Empirical vs. Review Articles: Understanding the Differences
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The following worksheet will explain the most common types of articles, empirical and review articles.

EMPIRICAL ARTICLES

In the social and health sciences, articles that report on original/new research studies are referred to as empirical.

- Empirical articles are usually divided into sections.
- Common sections in an empirical article include introduction, literature review, methods/process, data, results, discussion, conclusion/suggestions for further study, and references.
- In the methods section of an empirical article, the authors will describe how they actively conducted new or original research -- such as an experiment or survey.
  - Examples of what would likely be explained: How they identified participants, that they received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, control vs. experimental groups, survey design, and so forth about their research.
- Remember that commentaries, editorials, book reviews, and other short articles are not empirical.
- Review this YouTube video for more information about the key parts of an empirical article: http://tinyurl.com/empiricalyoutube

REVIEW ARTICLES

Articles that either interpret or analyze original research studies/articles are considered review articles.

- Some types of review articles:
  - An entire article that is purely a literature review [usually a review of select other articles considered to be the best support for a research question/topic]
  - Systematic review
  - Meta-analysis / meta-analyses
  - Meta-synthesis / meta-syntheses
  - Integrative review
- If an article is a review article, it is likely [but not always] to have the words literature review, systematic review, integrative review, meta-analysis, meta-synthesis, or integrative review in the title.
- The main indicator of a review article is if authors are just interpreting, analyzing, and/or comparing the results of other research/research articles. So, in comparison to a research article, the authors of a review article do not describe an experiment or survey they conducted.
- The confusing part of review articles is that they have a methods section. Pay close attention to the description of methods.
  - The methods section will usually describe how the authors searched for other articles [which databases they searched, what search terms they used] and decided articles to include or exclude as part of their review. The authors will not be describing how they conducted new or original research, such as an experiment or survey.
  - If there is a results section, it will usually report the findings of the authors' interpretation or comparison of the results of other empirical articles.

08.26.2016