



Critical Proposal Coursework Brief

Write an 1,800 word critical evaluation on an empirical paper from a Psychology Journal within your chosen field of research, including critical reflection of how you and your group might improve upon it, and/or build on its strengths

70% of your mark will depend on the quality of your critical assessment, 30% will depend on your suggestions for how your individual and group efforts in the Mini-Dissertation might improve research in this area. See Rubric for more detail.

- ☐ We stop marking at 1,800 words. No penalty for going over, but the words you use after 1,800 words cannot win you marks
- ☐ Worth 15% of your module grade for PS52007D (30 Credits)
- ☐ Your reference list does not count towards the word count
- ☐ You must use the **Critical Proposal Coversheet** and use ONLY your 8 digit Student ID in the filename
- ☐ You must focus on an empirical article (i.e. an article that reports the collection of quantitative data) from a Psychology Journal. You are perfectly permitted (encouraged!) to confirm the suitability of your paper with your Lab Tutor!
- ☐ You **MUST** provide a full APA reference to your chosen paper at the top of your essay.
- ☐ You **MUST** include a copy of the Experimental Design Schematic with information on at least one IV (name and factor levels) and an effect size developed from the paper (see week 3 lab materials)
- ☐ Although lab groups are collaborative, this must be your **individual work** and collusion or plagiarism may result in a penalty or misconduct review.
An AI declaration (regardless of whether you used AI or not) is compulsory.

Learning outcomes:

- ☐ To encourage a deeper and more rigorous approach to reading published research
- ☐ Appraise the process of psychological research and assess the merits of particular studies
- ☐ Assess the reporting of research in published sources
- ☐ Critically reflect on how research practices may be improved, or strengths built upon, and the possible value of research increased in your forthcoming Mini-Dissertation

Your work should be in an essay format with introduction and critical reflection/conclusion. It **should not** have sub-headings within the text but you are recommended to cover all of the general areas presented below, but with focus on the most important aspects thereof.

**The deadline for handing in your Critical Proposal is:
Friday, 3rd November 2023, before 10am**

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

Summary - Provide a summary of the article in 150-200 words in which you capture the essentials of what was done.

- (a) What is the research domain and core question?
- (b) What is the method?
- (c) What is the outcome?
- (d) Were there significant flaws or limitations in the study?

Research Question – Do the authors link their experiment to wider issues and theories in psychology? What question is the paper trying to answer? Is the hypothesis clear? Is it well argued?

Method - Is it clear and unambiguous? Could another (better) method have been used? Could you carry out a replication from this report? Is the design the most efficient for the purpose? Have broad theoretical constructs been well operationalised into specific variables?

Outcome - Is the Results section clear? Is the analysis unambiguous? Are all analysis and statistical choices appropriate? Did the experimenter answer the question?

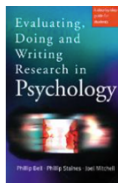
Experimental Design Schematic – You are required to complete details of one IV and an effect size (drawn from the target paper) at least!

Discussion – Are the inferences from the results justified? Well-argued? Do they advance our knowledge? What further questions are raised by the results? What experiments might be done to answer them?

Suggested improvements – Which aspects of the research project could be improved? Is there a better research design? Are there extraneous or confounding variables? How would you remove them? Could the results be more clearly analysed and presented? Think also about which aspects of the paper itself could be improved. Were the hypotheses clearly reported and well-justified? Would you have displayed information different (e.g., in figures or graphs)?

Your Critical Reflection and Conclusion – What was the key strengths and/or weaknesses of the paper? Did you find the paper clear? Do you think it provides a persuasive answer to the research question set out, or are there important limitations that limit its overall usefulness? How will your Mini-Dissertation improve of the research presented? Why is it important that YOU do this research? How will you implement 'Best Practice' in the Mini-Dissertation? Aspects of your learning or development as a learner – what has this exercise taught you, and how has it developed your metacognitive abilities?

Useful readings available online in the library reading list:



Bell, P., Staines, P. & Mitchell, J. (2001). *Evaluating, doing and writing research in psychology*. London: Sage

Chapters 5 & 6



Haslam, A. & McGrarty, C (2014). *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology*. London: Sage

Checklists on pp: 29-30, 61, 92-94 e.g.

Objective and ideals: A checklist for research evaluation and improvement

Table 2.2

Potential problem	Question to ask	Potential improvement
Empirical weakness	Do researchers have sufficient empirical evidence to back up their claims about particular psychological processes or states?	Consider carefully the relationship between the claims that researchers make and the empirical evidence they use to back up those claims. In particular, try to identify empirical gaps and to consider assumptions that are implicit in the arguments presented. Where gaps exist, or assumptions appear questionable, consider conducting empirical research that clarifies matters and advances understanding of the relevant processes and states. The decision to conduct this research should be tempered by the importance of any problems you identify and of the research question as a whole.
Theoretical weakness	Have researchers integrated their empirical findings within a sufficiently broad and sufficiently plausible explanatory	Consider how well researchers have succeeded in reconciling the range of empirical findings on a given topic and whether any integrated analysis they provide allows predictions to be made which extend beyond existing empirical work. Where necessary, seek to develop an appropriate theory that performs these functions and