



LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



Critical Eye: Your Guide to Analysing and Appraising Sources

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Introduction

Welcome to this guide on analysing and appraising source material. As an undergraduate student, it is essential to critically assess the sources you use in your assignments. This guide will help you understand key concepts and provide practical strategies for engaging with your reading materials effectively.

Let's start by taking a look at the key verbs that might appear in your learning outcomes.

Analyse

To break down information into its component parts and examine them in detail to understand the relationships and influences between them.

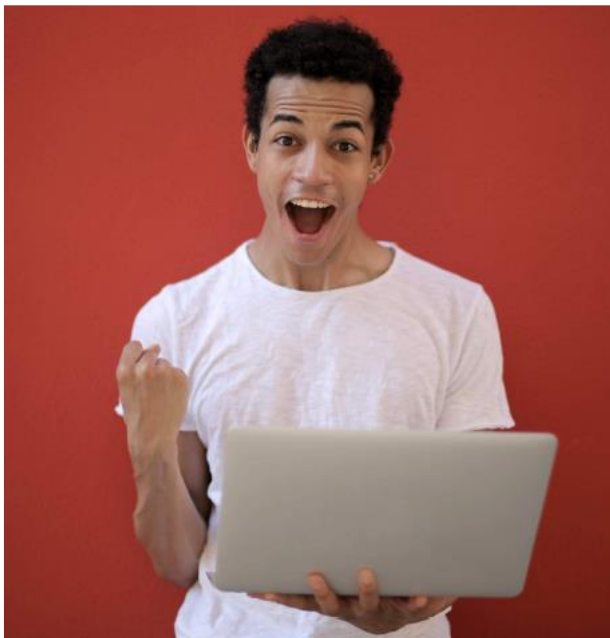
Appraise

To estimate the worth, quality, or significance of something, often by weighing up strengths and weaknesses.

Evaluate

To assess the value, significance, or quality of something based on criteria and standards.

How to Analyse Source Information



Imagine this...

Harry has decided to buy a new laptop for his studies. He has found one that he likes, it seems to have great features and it's advertised for a good price.

The sales assistant in the shop explains he is getting the "best" deal and "he won't find a better laptop available anywhere else!" But how does Harry know this information is

correct? Well, in short, he doesn't.

Before buying the laptop, Harry decides to go home and analyse whether the information he has been given is true. He starts by making a list of the questions he wants to know the answer to, including:

- **What** are the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of the laptop he wants to buy?
- **What** are the customer reviews like? Are there more **positive** than **negative reviews** or vice-versa?
- **How** does this laptop **compare** to similar models? E.g., battery life, size, cost, etc.

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- **How** will this laptop help him with his studies?
- **When** was the laptop released to the market?
- **When** is the laptop available for collection?
- **Why** does he want to buy it?
- **Why** does he need a new laptop?
- **Which** retailer is selling the laptop for the best price?
- **Which** retailer will offer student discount?

Finally, satisfied with the answers to his questions, he decides to appraise the information by asking questions, such as “are the sources reliable and trustworthy?” and “What is the value of the information I have looked at?”

On reflection, Harry realised that there were better laptops on the market for cheaper.

Just like Harry did, when you’re asked to appraise or analyse source material, it’s important to ask different evaluative questions.

How to Approach Your Decision



When you analyse or appraise information or data, you probably do most, if not all, of the following:

Evaluate different information and points of view to see which you agree with

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of information/data. This involves being objective and considering each thing from different perspectives ('on the one hand this is good, but on the other hand...')

Reflect and add in thoughts from your experiences (For example, reading through your lecture notes is good but works better when you include published source material)

Consider what evidence supports your point of view and base your decision on that

You can then present your argument or claim and support it with relevant, reliable and trustworthy evidence. For instance, if we revisit the laptop scenario, Harry could say:

"Arguably, the best laptop on the market is...because..."

"According to Best Laptops Magazine (2024), the best laptop on the market is..."

Analytical questions

What is the main argument or thesis of the source?

Identify the main point the author is trying to convey and evaluate how effectively they support it with evidence.

What evidence does the author use to support their argument?

Has the author used evidence to support their argument? Which evidence has the author used?

What are the key concepts, and how are they defined?

Look in the introduction or abstract for this information.

How did the author structure the information?

Has the author used a logical flow to present the information?

What methodologies are used? Are they appropriate?

How did the researchers get this information? E.g., interviews, questionnaires, etc. You will usually find this information in the first paragraph of the methodology section and the abstract.

Activity: Source Breakdown



1. Choose an article related to your current assignment
2. Break it down into its key components: thesis, evidence, concepts, structure and methodology
3. Write a short paragraph summarising your findings

Appraisal questions

Who is the author? What are their credentials?

- Are they an expert in their field?

Was their work peer-reviewed or published by a reputable organisation?

- Research the process of publication and who published the author's work.

What are their findings?

- Is their conclusion reasonable?

Are all claims valid?

- Did the author make unsupported claims?

