

Aims and Conclusions

You need to consider what the researchers were trying to find out. In experimental studies the researchers are usually trying to test the effect of one variable on another.

You also need to consider what conclusion could be drawn from the findings. A conclusion should refer back to the aim (so, did the study demonstrate that something had an effect on something else?) A conclusion might also suggest why the effect occurred (if there was one).

A common error in drawing conclusions is simply restating the results. One way of avoiding this error is to remember that the results are about how the sample behaved, whereas the conclusions is always a more general statement about the target population of the study.

External Validity

You need to consider whether the results of the study generalise beyond the research situation.

You can comment on the setting in which the study took place (ecological validity) and the sample of participants who took part (sampling validity).

A common error in judging external validity is to make overly bold statements that don't consider the context of the study. For example, criticising the use of students as participants when the study's target population was students; or criticising the use of a laboratory when the behaviour being tested is unlikely to be affected by the setting.

Internal Validity

You need to consider whether the researchers were measuring what they intended to measure.

You need to focus on how effectively the researchers removed unwanted influences on the PPs' behaviour. You also need to consider how well the behaviour measured by the researchers represents the psychological process they were trying to study (for example, PPs may not actually say what they are thinking when asked questions by researchers).

A common error in judging internal validity not considering the full range of possible influences on the PPs behaviour and simply accepting the researchers' conclusions at face value.

Implications

You need to consider what the results of a study might imply about real world behaviour or problems.

You could focus on how a particular finding allows us to explain a related phenomenon in the real world. You might be able to identify how a finding leads to advice that might be useful to people attempting a certain activity or doing a particular job.

A common error in considering implications is assuming that just because a study used a particular type of stimulus or setting, it has nothing to say about real world thinking and behaviour. Identifying the implications of a study can be easier if you approach it as a creative task and try not to 'censor' your ideas.