

Being Critical

As an academic writer, you are expected to be critical of the sources that you use. This essentially means questioning what you read and not necessarily agreeing with it just because the information has been published. Being critical can also mean looking for reasons why we should not just accept something as being correct or true. This can require you to identify problems with a writer's arguments or methods, or perhaps to refer to other people's criticisms of these. Constructive criticism goes beyond this by suggesting ways in which a piece of research or writing could be improved ... *being against is not enough. We also need to develop habits of constructive thinking.*²

Introductory phrases

Much of the criticism that X has attracted relates to ...
Critics question the ability of the X theory to provide ...
Many aspects of this interpretation have been questioned.
Non-government agencies are also very critical of the new policies.
Smith's meta-analysis has been subjected to considerable criticism.
These claims have been strongly contested in recent years by a number of writers.
The X theory has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of writers.
More recent arguments against X have been summarised by Smith and Jones (1982):
Many analysts now argue that the strategy of X has not been successful. Jones (2003), for example, ...

Highlighting inadequacies of previous studies

Previous studies of X have not dealt with ...
Researchers have not treated X in much detail.
Such expositions are unsatisfactory because they ...
Most studies in the field of X have only focused on ...
Half of the studies evaluated failed to specify whether ...
The research to date has tended to focus on X rather than Y.
Most empirical studies of X have relied upon small sample sizes.
However, these studies used non-validated methods to measure ...
The vast majority of researchers have not considered the effects of ...
The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.
Most studies of X have only been carried out in a small number of areas.
However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature.
Small sample sizes have been a serious limitation for many earlier studies.
The lack of reliable instruments is particularly problematic for studies of ...
None of the studies reviewed appear to have controlled for the effects of ...
The generalisability of much published research on this issue is problematic.
This general lack of methodological rigour may put in question the results of ...
However, few writers have been able to draw on any structured research into ...
There are obvious difficulties in accepting the reliability of self-report information.
However, these results were limited to X and are therefore not representative of ...
Most of the research on the association between X and Y is flawed methodologically.
The experimental data are rather controversial, and there is no general agreement about ...
Although extensive research has been carried out on X, no single study exists which adequately ...

² De Bono, E. (2016) *Parallel Thinking*. London: Ebury Publishing (p.58).

Most studies of X	have only focused on ... are unsatisfactory because they ... fail to estimate economic rates of ... have only investigated the impact of ... have not included variables relating to ... are limited by weak designs and a failure to address ... have only been carried out in a small number of areas.
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Highlighting inadequacies of an empirical study

The study suffers from ...

The paper fails to specify ...

No attempt has been made to ...

The study makes no attempt to ...

The report provides little evidence that ...

A major problem with this experiment was that ...

No attempt was made to quantify the association between X and Y.

The scope of this research was relatively narrow, being primarily concerned with ...

Smith's study of X is considered to be the most important, but it does suffer from the fact that ...

However, these results were based upon data from over 30 years ago and it is unclear whether ...

Smith The paper	fails to does not makes no attempt to	specify ... quantify ... separate ... compare ... account for ... suggest why ... analyse how ... ascertain whether ... distinguish between ... explain the meaning of ... provide information on ... address the question of ... assess the effectiveness of ... use a standardised method of ... give sufficient consideration to ... consider the long term impact of ... offer an adequate explanation for ... engage with current discourses on ... determine the underlying causes of ... systematically review all the relevant literature.
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(However,)	the study the paper	suffers from	selection bias. limited sample size. poor external validity. multiple design flaws. an overemphasis on ... serious statistical flaws. insufficient sample size. inconsistent definitions. poorly developed theory. historical and cultural bias. methodological limitations. serious sampling problems. a lack of clarity in defining ... inadequate research design. considerable design limitations. the use of poorly matched controls. a paucity of standardised measures. notable methodological weaknesses. fundamental flaws in research design. lack of a strong theoretical framework. certain ambiguities at the conceptual level. an over-reliance on self-report methodology. a restricted range of methodological approaches. shortcomings in the methods used to select cases. a lack of well-grounded theoretical considerations. several conceptual and methodological weaknesses.
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Smith The study The report	overlooks fails to acknowledge makes no attempt to consider	the impact of ... the reasons for ... the evidence for ... the contexts in which ... several key aspects of ... the variable nature of ... other explanations for ... the complex nature of ... the potential impact of ... the social dimension of ... the dynamic aspects of ... the underlying causes of ... the ethical implications of ... the important role played by ... the demographic factors that ... the broader implications of how ... the unique complexities faced by ... the contextual factors that influence ...
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No attempt has been made to	determine whether ... investigate whether ... estimate the risk of ... quantify the degree of ... model the dynamics of ...
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However,	the analysis is largely superficial, based solely on ... the sample size in this study was relatively small ... this research has a number of methodological weaknesses. the degree of X experienced by patients was not measured. a major weakness with this study is that there was no control for X. a major problem with this experiment was that no control for X was used. one of the problems with the instrument the researchers used to measure X was ... the main methodological weakness is that X was only monitored for 12 months.
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Introducing questions, problems and limitations: theory or argument

The main weakness with this theory is that ...

