What is Empirical Research?

Empirical research is defined as research based on observed and measured phenomena. It is research that derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief. Articles reporting on empirical research can be quite long, and almost always contain the following sections:

- An introduction and literature review of related research
- A statement of the research question(s) and method used to gather the data
- Analysis of the results of the data gathered (this may be quantitative or qualitative)
- A discussion or conclusion
- A substantial list of the references consulted throughout the article

When in doubt, contact your professor or a librarian to get a second opinion regarding whether an article is reporting empirical research.

Locating Empirical Research Articles in Databases

Here are ways to locate empirical research articles in some specific databases.

Note: The following directions are in addition to the keywords you use to locate empirical research articles on a specific topic for your search. To access any of the databases referred to below, go to the Wayne State Library System home page at library.wayne.edu. From MENU, select Article Databases under Quick Links on the left.

PsycINFO (EBSCOHost) (for articles related to Psychology)

Click on Advanced Search under the search box

Under Limit your results

- From Publication Type box (left side) select Peer Reviewed Journal
- From the Methodology box (right side) select EMPIRICAL STUDY
ERIC (ProQuest) (for articles related to Education)

- Select Advanced Search to the right of the search box
- From the Limit to checkboxes, select the ERIC Journals Only and Peer Reviewed check boxes
- From the Document Type drop-down menu box, select the 143 Reports – Research check box

Note: This will help limit your search results, but will not limit only to empirical research. You will need to examine the article to make sure it fits the criteria for an empirical research article.

Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest) (for articles related to Sociology)

- Select Advanced Search
- Add the following as search terms study OR research
- Select the Peer reviewed check box
- From the Source Type box, select Scholarly Journals

Note: This will help limit your search results, but will not limit only to empirical research. You will need to examine the article to make sure it fits the criteria for an empirical research article.