

A brief guide to evaluating research articles

Understanding how to evaluate a research article is an important aspect of digesting literature on psychotherapeutic research. Here is a brief overview of how to assess an article.

1. Identify the main research questions

First, identify what the research article is investigating. A quality research article should clearly state what primary research questions they are examining and why these questions are relevant and important.

2. Determine the type of research

Identifying what type of research is being conducted is vital. Whether the research is qualitative or quantitative will inform how to evaluate its methodological process.

Quantitative research consists of numerical data, while qualitative research is concerned with people- and experience-based information. Mixed-methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative data. Whatever the method(s) used, they should be fully explained and justified. More information on research methods can be found in [this downloadable guide](#) produced by the International NGO Training and Research Centre.

3. Background

The article should include a review of existing literature on the topic in the introduction/background section. It should identify a gap in the research currently available, along with an explanation of how the study fills this gap.

4. Methods and results

In addition to the quantitative/qualitative methods discussed above, the analysis used and participant data should be detailed. Examine whether or not the method of analysis is clearly explained and whether the results make sense based on the process described in the methods section. Tables and figures should be clear and understandable.

5. Discussion and limitations

Check whether the limitations of the study were accurately detailed and addressed. The significance of the findings and generalisability of the study should also be discussed. Sources of potential bias should be

explained and accounted for. You should also identify whether conflicts of interest and funding sources were accurately identified. The conclusions should be appropriately based on the findings. Finally, the reference list should be complete, and citations should be used throughout to demonstrate how the research connects to the overarching literature on the topic.

Additional resources

- [BMJ: How to read a paper](#)
- [National Library of Medicine: Critical appraisal of clinical research](#)
- Pyrczak, F and Tcherni-Buzzeo, M. [Evaluating research in academic journals: a practical guide to realistic evaluation](#).
- [University College London: Critical appraisal of a journal article](#)
- [University of Bath: How to evaluate journal articles and websites](#)
- [University of South Australia: Critical appraisal tools](#)

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