

Research & Analysis / Academic Research

Find papers that disagree with each other and explain why — methods, samples, or theory.

Difficulty: Advanced

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Literature Review Depth, Research Question Framing, Meta-Analysis Prep

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Why This Prompt Exists

Science progresses through disagreement, but most literature reviews hide contradictions instead of highlighting them.

You get:

- smoothing over disagreements to tell a clean story
- citing “mixed findings” without explaining why
- missing the most interesting questions (why do studies disagree?)
- reviewers pointing out contradictions you should have addressed
- building on findings that later studies contradict

But contradictions have causes:

- methodological differences (experiment vs. survey, lab vs. field)
- sample differences (students vs. professionals, culture A vs. B)
- measurement differences (how constructs are operationalized)
- temporal differences (findings change over time)
- publication bias (significant findings publish, nulls don't)

Without contradiction hunting, you miss the real science.

This prompt identifies and explains disagreements across papers.

The Prompt

Assume the role of a meta-research scientist who hunts contradictions.

Your task is to identify and explain disagreements between papers.

Generate:

1. CONTRADICTION SUMMARY TABLE

| Finding | Paper A | Paper B | Direction of disagreement |

2. POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS (ranked by likelihood)

- Methodology (different designs, measures, analyses)
- Sample (different populations, settings, time periods)
- Definition (different constructs or operationalizations)
- Statistical (power, multiple comparisons, p-hacking)
- Publication bias (one finding is true, the other is file-drawer)

3. MODERATOR HYPOTHESES

- What variable might explain the disagreement?
- How would you test it?

4. WHAT'S NEEDED TO RESOLVE

- Replication study (with what design?)
- Meta-analysis (with what search strategy?)
- Theoretical integration (when is each finding true?)

5. IMPLICATION FOR YOUR WORK

- Which finding do you trust more? Why?

- How will you frame this debate?

INPUTS:

Paper A (full text or detailed summary):

[PASTE]

Paper B:

[PASTE]

Your research question:

[PASTE]

Field/discipline:

[PASTE]

RULES:

- Assume both papers are honestly conducted (no accusations of fraud without evidence)
- Look for "boundary conditions" – contradictions often reveal when a finding holds
- Distinguish between statistical and practical significance
- Note if the contradiction is actually a replication failure

How To Use It

- Use this when your literature review finds "mixed results" – that's an opportunity, not a problem.
- Run this on the two most-cited papers in your field that disagree.
- Use the "moderator hypotheses" to generate your own research ideas.

- Frame your research question as “when does X happen?” rather than “does X happen?” — that’s how you publish.
- Cite both sides of the contradiction — reviewers will respect your even-handedness.

Example Input

Paper A:

“Eysenck & Calvo (1992). Anxiety and performance: The processing efficiency theory. Found anxiety impairs performance on complex tasks but not simple tasks. N=80, lab experiment using math problems.”

Paper B:

“Beilock & Carr (2005). When high-powered people fail. Found high-pressure conditions impair performance on well-learned tasks (choking). N=60, lab experiment with golf putting.”

Your research question:

“When does anxiety help vs. hurt performance?”

Field/discipline:

Sport Psychology / Cognitive Performance

Why It Works

Most researchers treat contradictions as annoyances to be explained away.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- contradiction table (visual, clear, honest)
- ranked explanations (hypotheses to test)
- moderator identification (when is each finding true?)
- resolution path (what research is needed)
- implication framing (how to cite responsibly)

Great contradiction hunting doesn't resolve debates — it reveals the boundary conditions that make both findings true.

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