

The Good, The Bad, and The (Not So) Good: Assessing study quality in the age of COVID-19

Gauging study quality is essential in critical appraisal, a key step in evidence based practice. But in this environment of emerging and often conflicting research, it can be challenging. These tips can help you quickly assess a study's quality and determine if it can be relied on in practice. Ask a librarian if you need further help.

- **Read past the headlines:** News reports and synthesized sources (e.g., Medscape) are not the end all. Read the original study before relying on the headline.
- **View the whole study:** Don't just read the abstract. Focus on the study methodology and results sections, as those will provide the best clues on how the study was conducted and its findings.
- **Know the limitations:** Most studies have a limitations section or at least some mention of potential issues in study design, sample size, methodology, etc. Be skeptical if no limitations are noted.
- **Look for the obvious:** Are the authors from reputable and known institutions? Is the journal well-known in its field? Is the study funding revealed, and if so, is the study funded by commercial interests (e.g., a drug company)? Take a look before deciding whether to fully trust a study and its results.
- **Visit the (evidence) pyramid:** Know where the study sits on the evidence pyramid, particularly when comparing studies. Rapid reviews and other less rigorous designs may be the best currently available, but randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and systematic reviews still remain best evidence.
- **Understand peer review:** Pre-prints (accepted for publication but pending peer review) may be hot right now, but are not peer reviewed. The peer review process is important in vetting studies and determining if they contain significant errors. Keep this in mind before relying on reported results.

For assistance, please send your request via the [INEx Portal](#):



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