

The Critique Process:

Reviewing and Critiquing
Research

Objectives

By the end of the session, the student should be able to

1. state a definition for research critique.
2. state the purpose and provide a rationale for completing a research critique.
3. list the necessary elements/questions in a research critique.

What Is a Research Critique?

A research critique is an analysis of a research undertaking that focuses on its strengths and limitations.

Critiquing is a systematic process for evaluating research studies and the results reported.

Purpose of a Research Critique

“The purpose of a research critique is to determine whether the findings are usable for you” (Brink & Wood, 2001, p. 57).

Why Do a Research Critique?

- Not all published research is scientifically sound.
- Results may have little support for their validity and may reflect a bias.

Four Key Aspects of Critique

- Understanding the purpose and problem, while determining if the design and methodology are consistent with the purpose.
- Determining if the methodology is properly applied.
- Assessing if outcomes and conclusions are believable and supported by findings.
- Reflecting on overall quality, strengths, and limitations.

(Holder, 2003)

Research Critique Process

1. Read the research article or report in its entirety to get a sense of the study and its contribution to knowledge development.
2. Read the article or report again, paying attention to the questions appropriate to each stage of the critiquing process.

(Holder, 2003)

Essential Elements in the Research Critique Process

“The necessary elements in a research critique can be compiled in a series of questions for the process of critiquing research” (Boswell & Cannon, 2009, p. 308).

Examples follow.....

Source and Abstract Questions

- **Source:** How legitimate is the source (e.g., empirical study from peer-reviewed journal versus article from popular magazine)?
- **Abstract:** What is the major theme of the research source? What is the study about?
The abstract provides a snapshot of the study. From the snapshot, decide how relevant the source is for your purposes, in terms of topic, population, and methodology.

Problem and Purpose Questions

- **Problem:** What is the research problem? What problem existed (in the setting, in terms of a lack of research, a need for further research, etc.) that the researcher(s) attempted to address?
- **Purpose:** What was the purpose of the study? Is the purpose clear? Was there a clear need for the study? Will the study add to the body of literature in the field?

Literature Review Questions

- Is the review comprehensive? That is, did the researchers include the most relevant literature regarding each of the study's variables and constructs?
- Are the sources current (within the last 5 years) and/or seminal within the field?
- Are seminal publications reviewed?
- Are the majority of sources primary or secondary?

More Literature Review Questions

- Do the authors identify a guiding theoretical/conceptual framework, and if so is it clearly explained and linked to the study?
- Is it well organized and does it include an introduction and a summary?

Methodology Questions

- **Research Questions:** Did the authors offer any research questions?
- If so, what were they? Are they clearly stated? Do they match the purpose of the study? Are all of the research variables identified?
- **Hypotheses:** Do the researchers offer any hypotheses?
- If so, what were they? Are they clearly stated? Do they match the purpose of the study?

More Methodology Questions

- **Participants:** What was the target population for the study? How were the participants selected? Who is included? Who is excluded? How large is the sample?
- **Instruments:** What instruments or tools were used in the study? Who developed the instruments or tools? How valid and reliable are they? Do the instruments or tools directly measure the variables of interest? Does the researcher describe clearly how meaning or scores are derived from the instruments?

More Methodology Questions

- **Research Design:** What was the specific research design used? How were the data collected? What were the steps in the timeline? Are potential limitations identified and addressed?
- **Data Analysis:** Were the data analysis strategies appropriate for the study?

Results

- Is each research question or hypothesis addressed?
- Are the findings clearly described?

Discussion

- How do this study's results fit into the broader literature?
- What were the limitations of the study?
- Are recommendations made for practical application?
- Are recommendations made for further research?

The questions just discussed were designed for critiquing quantitative research. The critique of qualitative research takes a slightly different focus because.....

“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of qualitative research designs.

“Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Qualitative Research...

- starts with a general problem without specific questions or hypotheses to guide the study.
- may or may not present a theoretical/conceptual framework.
- is based on a relatively small, purposive sample.
- measures intensively with relatively unstructured instruments. (The researcher is considered the instrument.)
- presents results mainly in words.
- results reflect the realities as perceived by participants; participants can review their data for accuracy and provide feedback to researcher.

Given these characteristics of qualitative research, what additional or different components do you think one would need to examine in critiquing qualitative research?

Critique of Qualitative Research

- What is the phenomenon of interest, and is the study's qualitative inquiry design identified?
- Do the problem and purpose match the study's overarching research question(s)?
- Are ethical considerations stated? (researcher-participant relationship and researcher's background, role, biases, and assumptions)
- Is the research setting/environment described?

And...

- Is an appropriate rationale provided for selection of the purposive sample?
- Are the data-collection approaches (e.g., interviews, document review, observation, open-ended questionnaire) appropriate for the study's purpose and for qualitative inquiry?

And...

- Are the steps for the systematic analysis of data clearly described?
- Are categories and themes presented and supported with clarity for the reader?
- Does the researcher integrate his or her thought processes from field notes and reflexive journal?
- Are the study's limitations identified?

And. . .

- Are methods reported for the establishment of data trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability)?
 - Triangulation (theories, data sources, data collection methods)
 - Peer review
 - Member checking
 - Audit trail (log of a ship)
 - Rich, thick description
 - Prolonged engagement
 - Researcher credibility

Critique of Mixed Methods Research

- Critique both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- Is there a stated rationale for the use of mixed methods?
- Does the discussion provide for the integration of the two types of data and show how they strengthened the outcomes?

(Boswell & Cannon, 2009)

Practicing With the Matrix

Hay, I., Elias, G., Fielding-Barnsley, R., Homel, R., & Freiberg, K. (2007). Language delays, reading delays, and learning difficulties: Interactive elements requiring multidimensional programming. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(5), 400-409.

<http://bit.ly/MAQz4c>

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- Brink, P. J., & Wood, M. J. (2001). *Basic steps in planning nursing research from question to proposal* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Jones and Bartlett.
- Holder, B. (2003). *The research critique*. Available at http://virtual.clemson.edu/group/odce/summer1_03/nursT807/pdf