
CRITICAL APPRAISAL**Thamer A Hamdan**

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As a university staff, we have to learn how to write and how to read a scientific work, because the presentation of the ideas carries as much as the ideas themselves or may even spoil the ideas. So, we can't keep ourselves away from critical appraisal. It is a vital part of our job. We have to digest it very well. By critical appraisal we can help in creating very good university staff. Good publications can lead to academic promotion and failure to publish lead to academic stagnation.

By learning the art of critical appraisal, we can analyze and differentiate between good and bad writing. This is not an easy job as expected but on the contrary it needs experience and justice. The target is the work rather than the writer.

Avoiding personal element is a must; otherwise we can't achieve the scientific goal. Probably it is a good idea to appraise without knowing the name of the writer.

Before we start reading the scientific work, we have to think of finding answers for the followings: Why this work was done? How it was done? What has it found? What is its implication? And is it of interest? After that we have to look seriously for the layout of the work, the sequence of the content, how close to the standards of scientific work, was the content defined as it should be, i.e. was the discussion as supposed to be.

Considerable part of the content should belong to the author and the least was quoted from books and journals.

The author must follow the specific instructions for authors given by the specific journal before he submits his work. Justifying the pattern of work is a necessity; this can only be achieved by considering the subsequent points and answering the following questions: Was the aim clearly stated? Was the sample size justified? Was the statistical methods described? Were important effects overlooked? How do the results compare with the previous report? Was there any fatal mistakes? Was the data collected in a proper way? How was it analyzed? How was the control group chosen? How useful it was? And what was the outcome?.

After extensive probing of the article, we have to look for the work related outcome and writing related outcome. No doubt, a double blind study comes on the top in regard to the results of any scientific work.

Sadly, some authors draw the final result as he thinks or as he feels irrespective of the work related results. Moreover, sometimes he gives conclusion not based on the work.

We have to be sure that the result is not company related, i.e. commercialization of the scientific work.

Probably the most vital point in critical appraisal is to look for the honesty of the work and to be pretty sure there was no element of fraud in any part of the work. This can be discovered easily by the experienced editor, if the contents of the table is not identical to the text, which way suggest dishonesty (fabrication).

After very careful answering of the questions above, we are in a position to say whether it is a good or bad work.

A solid ground is mandatory before making the final decision which is either acceptance sometimes or rejection of the publication. This should depend on objective measures to merit the score.

Finally, writing is a skill like any game, some persons are naturally good at, most are not, but all can improve with practice especially if guided by proper instructions.

The more readily an inspiring author can recognize the bad, the more readily he can improve his own writing. He should become sensitized to certain major faults, so that when he encounters them they will engender acute discomfort.