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Standards

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evaluates the strength of the evidence of effectiveness of educational interventions. As part of the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) plan to help educators and education policymakers incorporate scientifically based research into their educational decisions, the WWC has established rigorous standards for the review of causal research. The first set of these standards is for the review of individual studies.

WWC Evidence Standards

The [WWC Evidence Standards](#) identify studies that provide the strongest evidence of effects: primarily well conducted randomized controlled trials and regression discontinuity studies, and secondarily quasi-experimental studies of especially strong design.



"Meets Evidence Standards"—randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that do not have problems with randomization, attrition, or disruption, and regression discontinuity designs that do not have problems with attrition or disruption.



"Meets Evidence Standards with Reservations"—strong quasi-experimental studies that have comparison groups and meet other WWC Evidence Standards, as well as randomized trials with randomization, attrition, or disruption problems and regression discontinuity designs with attrition or disruption problems.



"Does Not Meet Evidence Screens"—studies that provide insufficient evidence of causal validity or are not relevant to the topic being reviewed.

Studies may not pass WWC screening requirements for the following reasons:

1. **Evaluation research design.** The study did not meet certain design standards. Study designs that provide the strongest evidence of effects include: [randomized controlled trials](#), [regression discontinuity designs](#), [quasi-experimental designs](#) (must use a similar comparison group and have no attrition or disruption problems), and [single subject designs](#). For example, qualitative case studies are not in the scope of the WWC's review because they are not outcome evaluations. Therefore, a qualitative case study would not pass this screen.
2. **Topic area definition.** The study did not meet the intervention definition developed by the WWC for a particular topic. For example, the Middle School Math Curricula topic definition requires that:
 - i. the intervention focus on Middle School Math Curricula. Therefore, a study on a reading intervention would not pass this screen, but could be reviewed under the Beginning Reading topic.
 - ii. the intervention be at least a semester long. Therefore, a study of an intervention designed to last one and a half months would not pass this screen.
3. **Time period definition.** The study was not conducted within the time period set for that topic (generally, the last 20 years). Therefore, a study conducted in 1983 or earlier would not pass the time period screen for most topics.
4. **Relevant outcome.** The study did not have relevant outcome measures. For example, the Middle School Math topic focuses on academic outcomes in math. Outcomes such as student self-confidence are not included for this topic. A study needs to have only one relevant outcome to pass this screen. In addition, there must be some evidence that the relevant outcome measure is an acceptable measure of the outcome. The WWC considers evidence such as test reliability or validity important markers of a relevant outcome. The WWC also looks for a sample or description of relevant test items if a study outcome test is not known or available.
5. **Relevant student sample.** The study did not include a relevant sample of students. For example, a study looking at elementary school children would not be relevant for the Middle School Math Curricula topic. Therefore, this study would not pass the screen for the Middle School Math review.

In addition, the standards rate other important characteristics of study design, such as intervention fidelity, outcome

measures, and generalizability.

The WWC regularly updates the WWC Technical Standards and their application to take account of new considerations brought forth by experts and users. Such changes may result in re-appraisals of studies and/or interventions previously reviewed and rated. The current WWC Standards offer guidance for those planning or carrying out studies, not only in the design considerations but the analysis and reporting stages as well. The WWC Standards, however, may not pertain to every situation, context, or purpose of a study and will evolve.