

Critical Reading Protocol for Studies about Interventions

Directions: Review the study with a highlighter in hand to note interesting and/or relevant information. As you answer the questions below, please also note any questions the study raises or any other information you might need to know.

1. Authorship: Who is the author? Is it the vendor or a third party? Who funded the study? Is there an obvious bias?

Tip: Third party studies often find lower impacts than studies done by the vendor. It is also important to critically read reports or stories about studies.

2. Sample: How closely do the participants in the study mirror your population?

Tip: The more closely the characteristics of the participants in the study resemble the characteristics of your districts, schools, teachers, and students, the more likely it is that the study's findings will be similar for your group.

3. Research design: What kind of design did the researchers use? Is there anything unclear or potentially problematic about the design?

Tip: If you want to know about the impact of a program, well-designed quasi-experimental and experimental studies or meta-analyses are the best. (Look at Types of Research Methods Handout.) When looking at quasi-experimental and experimental studies, it is very important to look at the characteristics of the two groups being compared to see if they differ in any way.

4. Results: What kinds of outcomes were measured? On which measures did they find statistical significance? Are the results practically significant? If you were going to implement this, what kind of outcomes can you reasonably expect?

Tip: You want to see statistically significant results on the program outcomes. Practical significance involves looking at actual mean differences between the two groups and determining if implementing the intervention is worth your time and effort.

5. Implementation: What information is provided about implementation? Does the study connect implementation to the results in any way?

Tip: The outcomes of all interventions depend on how well they have been implemented. You will want to pay special attention to any aspects of implementation that are associated with more or less positive results.