




Graduate Research Advanced Skills Program (GRASP)

Research Writing Series

2/7

Being critical in research writing

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I acknowledge the Whadjuk Nyungar as the Custodians of the land on which I live and work. This Country was never ceded, it always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

I pay my respects to Whadjuk Nyungar Elders past and present. I value their ancestral and continuing caring for Country practices and thank them for looking after this Country for so long.

I appreciate Indigenous ways of communication which are inclusive and respectful, and I recognise that this Country has been a place of teaching, research and learning for tens of thousands of years.

Dimensions of academic writing

Argument

The process of supporting one main, contestable claim, with other claims using reasoning and evidence.

Critique

The systematic application of doubt in order to arrive at a balanced evaluation.

Analysis

Breaking things down into parts, looking for relations between these parts in order to make meaning.

What is critique?

Immanuel Kant

We deal with a concept **dogmatically**...if we think about it as being already contained under another concept which is already given and known.

However, we deal with a concept **critically**, if we think about it only in relation to our own cognitive faculties and the subjective conditions of thinking it, before making any firm judgements about it.

(A paraphrase from Section 74 of The Critique of Judgement (1790;2005, p.181))

Application of Kant's approach

Dogmatically

Over the last two hundred years, industrial development has been disastrous for the natural environment.

Human-induced climate change over the last century provides clear evidence of this destruction.

Application of Kant's approach

Critically

- What evidence is there that industrial development has been disastrous for the environment?
- What evidence is there that climate change over the last 100 years is, in fact, human-induced?
- Whose evidence do I trust? Why do I trust it?
- How do I define *climate change* and *human-induced*?
- How do my ideological/political/cultural prejudices influence my views on the topic?
- How did I arrive at these views? What empirical evidence and theoretical constructs did I apply?
- ...

Application of Kant's approach

Dogmatically

If you consciously uncouple from your partner, you will be able to have an amiable divorce that will not greatly affect your children.

Critically?

What is critique?

Following Kant's approach we should be critiquing at three levels:

- Critique of an object (material, ideal or conceptual) already established as given or *true*.
- Critique of the thinking of others about this object.
- Critique of our own subjective thinking the object. This is a kind of meta-critique or critique of critique.

Objects of critique in research

- Scope of the research
- Significance of the research
- Research question/thesis statement/central claims

- Methodological design (ontology/epistemology/conceptual framework)
- Methods/tools/instruments
- Data collection and analysis
- Interpretation and discussion of findings

- Written analysis/critique/argument
- Argument: logical structure, coherence
- Style/clarity of expression
- Claims/stated and unstated assumptions

Assessing quality of information

Authenticity

Trustworthiness of the source

Merit

Knowledge and competence of author

Validity

Soundness of evidence in quantitative research

Credibility

Believability of evidence in qualitative research

Legitimation

Trustworthiness of evidence in mixed research

Rigorous research practices

...adheres to standards accepted in the field

(Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016, 164-168)

The language of critique

- Scholarly, balanced
 - Concessional, not excessively negative
 - Recognise own limitations
 - Anticipate possibility of objections or counter claims.
- ✓ Tip: University of Manchester Academic Phrasebank: Being critical:
<https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/being-critical/>

More resources

✓ [Curtin Library critical thinking guide](#)

✓ [Project Implicit](#)

✓ [ABC \(RMIT\) Fact checker](#)

(Misleading, doubtful, flawed, overstated, exaggerated, not the full story, drawing a long bow, in the ballpark, close to the mark, fair call...)

✓ [Online Critical thinking tutorial by Lau & Chan](#)

✓ [Cognitive Biases poster](#) (Richardson, 2020)

✓ [Logical Fallacies poster](#) (Richardson, 2020)

Example critique

- *...Goodwin et al (2000) conducted a study about X*
- *This research aimed to provide further evidence as to why X is...*
- *The study reveals that X...*
- *The result agreed with other authors who found that X...*
- *However the results of the other dimensions provided less clear as ...*
- *To the extent that this research is exploratory, results of this study provide insights into X.*
- *However, several limitations must be considered in interpreting the study findings.*
- *In summary, it has to be admitted that the current study is still far from being conclusive.*
- *Further studies must be undertaken, better measures must be developed, and larger samples must be used to improve our understanding of X.*

<https://student.unsw.edu.au/sample-extracts>

Example critique

...Goodwin et al (2000) conducted a study on the influence of culture on ethical decision making between two groups of accountants from Australia and Singapore. This research aimed to provide further evidence on the effect of cultural differences since results from previous research have been equivocal. The study reveals that accountants from the two countries responded differently to ethical dilemmas in particular when the responses were measured using two of the five cultural dimensions. The result agreed with the prediction since considerable differences existed between these two dimensions in Australians and Singaporeans (Hofstede 1980, 1991). However the results of the other dimensions provided less clear relationships as the two cultural groups differed only slightly on the dimensions. To the extent that this research is exploratory, results of this study provide insights into the importance of recognising cultural differences for firms and companies that operate in international settings. However, several limitations must be considered in interpreting the study findings.

...

[8] In summary, it has to be admitted that the current study is [9] still far from being conclusive. [10] Further studies must be undertaken, better measures must be developed, and larger samples must be used to improve our understanding concerning the exact relationship between culture and decision making.[11] Despite some deficiencies in methodology,[12] to the extent that this research is exploratory i.e. trying to investigate an emerging issue, the study has provided some insights to account for culture in developing ethical standards across national borders.

Questions

GRASP webpage

<https://libguides.library.curtin.edu.au/grasp>

Help

libraryhelp@curtin.edu.au

Feedback (Stop – Start – Continue)

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1t7roPInys2xK_0zY69ivY9s09ZNs2iY_byLVdCSKD7M/edit?usp=sharing

References

Kant, Immanuel. 1790/2005. *Critique of judgement*. New York: Dover Philosophical Classics.

Onwuegbuzie, Anthony and Rebecca Frels, R. 2016. *Seven steps to a comprehensive literature review*. Los Angeles: Sage.

'Writing a critical review'. 2018. Accessed 3rd April 2018 <https://student.unsw.edu.au/sample-extracts>

'Confirmation Bias'. Richardson, J, 2020. Accessed 9th May 2022: <https://yourbias.is/>