The key problem with this explanation is that ...

However, this theory does not fully explain why ...

One criticism of much of the literature on X is that ...

Critics question the ability of the X theory to provide ...

However, there is an inconsistency with this argument.

There are limits to how far the concept of X can be taken.

A serious weakness with this argument, however, is that ...

However, such explanations tend to overlook the fact that ...

One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether ...

One of the main difficulties with this line of reasoning is that ...

Smith's argument relies too heavily on qualitative analysis of ...

Smith's interpretation overlooks much of the historical research ...

Many writers have challenged Smith's claim on the grounds that ...

The X theory has been criticised for being based on weak evidence.

Smith's analysis does not take account of X, nor does he examine ...

The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.

It seems that Jones' understanding of the X framework is questionable.

Aspects of X's theory have been criticised at a number of different levels.

One of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not explain why... .

A final criticism of the theory of X is that it struggles to explain some aspects of ...

The X theory has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of writers.

A second criticism of the hypothesis draws upon research evidence which suggests ...

The X hypothesis has been questioned on the basis of some conflicting experimental findings.

The theory is unable to	predict ... explain why ... fully account for ... adequately explain the ... explain what happens when ... make any useful prediction about ... explain the differences observed when ... provide a comprehensive explanation for ...
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The current model of X suffers from	poor scalability. unnecessary complexity. lack of empirical support. several methodological problems. certain weaknesses that hinder its ability to ...
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Introducing questions, problems and limitations: method or practice

The limitation of this approach is that ...

A major problem with the X method is that ...

One major drawback of this approach is that ...

Selection bias is another potential concern because ...

Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of this method is that ...

The main limitation of biosynthetic incorporation, however, is ...

Non-government agencies are also very critical of the new policies.

All the studies reviewed so far, however, suffer from the fact that ...

Critics of laboratory-based experiments contend that such studies ...

Another problem with this approach is that it fails to take X into account.

Difficulties arise, however, when an attempt is made to implement the policy.

There are obvious difficulties in accepting the reliability of self-report information.

There are certain problems with the use of focus groups. One of these is that there is less ...

Critics have also argued that not only do surveys provide an inaccurate measure of X, but the ...

Nevertheless, the strategy has not escaped criticism from governments, agencies and academics.

Many analysts now argue that the strategy of X has not been successful. Jones (2003), for example, argues that ...

However, all the previously mentioned methods suffer from (some) serious	drawbacks. limitations. weaknesses. shortcomings. disadvantages.
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However,	this method of analysis has a number of limitations. this method does involve potential measurement error. approaches of this kind carry with them various well known limitations. questions have been raised about the reliability of self-report methods.
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Selection bias is another (potential)	risk. concern. problem. limitation. weakness. threat to internal validity. limitation of systematic reviews.
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Criticism of an author or an author's work

Smith seems to ignore ...

Smith fails to grasp that ...

Smith's interpretation overlooks ...

Smith overlooks a number of important sources.

Smith fails to acknowledge the social aspects of ...

However, Smith's accounts are clearly ideological.

Although Smith has argued that ... she neglects to note that ...

Many aspects of Smith's interpretation have been questioned.

Smith's meta-analysis has been subjected to considerable criticism.

The most important of these criticisms is that Smith failed to note that ...

The most convincing rebuttal of Smith's interpretations has been written by ...

Smith's decision to prioritise X as the primary cause of Y has been widely attacked.

The scope of this research was relatively narrow, being primarily concerned with ...

Smith's study of X is considered to be the most important, but it does suffer from the fact that ...

