

ACE Quick Guide to Relating Theory to Practice

Theory and Practice

Theory	Allows specific issues, situations, or experiences to be classified in terms of a broader underlying framework , model or set of principles. This in turn may prompt new insights into the specific case.
Practice	Often refers to professional or academic experiences , but other aspects of personal experience may also be relevant.

Academic assignments often require **connections** to be made between theory and practice. Commonly, the focus will be on **using theory to justify** or better **understand practice**. Alternatively, practical experience may be used to comment on the **strengths and limitations** of a particular theory.

When Relating Theory to Practice...



Demonstrate clear links between your experiences and the theories, models and concepts studied on the course.



Indicate how your practical experiences assist you in understanding these theories, models, and concepts.



Explore whether your observations are consistent with what the theories and models suggest. Does your experience challenge or negate these concepts?



Analyse the discrepancy between theory and practice if your experience is quite different. Why does your practice contradict established theory? What does this mean in a practical setting?

Supporting Theory with Practice

At the most basic level, theory should be used to support choices made in your professional practice. You can see this in the example below:

Company X’s project teams are established on an opt-in basis following the idealistic model (Smith, 2021), where individuals are motivated by clear long-term goals and a working knowledge of the skills required to achieve them.

Theory is reinforced by a **specific example** of practice according with it in an exact and detailed way.

Professional practice is shown to **align with** recent **research** in the field.

(Adapted from RMIT University, 2021)

Progressing to Analysis and Evaluation

After introducing relevant, well-chosen models, concepts and ideas to justify workplace decisions it is crucial to then analyse and evaluate the success of both theory and practice. Below are some example sentence starters to help you do this:

Considering **alternative perspectives** / theories / experiences

Singh (2023) explores the potential drawbacks of this model, including...

Discussing **limitations**, challenges, “to what extent” the model can be applied in the workplace context

However, Smith’s (2020) theory neglects to consider the potential impact of employee disengagement. At Company X...

Using additional sources or **evidence** to back up the claim

Furthermore, as Rodriguez (2024) demonstrates...

Providing **insight** into how things could be improved

Following Hoffman et al. (2021), Company X’s project teams would therefore benefit from...

Top Tips for Relating Theory to Practice



Always think “what purpose does this theory serve in my paragraph?”



Think about how different theories link to one another and can be used to build your argument, engaging in comparative analysis.



Reinforce or challenge theory by using specific, detailed and meaningful examples from your own practice.



Always be critical about the theory **and** your practice!

Reference List

RMIT University (2021) *Body*. Available at:
<https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/body-0> (Accessed: 10 December 2024).

Additional Resources

The [ACE Quick Guide to Evaluating Sources and Reading Critically](#) offers additional guidance on assessing the strengths and limitations of scholarly resources in relation to your own professional practice.

The [ACE Quick Guide to Use of Sources](#) includes an in-depth guide to synthesising source material into an academic argument and contains a phrase bank for engaging with scholarly ideas.



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