Reading Journal Articles Critically 2

This workshop will:
- Review the idea of critiquing and analysis tools
- Highlight the patterns in shape and style that can occur in academic articles
- Reveal the power of structure and argument in scholarly writing

Teaching Points:
1. Understanding critiquing tools
2. Introducing a specific reading tool (textscrolling)
3. Applying the new tool to sample text
This workshop focuses on reading journal articles; we run other workshops for finding journal articles on-line; how to undertake a literature review and how to choose the appropriate articles for your question/brief/research project. For more information, please visit our website.

A key skill for students is to read critically, and as journal articles are a major source for assignments, you will need to know how to read these important pieces of literature. But how do you do it? How do you keep track of what is relevant? How do you identify a gap in the author’s article? How do you discover whether there is anything to critique in an article? How do you cross reference one article with others to build up your case?

1. Understanding Critiquing Tools

There are a variety of especially designed critiquing tools that different disciplines can use to review and evaluate research. These tools are designed to offer question prompts or criteria to critically analyse (take apart and evaluate) research studies in order to:

A) understand how research is done and what it has found out

B) assess the quality of research by questioning what has been written

They provide a methodical way of working through articles and recording your responses so that you can justify the topics and evidence that you use in your essays and assignments.

Due to time constraints, we are cannot work through examples of all the many types of critiquing tools available and before we focus on one critiquing tool, below are three examples of others you may wish to use. There will be a list of sources for additional tools at the end of the booklet.
## Research questions: guidelines for critiquing a quantitative research study

Adapted from Coughlan *et al*(2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements influencing believability of the research</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing style</td>
<td>Is the report well written – concise, grammatically correct, avoids the use of jargon? Is it well laid out and organized?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Do the researcher’s qualifications/position indicate a degree of knowledge in this field?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report title</td>
<td>Is the title clear, accurate and unambiguous?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Does the abstract offer a clear overview of the study, including the research problem, sample, methodology, findings and recommendations?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements influencing robustness of the research</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose/research problem</td>
<td>Is the purpose of the study/research question clearly identified?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical consistency</td>
<td>Does the research report follow the steps of the research process in a logical manner? Do these steps naturally flow and the links clear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Is the review logically organised? Does it offer a balanced critical analysis of the literature? Is the majority of the literature of recent origin? Is it mainly from primary sources and of an empirical nature?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical framework</td>
<td>Has a conceptual or theoretical framework been identified? Is the framework adequately described? Is the framework appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims/objectives/research question/hypotheses</td>
<td>Have aims and objectives, a research question or hypothesis been identified? If so, are they clearly stated? Do they reflect the information presented in the literature review?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Has the target population been clearly identified? How was the sample selected? Was it a probability or non-probability sample? Is it of adequate size? Are the inclusion/exclusion criteria clearly identified?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
<td>Were the participants fully informed about the nature of the research? Was the autonomy/confidentiality of the participants guaranteed? Were the participants protected from harm? Was ethical permission granted for the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational definitions</td>
<td>Are all the terms, theories and concepts mentioned in the study clearly defined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Is the research design clearly identified? Has the data gathering instrument been described? Is the instrument appropriate? How was it developed? Were reliability and validity testing undertaken and the results discussed? Was a pilot study undertaken?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis/results</td>
<td>Are the data collection strategies described? Are the strategies used to analyse the data described? Did the researcher follow the steps of the data analysis method identified? Was data saturation achieved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Are the findings linked back to the literature review? If a hypothesis was identified, was it supported? Were the strengths and limitations of the study including generalizability discussed? Was a recommendation for further research made?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Were all the books, journals and other media alluded to in the study accurately referenced?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does the title reflect the content?

Are the authors credible?

Does the abstract summarise the key components?

Is the rationale for undertaking the research clearly outlined?

Is the literature review comprehensive and up-to-date?

Is the aim of the research clearly stated?

Are all ethical issues identified and addressed?

Is the methodology identified and justified?

Is the study design clearly identified, and is the rationale for choice of design evident?

Are there an experimental hypothesis clearly stated? Are the key variables clearly defined?

Is the population identified?

Is the sample adequately described and reflective of the population?

Is the method of data collection valid and reliable?

Are the results presented in a way that is appropriate and clear?

Is the discussion comprehensive?

Quantitative

Qualitative

Are the philosophical background and study design identified and the rationale for choice of design evident?

Are the major concepts identified?

Is the context of the study outlined?

Is the selection of participants described and the sampling method identified? Is the method of data collection auditable?

Is the method of data analysis credible and confirmable?

Are the results generalizable?

Is the discussion comprehensive?

Adapted from Caldwell et al (2011)
Academic Skills Advice

Philip Shon has devised a simple coding system to enable students to read critically whilst managing the amount of information collected. It uses fourteen acronyms which you jot down next to passages within the article which are either directly related to critical reading, or are used to critique the article and encourages you to generate new ideas about what you are reading. All of his codes are placed in the right hand margin. This is so your own thematic codes/notes can be placed in the left hand margin.

Shon’s codes relate to authors’ intentions; literature review aspects; gaps in researchers’ work; and many more elements. This code is applied in a separate workshop: Reading Journal Articles Critically: 1. For more information, please visit our website www.bradford.ac.uk/academic-skills

There are many different types of critiquing tools already available or you can develop your own but the important thing to remember is to be systematic in your critical analysis of texts. This will ensure you don’t miss anything.

2. Introducing a specific reading tool (textscrolling)

Textscrolling is different to other critiquing tools: rather than seeing a text page by page, you see it in its entirety as a continuous piece of writing or as a scroll. This provides you with an aerial view of the text so that when you make notes on or highlight different aspects of the text, it may be easier for you to see where there are...

✓ connections or disconnects in different sections, e.g. a researcher may not have applied the analysis method he/she may have stated earlier in the paper
✓ problems or issues with the research, e.g. a research tool is used which does not provide the sort of data required to answer the author’s research questions
✓ information that has a specific bearing on your own work, e.g. a theory that might inform your reflection on an event or situation

As you can see from the sample article, I have identified a variety of aspects starting from...

shallow and surface issues with the paper itself, such as proofreading and labelling to...

deeper problems, e.g. structure and a lack of explanatory definitions, before moving on to...

details relating to the research process itself, including concerns regarding the complexity of the data collecting and cleaning process.

3. Applying the new tool to sample text

Activity 1: Your turn

In pairs or small groups, read the article provided on the A0 scroll. Then notate the article in any way you wish looking for inconsistencies, omissions, mistakes, confusing sections, etc. Transfer your findings to the table on the separate sheets. We will then discuss your findings.
List of critiquing tools:

Qualitative


Quantitative


Both


For further advice on Critical Analysis, we run workshops on this subject. We also run another specific workshop on Choosing Journal Articles. Please also refer to the books in the list below.

References


www.brad.ac.uk/academic-skills
