# **Critical Appraisal of Sources**

**Here are some ways in which we can show critical thinking in our writing:**

1. Suggesting reasons why an academic theory may not be valid
2. Showing how research in one area has developed to address certain limitations
3. Showing how one source builds on another source
4. Showing how one source had a different aim/different results to another source
5. Using one researcher’s work to question another researcher’s work
6. Outlining how a particular source is relevant to our own work

**TASK: Find one example of each method in the paragraphs below.**

**PARAGRAPH A**

The superiority theories within humour studies are concerned with humour as a means of disparaging other individuals, and the feeling of superiority associated with mocking others’ shortcomings and misfortunes. The origins of this approach to laughter have been dated back to the philosophical works of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates (in Billig 2005: 40, Ermida 2008: 21), and the role of the feeling of superiority in humour appreciation has been linked to Hobbes, whose term *sudden glory* (1996 [1651]: 43) relates to the unexpected boost of self-congratulation which lies at the heart of our pleasure in humour. While Hobbes stresses the importance of the feeling of superiority in those who laugh, the work of Bergson (1913: 22-3) contains references to the amusing value of the deformity and ugliness in those who are laughed at. These early views of humour as aggressive and morally suspicious can be seen to have lost some of their relevance in the present-day context. That is why, rather than treating all humour as an expression of hostility, researchers now tend to speak of different types of humour, where the superiority-based kind is referred to as *disparagement humour* (e.g. Ferguson and Ford 2008).

**PARAGRAPH B**

The release theories of humour (also referred to as arousal or relief theories) see humour as deriving from a sense of psychological relief which follows a release of some form of tension or energy. The origins of this approach can be linked to Spencer’s (1860) view of laughter as a means of releasing built-up excess nervous energy. A version of this view of the human nervous system as a mechanism for regulating nervous energy has been developed by Freud, who proposed a concept of *psychical expenditure* required for creating and maintaining psychical inhibitions (1960 [1905]: 145). Humour, according to Freud, relies on some form of energy (often the energy needed to suppress forbidden emotions such as aggression or sexual desire) to be saved and subsequently released together with laughter. This release satisfies the longing for freedom from the constraints imposed on the individual by the society, and therefore is seen as a source of pleasure. Since both Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and Spencer’s energy-release approach have been largely discredited by modern psychology (Martin 2007: 41, 58), it may be unsurprising that the related contemporary release-based approach to humour, Berlyne’s (e.g. 1972) notion of *arousal jag*, has not been supported by physiological research data (Martin 2007: 60). Due to its role in the research on amusement and other narrative emotions, however, Berlyne’s concept of arousal will be mentioned again in the literature review of Chapter 5 (5.1.1), where I discuss its relationship with our responses to plot structures, including what Brewer and Lichtenstein (e.g. 1982) refer to as *story liking*.