical concepts?

- 5) How did the findings sit in relation to the hypothesis or theory? Have they justified or expanded or modified the initial claim or theoretical framework? How were they presented—are there visual or other representations? Is the ‘results’ section concise, well-organized, relevant to the research problem, and clear?
- 6) Is the discussion rich, thought-provoking, clear, and closely tied to the findings? Does it explain the findings (including any unexpected findings) effectively, showing their significance, and is it well contextualized in relation to similar studies within the tradition? Does it also provide any broader deductions, recommendations for future action, or ideas for further research?

Grammar and sentence structure:

- Write good overview statements
- Write in simple past tense or present perfect tense: see the example review.