

Section 6 – Evaluation

The **evaluation** section of the Independent Investigation is the researcher's chance to reflect purposefully on both the validity of the study and its limitations. Each stage of the investigation should be covered, from the choice of research questions to the analysis methods you have deployed. The limitations of your data collection methods are likely to form the main part of the evaluation but assessing your use of certain data presentation methods over others is just as important.

It is wrong to think that by highlighting the problems with your research, you are somehow admitting that you made mistakes and will be marked down for it. In fact, the opposite is true: most research, even at the highest academic level is imperfect. Not admitting that your study has limitations is naïve: the marker of your study will be looking to see that you recognise these problems and have tried to either resolve them or reduce their impact.

With the evaluation section appearing at the end of the study it can be tempting for students to quickly note down some possible improvements and declare the section complete, simply for wishing to finish the investigation and hand it in. However, it is worth spending some quality time on this section as it is relatively easy to gain marks in this section compared to others. Writing a **research diary** throughout the study can prove especially useful in the evaluation stage. Reading back through your field notes, your observations on your methodologies and ways that you tried to do things and failed, can provide lots of evaluative points that you might otherwise have forgotten.

Broadly, the evaluation of the different sections of the study should cover three main areas:

- The **reliability** of the study. This involves an analysis of how accurate your study is in setting out what it intended to do. You will have to look at the precision of your data collection methods, the accuracy of the way you have presented data and the significance of your results in the data analysis section.
- The **validity** of the study. This involves standing back from your study as a whole and thinking about whether it was a sound decision to study the whole of your chosen phenomena in the way you have. You might want to comment here on the level to which your study has contributed to geographical thinking.
- The **limitations** of the study. Your study was invariably limited by time, resources, location and personnel. Comment on how these made a difference to your study and how these limitations affected the possible conclusions you were able to make.

Whilst commenting on these areas, it is also worth considering the **improvements** you could make to your study. You may want to write about what you would have done differently had you had more time or different resources, as well as how you could **extend the study** and what logically you could do next if you were to continue researching. It is common practice to think about repeating the investigation at a different time of the year, or in a different location. You should also explain why you believe this might be useful and draw on the wider context of your investigation established through your reading and research.

Key words to use during an evaluation:

ethics strengths reliability
bias validity precision
accuracy misuse
limitation subjectivity human
weaknesses stakeholder error

Don't forget to also comment on the **strengths** of your work, as well as how you avoided pitfalls and potential problems.

The reader and marker of your study will expect to see that you have considered the potential **ethical problems** associated with carrying out your research. The evaluation is a good place to include this if you have not done so in earlier sections. This means you think about the ethical impact you, as a researcher, have had on people and the environment within your study, as well as the impact ethically that your study and the nature of your research has had more broadly.

Common Pitfalls:

- **Pretending that everything in your study is perfect.** No piece of research is without its flaws – be honest about what you would change and the inherent problems of researching your chosen topic.
 - **Only focusing on the limitations of the data collection methods.** The whole of your study should come under analysis in this section, and even the wording of your research questions should be evaluated.
 - **Having a fairly weak level of reflection.** Simply saying that questionnaire results were subject to human bias, that your sample size wasn't big enough or particular circumstances limited your access to alternative sites or wider data collection is not enough for the reader to be convinced that you have really thought deeply about your evaluation.
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