The Hierarchy of Evidence

As you move up the pyramid the study designs are more rigorous and allow for less bias or systematic error that may distract you from the truth.

Read the [APA policy statement on EBP](https://www.apa.org/pubs/periodicals/ebp) to learn more about Evidence Based Practice principles and how they apply in psychology.

The following excerpt from the APA Policy Statement outlines the different research designs that contribute to evidence based practice and the type of questions they can be used to address.

- **Clinical observation** (including individual case studies) and basic psychological science are valuable sources of innovations and hypotheses (the context of scientific discovery).
- **Qualitative research** can be used to describe the subjective, lived experiences of people, including participants in psychotherapy.
- **Systematic case studies** are particularly useful when aggregated (as in the form of practice research network) for comparing individual patients with others with similar characteristics.
- **Single-case experimental designs** are particularly useful for establishing causal relationships in the context of an individual.
- **Public health and ethnographic research** are especially useful for tracking the availability, utilization, and acceptance of mental health treatments as well as suggesting ways of altering these treatments to maximize their utility in a given social context.
- **Process–outcome studies** are especially valuable for identifying mechanisms of change.
- **Studies of interventions** as these are delivered in naturalistic settings (effectiveness research) are well suited for assessing the ecological validity of treatments.
- **RCTs** [randomised controlled trials] and their logical equivalents (efficacy research) are the standard for drawing causal inferences about the effects of interventions (context of scientific verification).
- **Meta-analysis** is a systematic means to synthesize results from multiple studies, test hypotheses, and quantitatively estimate the size of effects.