

How to Read a Clinical Paper: Checklist

Points to consider when determining whether the findings of a clinical paper are reliable and valid.

CHECKLIST	COMMENTS
OVERALL	
Why was the study done? Has an appropriate literature review been completed?	
What type of study was done (e.g. primary/secondary research)?	
Was the study design appropriate to the field of research addressed (e.g. therapy, diagnosis, prognosis)?	
METHODS	
Study subjects, sample size, controls – are these appropriate?	
Were sample sizes and controls adequate?	
Statistical tests – are they appropriate and will analysis generate meaningful data?	
RESULTS	
Have comparable groups been determined?	
Have 'p values' been calculated and interpreted properly?	
Have the results been presented clearly?	
DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS	
Did the review address an important clinical question?	
Was the methodology adequately assessed?	
Have the authors related the results to the likely harm or benefit of the individual patient?	
Were there any limitations to the study and if so, how did they affect the outcome?	
Did the author make the appropriate conclusions based on the results?	

Checklist for a systematic review or meta-analysis.

CHECKLIST	COMMENTS
Did the review address an important clinical question?	
Was the database/literature review utilised fully and were other potentially important sources determined?	
Was the methodology quality assessed and the trials weighted accordingly?	
Are the results a reliable indication to the way the study was done?	
Have the results been interpreted correctly and do they address the aim of the study?	
Have the appropriate conclusions been made based on the results?	

Checklist for a qualitative research paper.

CHECKLIST	COMMENTS
Did the review address an important clinical question?	
Was a qualitative approach appropriate?	
On what basis were the a) setting and b) subjects chosen?	
Of what interest was this to the researcher and has this been taken into account?	
What analysis was carried out and what quality controls were implemented?	
Are the results credible and if so, clinically relevant?	
Were the appropriate conclusions taken based on the results?	
Can the findings of this study be related to other clinical settings?	

If you wish to find out more about how to read a paper, please refer to:

Trisha Greenhalgh (2010). How to Read a Paper: The Basics of Evidence-based Medicine. 4th Edition. West Sussex. John Wiley & Sons.