

## Structure of Empirical Articles in the Social Sciences

A social scientist reading an empirical article in a social science journal expects that the article has a familiar organizational structure. The author's job is to satisfy the audience (among others, their curiosity, their love of intellectual puzzles, or their desire to understand the issue and replicate the author's findings). There is a standard structure. Deviations from the standard are acceptable within limits; if the author deviates, the reader must easily understand the logical flow of the structure.

### **The standard structure of an empirical article:**

#### I. Introduction

Cites the relevant literature, states the research topic, poses the research question and answers "So What?"

#### II. Theories and Hypotheses

This section contains an in-depth exposition of theories relevant to the article and clearly stated hypotheses.

#### III. Data, Variables and Methods

Description of data, variables and methods of social inquiry are clear enough for someone to replicate your results.

#### IV. Results

All most important parts of tables, graphs and the like are clearly interpreted and put in language that the reader recognizes. The author personally and formally addresses the hypotheses.

#### V. Conclusion and/or Discussion

This section has no standard form and may contain the following (not necessarily in order): summary of article (question, theory, hypotheses, data and main results); restatement of the answer to So What and the implications of your results for new theoretical or methodological directions; explanation of the weird things you found in your analyses that you didn't expect to find; limitations of the research; suggestions for future research, including new theory or other empirical articles that should be written; practical implications and policy suggestions; and speculations. Some folks think that conclusions should not present any new information. Others think this is the place for speculations and interesting and relevant stuff that didn't seem to fit anywhere else (like the footnotes). There isn't even a consensus on what to call this section.

**NB:** Setting: if the empirical article is a case study (of a country, a village, and so on), a demographic, political, economic and social description of the physical or virtual place in which the objects of your study interact. Settings can be placed after theory and before methods.