(However,)	the paper does not address ... Smith fails to fully define what ... a major criticism of Smith's work is that ... Jones fails to acknowledge the significance of ... the author overlooks the fact that X contributes to Y. what Smith fails to do is to draw a distinction between ... Smith's paper would appear to be over ambitious in its claims. the main weakness of the study is the failure to address how ... another weakness is that we are given no explanation of how ... the research does not take into account pre-existing ... such as ... the study fails to consider the differing categories of damage that ... the author offers no explanation for the distinction between X and Y. Smith makes no attempt to differentiate between different types of X.
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Smith The book The paper	fails to does not makes no attempt to	specify ... quantify ... compare ... separate ... account for ... suggest why ... analyse how ... ascertain whether ... distinguish between ... explain the meaning of ... provide information on ... address the question of ... assess the effectiveness of ... use a standardised method of ... give sufficient consideration to ... consider the long term impact of ... offer an adequate explanation for ... engage with current discourses on ... determine the underlying causes of ... systematically review all the relevant literature.
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Offering constructive suggestions

The study would have been more interesting if it had included ...
These studies would have been more useful if they had focused on ...
The study would have been more relevant if the researchers had asked ...
The questionnaire would have been more useful if it had asked participants about ...
The research would have been more relevant if a wider range of X had been explored.

The study The findings Smith's paper Her conclusions	would have been might have been	more much more far more	useful original relevant convincing interesting persuasive	if he/she had if the author had
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used ...
adopted...
included ...
provided ...
considered ...

A more comprehensive study would include all the groups of ...
A better study would examine a large, randomly selected sample of societies with ...
A much more systematic approach would identify how X interacts with other variables that ...

Evaluating work positively

This article provides a valuable insight into ...
Overall, X's study is a powerful explanation of ...
Smith's research is valuable for our understanding of ...
The first major fieldwork project that was started in X was ...
In his seminal text, XXXXX, Smith devoted some attention to ...
One of the most influential accounts of X comes from Smith (1986) ...
Smith's synthesis remains one of the most comprehensive studies of ...
Smith makes an interesting contribution with regard to the impact of ...
In a well-designed and robust study, Smith (1998) examined data from ...
A good summary of the classification of X has been provided in the work of ...
The pioneering work of Smith remains crucial to our wider understanding of ...
The most comprehensive study of X during this period has been undertaken by ...
Smith, in his comprehensive two-volume biography of X, devoted a substantial section to ...
Smith's study is of great significance as it marks the first attempt to assess the broader impact of ...
A more substantial approach to the longer-term significance of X can be found in Smith's recent article in ...

Smith (1990)	offers provides presents	a useful a detailed an original an insightful an extensive an interesting a comprehensive a contemporary	analysis of ...
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In his In her In this	useful timely seminal detailed thorough excellent influential important innovative pioneering impressive wide-ranging comprehensive ground-breaking	study (of X), survey (of X), analysis (of X), examination (of X), investigation (into X),	Smith (2012) Jones (2014)	found ... concluded that ... was able to show ...
				argues that ... makes the case for ... provides a valuable ...

Smith's	seminal landmark thoughtful innovative pioneering influential informative fascinating wide-ranging comprehensive ground-breaking	study analysis	provides a valuable insight into ... makes a valuable contribution with regard to ... remains crucial to our wider understanding of ... is of great significance as it marks the first attempt to ...
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Introducing the critical responses of individual writers

Smith (2014) disputes this account of ...
Jones (2003) has also questioned why ...
However, Jones (2015) points out that ...
The author challenges the widely held view that ...
Smith (1999) takes issue with the contention that ...
The idea that ... was first challenged by Smith (1992).
Smith is critical of the tendency to compartmentalise X.
However, Smith (1967) questioned this hypothesis and ...
Smith (1980) broke with tradition by raising the question of ...
Jones (2003) has challenged some of Smith's conclusions, arguing that ...
Another major criticism of Smith's study, made by Jones (2003), is that ...
Jones (2003) is critical of the conclusions that Smith draws from his findings.
An alternative interpretation of the origins of X can be found in Smith (1976).
Jones (2003) is probably the best known critic of the X theory. He argues that ...
In her discussion of X, Smith further criticises the ways in which some authors ...
Smith's decision to reject the classical explanation of X merits some discussion ...
In a recent article in *Academic Journal*, Smith (2014) questions the extent to which ...
The latter point has been devastatingly critiqued by Jones (2003), who argues that ...
A recently published article by Smith *et al.* (2011) casts doubt on Jones' assumption that ...
Other authors (see Harbison, 2003; Kaplan, 2004) question the usefulness of such an approach.
Smith criticised Jones for his overly restrictive and selective definition of X which was limited to ...
Smith's analysis has been criticised by a number of writers. Jones (1993), for example, points out ...

Smith	criticises ... questions ... challenges ... is critical of ... casts doubt on ... points out that ... takes issue with... raises a number of questions about ...
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Introducing a section of text which has a critical purpose

The section below The section that follows	critically	assesses examines	the idea that ... the view that ... the claim that ... the quality of ... the concept of ... the role played by ... the argument that ... Smith's analysis of ... the effectiveness of ... the current approaches to ...
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