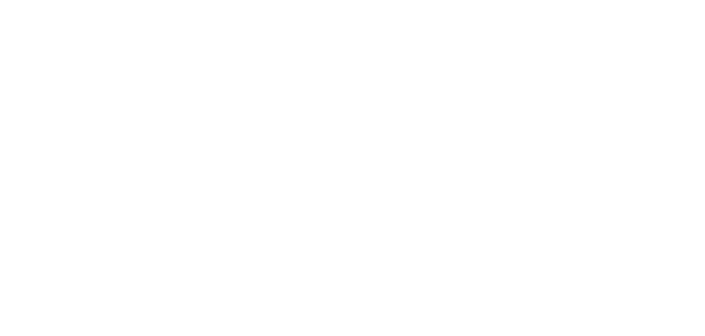


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**Critical Analysis of a Journal Article**



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# Introduction

During your time at university, it is likely that you will be asked to critique or analyse a journal article. But what does this actually mean? In order to write a critical analysis of an article, you need to take several things into consideration.

Firstly, you will need to describe the article briefly, explaining what it is about. You’ll then need to look in more detail at the information contained within the article.

For example, let’s say the article is about a study conducted by the author. The purpose of the study was to determine whether people preferred reading The Guardian or The Sun newspapers. The author (let’s call her Sally Smith) did this research by asking people on the street which newspaper they preferred to read.

In your analysis, you need to not only explain her research methods, but also question whether they were suitable. In this case, you might want to think about the following kinds of questions:

1. How many people did Smith ask? Was it enough?
2. Does Smith show that she asked a cross- section of people, and if not, what effect could this have? (For example, would the age of the respondents have an effect on the result? What about whether they were male or female?)
3. Where did she do this research? Could her choice of location have affected the responses of those asked? (For example, if she asked The Sun staff members outside The Sun’s offices, it is highly likely that most respondents would say that they preferred The Sun!)
4. What questions did she actually ask? Did she use a verbal or written questionnaire? Could this have made a difference? Were there any ‘leading questions’?
5. Would there have been a more suitable method? Why / why not?

You’ll then need to think about Smith’s results, and how she has presented them. For example:

1. Has Smith used any graphs? Are they clear and easy to understand?
2. Are the results misleading in any way? (For example, is the scale on the graph suitable or are the results being given in a mixture of formats, making comparison difficult?) Are the figures being twisted and showing bias? Has anything important been omitted?
3. Has Smith discussed the results and their possible meanings and / or implications? Has she looked at all possible meanings? Is her conclusion justified?
4. Does the evidence back up Smith’s claims?
5. Remember, whatever you’re saying about the article, methods, results and so on, whether it be good or bad, back yourself up with examples and evidence!

By looking at the article in these ways, you will be beginning to analyse rather than describe*.* However, in order to analyse an article properly, you need to go one step further and look beyond the article itself. You need to look at the wider context of the subject. This means that your reference list will not only contain the article you are analysing, but some other relevant sources too. Using the example above, this might mean looking into these kinds of questions:

1. Does Smith refer to other studies and authors? Does she use their findings or theories to back up her argument?
2. Have other similar studies been done? Do the results of these show the same as Smith’s results? (You’ll need to actually look up these other studies and find out what they say!)
3. Do other authors agree or disagree with Smith? Why?
4. Have any authors written about Smith’s research since it was published? You may be able to find more recent work which agrees or disagrees with Smith, or shows a new perspective on the research. It is important to mention anything like this.

# Don’t forget…

Just because something has been published, it doesn’t mean that it is perfect (or even good).

# But, similarly…

Just because you have been asked to critique an article, it doesn’t mean that the article is necessarily bad.

The main thing to remember is: it’s fine to say that the article or research is good or bad, as long as you explain why you have come to this conclusion, and refer to examples and / or other authors’ work in order to justify this.

In order to show critical analysis skills in your assignments, you need to evaluate all of your sources in this way. You won’t have to go into this much detail every time, but you need to look at each source with a critical eye (whether the author has backed up their claims with evidence, whether they have interpreted the results correctly, whether their experiment was well-planned or could have been done differently and so on). You’ll also need to find out whether other authors agree or disagree with any claims made, and why*.* By doing this, you will be critically analysing the available evidence rather than simply describing what different authors have said.

Suzanne Waugh, Updated 2015