How effective is the language used by the author?

- Has the author used hedging strategies to support their claim? E.g., The evidence appears to suggest...

Activity: Author Appraisal



Research the author's background and the publication context of your chosen source

Evaluate the credibility of the source based on this information

Evaluative questions

Are there any links?

- How does the source relate to other information you have read?
- Does the evidence support, contradict or challenge other information?
- Explore alternative viewpoints and assess their validity to the author's argument

Is the quality relevant?

- Scrutinise the quality and relevance of the evidence presented. Look for gaps or inconsistencies in the reasoning

Are there any underlying assumptions?

- Uncover the implicit assumptions guiding the author's perspective and consider how they influence the argument. Not all assumptions are explicit so you will need to read between the lines.

What is your position?

- Does your position differ from the argument in the source?
- How will you use the source in your assignment?

Do you need to consider anything else?

- Are there any aspects of the author's argument that need to be investigated further?

Activity: Compare and Contrast



1. Select two sources on the same topic
2. Compare and contrast their arguments, evidence, and overall quality
3. Write a comparative evaluation outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each source

To support you with this activity, please see the 'Critical Writing' [\[Link\]](#) tutorial in this section.

Other Forms of Questioning



Objectivity

What is the purpose of the source?

- Was the text written to persuade or inform?

Was the author commissioned by a different organisation?

- What steps were taken by the author to ensure objectivity?

Are the author's assumptions explicit?

- Does this undermine the argument the author is making

Timing

When was the source written or last updated?

- Is it contemporary or out-of-date?

What is the context?

- Consider the historical, cultural, and social context in which the text was written to better understand its significance and implications

Are you looking at a website?

- If so, does it look like it is being maintained?
- Do the hyperlinks still work?

Supporting evidence

Has the author cited and referenced their ideas?

- If so, what evidence was used?
- Did the author provide data/statistics to support their ideas?
- Is it original research?

Are the included references valid for their sources?

- Are the references accurate and will allow you to follow up to check the credibility?
- If it's an online source, does the link work?

Did the author quote?

- If so, did the author capture the quote correctly?

Relevance

Is the source relevant to your assignment?

- Does it support your ideas and is appropriate for your needs?

Pro's and Con's



Use your judgment

After you have analysed and appraised the source, ask yourself, “Am I confident it’s credible, reliable and relevant for my assignment?” Why?/Why not?

These questions aim to guide you through the description, analysis and evaluation phases of critical thinking. They will help you assess the importance and relevance of your reading to your assignments and how your reading connects to other information you have looked at.

While this is fairly comprehensive, you may be required to adapt or supplement these questions with your own tailored to your subject, assignment, or learning outcomes.

In addition to asking questions to analyse and appraise information, there are also different tools you can use. Let’s take a look at these.

Critical Appraisal Tools



In the exciting world of university study, critical appraisal tools are like trusty guides helping students navigate through the maze of information. These tools are like superhero capes, empowering students to separate the diamond from the rough when it comes to research papers and articles.

By using critical appraisal tools, students learn to ask the right questions: Is this source reliable? Is it relevant to my research? These tools can help students become savvy researchers themselves. So, whether you're writing an assignment, preparing for a presentation, or just curious about the latest findings, critical appraisal tools are your sidekick, helping you uncover the truth in the vast universe of knowledge.

The tools listed below may help you to identify different ways that error and bias can distort research results. Generally speaking, these tools have a core set of questions that assess the risk of bias, together with other questions that address accuracy and viability. Please note that these tools have not been externally verified.

Systematic reviews

[Cochrane Training](#)

[JBI Critical Appraisal Tools](#)

[Critical Appraisal Skills programme \(CASP\)](#)

Observational studies

[ROBINS-I Tool](#)

Risk Of Bias In Non-randomized Studies - of Interventions

[CASP Checklists](#)

Critical Appraisal Checklists

[JBI Critical Appraisal tools](#)

[National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](#)

Case study

[JBI Critical Appraisal Tools](#)

[National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](#)

Standard Quality Assessment Tools

Qualitative review

[CASP Checklists](#)

[JBI Critical Appraisal Tools](#)

Economic evaluation

[CASP Checklists](#)

[JBI Critical Appraisal Tools](#)

[NICE Guidelines](#)

Developing NICE guidelines: the manual.

Establishing study type

[NICE Guidelines](#)

Appendix E. Algorithm for classifying quantitative (experimental and observational) study designs.

[National Library of Medicine](#)

Developing and Testing a Tool for the Classification of Study Designs in Systematic Reviews of Interventions and Exposures.

Summary

Analysing: Involves breaking down information to understand its components and their relationships.

Appraising: Involves judging the overall quality and significance of a source.

Evaluating: Assesses the value and relevance of a source based on specific criteria

By systematically analysing, evaluating, and appraising your sources, you can enhance the quality and credibility of your academic work. Use the strategies and activities in this tutorial to develop your critical thinking and ensure you are using the best possible sources for your assignments.