Critical Appraisal of Research Articles for a Literature Review

QUALITY OF THE LITERATURE

Critical evaluation requires consideration of the individual sections of the research article, enabling you to form an overall impression of the quality of the research as presented.

As you read research articles, consider questions like these:

- Am I persuaded by this study’s results?
- Is the purpose of the study clear and well defined?
- Is the study methodologically sound?
- Are the methods clearly described?
- Are results presented in a clear and understandable format?
- Does interpretation of results seem consistent with results presented?
- Are there other explanations that could account for the results?
- What are the study limitations?

Hewitt M., How to Search and Critically Evaluate Research Literature. The NIHR RDS for the East Midlands / Yorkshire & the Humber, 2009

RELEVANCE OF THE LITERATURE ➔ YOUR ASSIGNMENT ➔ YOUR INTERESTS

Critical evaluation also requires close attention to relevance and should help answer questions like these:

- Does this article address your research interests/or similar questions?
- Does it add to your knowledge of the topic – including the range of conflicting findings or perspectives?
- Does it examine similar populations in a similar context?
- Similar populations in different contexts?
- Provide relevant insight from other populations or contexts?
- Does it clarify your understanding of the methodology?
- Can you use it to justify the need for your research?
- Does it raise important questions that should be addressed?
- Does it identify gaps in knowledge?

The literature you gather will inform everything you do, so choose sources carefully.

If the body of literature you’ve gathered is NOT RELEVANT to your assignment or research:

- Re-search – revise strategies, select new keywords, change databases, etc.
- Refine the research question(s)
- Re-assess the relevance of the literature
- Repeat process if necessary