

# Handbook for Systematic Empirical Research in the Arts

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## Introduction | Background

Empirical approaches in the study of the arts have been gaining popularity, which is reflected not least in the fast development of empirical aesthetics. Despite this trend, practical statistical and analytical guidance for humanities scholars remains scarce. To address this situation, we are preparing a methods handbook for colleagues in the arts-based humanities embarking on systematic empirical research.

Our handbook will

- provide a how-to guide for preparing and conducting empirical studies;
- help manage expectations regarding what empirical research in the arts can and cannot accomplish;
- provide humanities scholars with a basic reading competence for more complex empirical data;
- explore the usefulness and necessary modifications of standard empirical methods for the purpose of studying the arts;
- complement reference works that focus on research outcomes rather than on methodology (e.g., Kuiken & Jacobs, 2021; Nadal & Vartanian, 2022; Skov & Nadal, 2022; Tinio & Smith, 2014).

## Structure

### Part I: Empirical research in the arts as an interdisciplinary field

Art-centred empirical research in the humanities, in interdisciplinary settings and in the sciences

### Part II: Empirical research questions and humanistic knowledge

Reach and limitations of empirical research in the arts; identifying a research question; exploratory research; experimental vs. non-experimental research

### Part III: The work of art under empirical scrutiny

Implications of using art as "stimulus"; the neurobiology of the brain in response to art; stimulus selection; feature engineering; signal processing; stimulus presentation

### Part IV: Qualitative research methods, their uses and applications

The epistemological status of qualitative data; presentation of different methods (interview, ethnographic studies, microphenomenology,...); data processing and analysis; data visualization

### Part V: Quantitative research methods, their uses and applications

The epistemological status of quantitative data; presentation of different methods (answer formats, peripheral physiology, imaging,...); data processing and analysis, with an emphasis on basic statistics; data visualization

### Part VI: Ethical and legal issues

Copyright and licensing; research participants and their rights; data protection

### Part VII: Publishing research results

Authorship conventions; disciplinary and interdisciplinary research outlets; the structure of science and humanities papers; open science

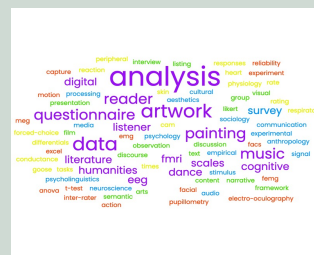
## Resource Wiki

We are complementing our handbook with a continually updated, extensive resource Wiki hosted by the MPIEA to reflect the rapid evolution of our field and to keep fast changing information up to date.

The Wiki will contain information about and/or links to

- methods
- software
- open-source programming code
- open-source stimulus and data sets
- digital corpora
- international funding opportunities
- relevant institutions
- e-learning modules

It will further feature a fully catalogued bibliography searchable with a library-standard search engine.



### The Wiki will

- be hosted at and curated by the MPIEA;
- go online as the handbook is published;
- start out based on information by our authors, but is open to submissions by all researchers in the field.

### The Wiki is meant to

- provide an up-to-date reference collection on an intuitive, easy-to-use platform;
- allow researchers to share and receive recognition for methodological and technical innovations.

## Outlook

- The project has been accepted for publication in the Oxford Handbooks series at Oxford University Press, where it is scheduled to appear in 2025.



Figure 3. Preliminary timeline of the project

- It will combine contributions by scholars from 12 different disciplines, affiliated at approx. 40 different institutions around the globe.
- The handbook will serve the development of the field as well as help to establish a more active role of the humanities in empirical research in the arts, linking their historical, epistemological and theoretical knowledge with the virtues of systematic, replicable research.
- It will allow for empirical work to be presented in a way that is likely to be more interesting to humanities research outlets, thereby increasing visibility of this research within the humanities disciplines.
- To our knowledge, there is currently no other comprehensive reference work on the use and development of empirical methodology in the study of the arts. Our handbook and the accompanying Wiki are going to fill this gap.



Figure 1. Methods represented in the handbook

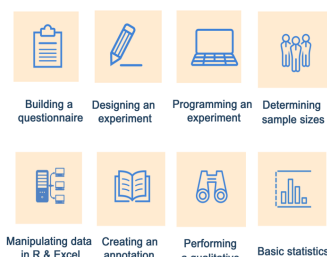


Figure 2. Skills covered in the methods sections