Template: Critical analysis of a text

# Text (reference details)

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**1. What review question am I asking of this text?**

(e.g. What is my central question? Why select this text? Does the Critical Analysis of this text fit into my investigation with a wider focus? What is my constructive purpose in undertaking a Critical Analysis of this text?)

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**2. How and why are the authors making this contribution?**

a. What type of literature is this (e.g. Theoretical, research, practice, policy? Are there links with other types of literature?)

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b. How clear is it which intellectual project the authors are undertaking? (e.g. Knowledge-for-understanding, knowledge-for-critical evaluation, knowledge-for-action, training?)

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c. How is the intellectual project reflected in the authors’ mode of working? (e.g. A social science or a practical orientation? Choice of methodology and methods? An interest in understanding or in improving practice?)

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d. What value stance is adopted towards the practice or policy investigated? (e.g. Relatively impartial, critical, positive, unclear? What assumptions are made about the possibility of improvement? Whose practice or policy is the focus of interest?)

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e. How does the sort of intellectual project being undertaken affect the research questions addressed? (e.g. Investigation of what happens? What is wrong? How well a particular policy or intervention works in practice?)

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f. How does the sort of intellectual project being undertaken affect the place of theory? (e.g. Is the investigation informed by theory? Generating theory? Atheoretical? Developing social science theory or a practical theory?)

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g. How does the authors’ target audience affect the reporting of research? (e.g. Do the authors assume academic knowledge of methods? Criticize policy? Offer recommendations for action?)

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**3. What is being claimed that is relevant to answering my review question?**

a. What are the main kinds of knowledge claim that the authors are making? (e.g. Theoretical knowledge, research knowledge, practice knowledge?)

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b. Excluding aspects that are obviously not relevant to the review question, what is the content of each of the main claims to knowledge and of the overall argument? (e.g. What, in a sentence, is being argued? What are the three to five most significant claims that encompass much of the relevant detail? Are there key prescriptions for improving policy or practice?)

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c. How clear are the authors’ claims and overall argument? (e.g. Stated in an abstract, introduction or conclusion? Unclear?)

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d. How consistent are the authors’ claims with each other? (e.g. Do all claims fit together in supporting an argument? Do any claims contradict each other?)

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**4. How certain and generalized are the authors’ claims?**

a. With what degree of certainty do the authors make their claims? (e.g. Do they indicate tentativeness? Qualify their claims by acknowledging limitations of their evidence? Acknowledge others’ counter-evidence? Acknowledge that the situation may have changed since data collection?)

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b. How generalized are the authors’ claims – to what range of phenomena are they claimed to apply? (e.g. The specific context from which the claims were derived? Other similar contexts? A national system? A culture? Universal? Is the degree of generalization implicit? Unspecified?)

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**5. How adequate is the backing for these claims?**

a. How transparent are any sources used to back the claims? (e.g. Is there any statement of the basis for assertions? Are sources adequately specified?)

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b. What, if any, range of sources is used to back the claims? (e.g. First-hand experience? The authors’ own practice knowledge or research? Literature about others’ practice knowledge or research? Literature about reviews of practice knowledge or research? Literature about others’ polemic? Is the range of sources adequate?)

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c. If claims are at least partly based on the authors’ own research, how robust is the evidence? (e.g. Are there methodological limitations or flaws in the methods employed? Do the methods include the cross-checking or ‘triangulation’ of accounts? What is the sample size and is it large enough to support the claims being made? Is there an adequately detailed account of data collection and analysis? Is there a summary of all data that is reported?)

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d. Are sources of backing for claims consistent with the degree of certainty and the degree of generalization? (e.g. Is there sufficient evidence to support claims made with a high degree of certainty? Is there sufficient evidence from other contexts to support claims entailing extensive generalization?)

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**6. How effectively does any theoretical orientation link with these claims?**

a. How explicit are the authors about any theoretical orientation or conceptual framework? (e.g. Is there a conceptual framework guiding the data collection? Is a conceptual framework selected after the data collection to guide analysis? Is there a largely implicit theoretical orientation?)

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b. What assumptions does any explicit or implicit theoretical orientation make that may affect the authors’ claims? (e.g. Does a particular perspective focus attention on some aspects and under-emphasize others? If more than one perspective is used, how coherently do the different perspectives relate to each other?)

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c. What are the key concepts underpinning any explicit or implicit theoretical orientation? (e.g. Are they listed? Are they stipulatively defined? Are concepts mutually compatible? Is the use of concepts consistent? Is the use of concepts congruent with others’ use of the same concepts?)

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d. How convincing are any diagrams presenting relationships between concepts? (e.g. Is the relationship between components clear? Are links hierarchical? Causal? Sequential? Is the purpose and direction of arrows convincing?)

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e. Do the authors justify their choice of theoretical orientation and if so, how? (e.g. Reference to empirical evidence suggesting that the theorization captures an important feature of the phenomenon? Reference to landmark texts adopting this orientation?)

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**7. To what extent does any value stance adopted affect claims?**

a. How explicit are the authors about any value stance connected with the phenomena? (e.g. A relatively impartial, critical or positive stance? Is this stance informed by a particular ideology? Is it adopted before or after data collection?)

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b. How might any explicit or implicit value stance adopted by the authors be affecting their claims? (e.g. Have they pre-judged the phenomena discussed? Are they biased? Is it legitimate for the authors to adopt their particular value stance? Have they over-emphasized some aspects of the phenomenon while under-emphasizing others?)

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**8. To what extent are claims supported or challenged by others’ work?**

a. Do the authors relate their claims to others’ work? (e.g. Do the authors refer to others’ published evidence, theoretical orientations or value stances to support their claims? Do they acknowledge others’ counter-evidence?)

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b. If the authors use evidence from others’ work to support their claims, how robust is it? (e.g. As for 5(c).)

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c. Is there any evidence from others’ work (including work you know, but the authors do not mention) that challenges the authors’ claims and, if so, how robust is it? (e.g. Is there relevant research or practice literature? Check any as for 5(c).)

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**9. To what extent are claims consistent with my experience?**

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**10. What is my summary evaluation of the text in relation to my review question?**

a. How convincing are the authors’ claims and why?

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b. How, if at all, could the authors have provided stronger backing for their claims?

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