Academic Skills and Development

Quick guide to

Critically Evaluating Literature

Once you have carried out your literature search, you need to engage with the literature you have found. This means deciding what information you will include or exclude in your piece of work. Critically evaluating the literature will help you decide on the quality, relevancy and currency of the information.

Remember, always follow the assessment and module guidelines on what type of information to include/exclude, for example, does it need to be within a date range.

# Why do you need to evaluate literature?

With the large amounts of information available, you should make sure that your work relies upon high quality sources. This information could come from a range of sources such as journal articles, books or websites, including social media if appropriate.

Evaluating the literature, your choice of information will help to ensure that the evidence you use to support your arguments is appropriate and reliable. For example, using an article which has no date means it is difficult to decide if the information is up-to-date.

# How to critically evaluate literature

Various models are available to help you evaluate literature and your department may recommend a specific one.

# You may wish to look at:

* PROMPT (from the Open University)
* Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) which is primarily used in health sciences.

These models provide reminders of what to consider when reviewing information.

Generally, using the following questions will help you to evaluate the literature and decide whether to include it in your work:

# Who? – What? – When? - Where? – How? – Why?

**Who? – What? – When? - Where? – How? – Why?**

**Who** has put the information online?

**Who** is the intended audience e.g. school/university?

**What** is the information/article about?

**What** is the purpose of the document? e.g. expressing an opinion or describing research

**Where** have you found this information? e.g. social media, website, journal article

**When** was the information written?

**How** is the information presented? e.g. do all the web-page links work?

**How** has the research been carried out and are the methods credible?

**Why** are you including the information in your work?

**How** does it relate to other research?

**What** does it add to your argument?

**How** can you demonstrate evaluation of literature?

You can demonstrate in your work how you have critically evaluated literature. For example, you might write something like:

Maltby (1999) claims that dentistry is the healthcare procedure most likely to induce feelings of anxiety in adults. Maltby’s findings are based on a large cohort study, but the research may now be considered too outdated to be useful in the present day. More recent research carried out by Jones (2016) suggests that 30% of adults feel anxious about going to the dentist. However, researchers only interviewed a small group, all who live in London, so the findings may not be applicable to the wider population.

# Other SPLASH guides which may help:

*Literature searching Critical thinking Academic writing*

Further advice and larger text guides can be found online: [www.surrey.ac.uk/splash](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/splash)

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