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adjective
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em·pir·i·cal | \ im-ˈpir-i-kəl , em- \
variants: or less commonly empiric \ im-ˈpir-ik , em- \

Definition of *empirical*

1 **:** originating in or based on observation or experience empirical data
2 **:** relying on experience or observation alone often without due regard for system and theory an empirical basis for the theory
3 **:** capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment empirical laws
4 **:** of or relating to empiricism

Synonyms & Antonyms Empirical Has Roots in Latin and Greek More Example Sentences

Phrases Containing *empirical* Learn More About *empirical*

Synonyms & Antonyms for *empirical*

Synonyms

- existential,
- experiential,
- experimental,

- objective,
- observational

Antonyms

- nonempirical,
- theoretical
- (also theoretic),
- unempirical

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Empirical Has Roots in Latin and Greek

When *empirical* first appeared as an adjective in English, it meant simply "in the manner of an empiric." An empiric was a member of an ancient sect of doctors who practiced medicine based exclusively on observation or experience as contrasted with those who relied on theory or philosophy. The name *empiric* derives from Latin *empīricus*, itself from Greek *empeirikós*, meaning "based on observation (of medical treatment), experienced." The root of the Greek word (*-peiros*) is a derivative of *peîra*, meaning "attempt, trial, test."

Examples of *empirical* in a Sentence

Eventually, access to electron microscopes and X-ray diffraction technology provided the necessary empirical evidence to test the hypotheses, and the jigsaw pieces began to fall into place. — Gail Nichols, *Ceramics Monthly*, February 2002 No religion, new or old, is subject to empirical proof, so what we have is a contest between faiths. — Harvey Cox, *Atlantic*, March 1999 They collected plenty of *empirical* data from their experiments. guidelines for raising children that are based on *empirical* evidence
Recent Examples on the Web There is little *empirical* evidence that explains why. — Gina Barton, *jsonline.com*, 3 May 2022 There is little *empirical* evidence that explains why. — Gina Barton, *USA Today*, 3 May 2022 And though the journal is supposedly committed to *empirical* tests, no data were presented that might speak to alternative explanations, such as that the cause of the under-representation lies in the pipeline of prepared and interested students. — James Freeman, *WSJ*, 4 May 2022 See More

These example sentences are selected automatically from various online news sources to reflect current usage of the word 'empirical.' Views expressed in the examples do not represent the opinion of Merriam-Webster or its editors. Send us feedback.

Phrases Containing *empirical*

- empirical formula

- empirical formula

First Known Use of *empirical*

1576, in the meaning defined at sense 1

History and Etymology for *empirical*

empiric "of physicians in ancient Greece and Rome holding that treatment should be based on observation rather than theory" (going back to Middle English *emperic,* borrowed from early Medieval Latin *empīricus,* borrowed

from Greek *empeirikós,* "based on observation (of medical treatment), experienced") + -al entry 1 — more at empiric

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Time Traveler for *empirical*

The first known use of *empirical* was in 1576

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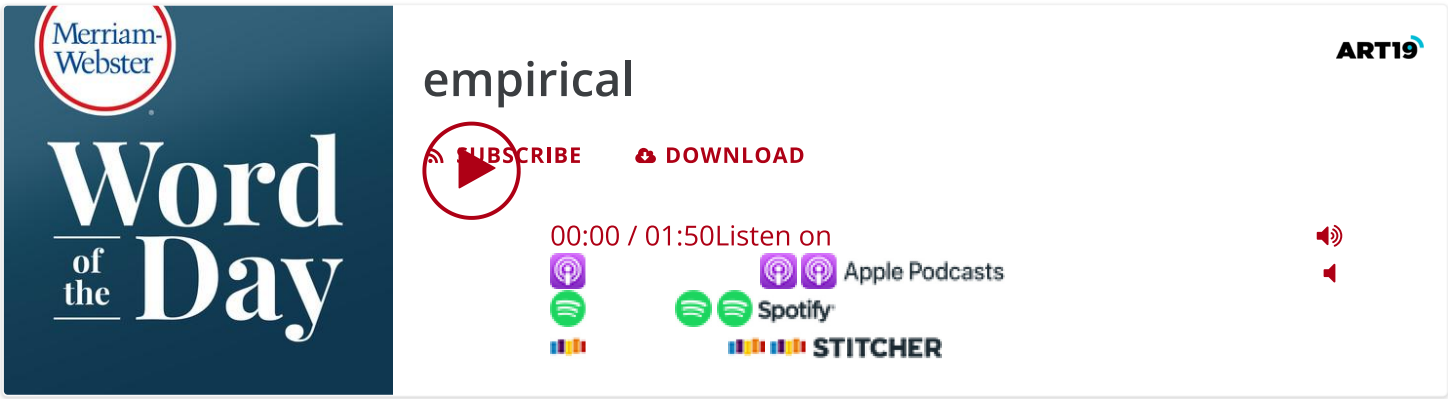

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AprylNadine • 3 May, 2011

"Empirical" is a word that has to do with things proven by actual facts and/or evidence...it's quite the opposite of "beliefs".

Reply 10

ZakJackson • 11 April, 2011

I'm studying the British empiricists. They believed knowledge is attained through experience vs. pure reason. (empiricists- empirical) ;).

Reply 8

ThelmaMarie • 10 May, 2013

Language is empirical, not innate as Chomsky believes.

Reply 6

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More Definitions for *empirical*

empirical

adjective

em·pir·i·cal | \ -i-kəl \

variants: also empiric \ -ik \

Medical Definition of *empirical*

1 archaic
a **:** following or used in the practice of the empirics — compare rational sense 2
b **:** being or befitting a quack or charlatan
2 **:** originating in or based on observation or experiment much medical lore had had an empirical origin … centuries of trial-and-error gropings after remedies— R. H. Shryock
3 **:** capable of being confirmed, verified, or disproved by observation or experiment empirical statements or laws

Other Words from *empirical*

empirically \ -i-k(ə-)lē \ adverb

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Nglish: Translation of *empirical* for Spanish Speakers

Britannica English: Translation of *empirical* for Arabic Speakers

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credulous

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WORDS AT PLAY

'Dunderhead' and Other 'Nicer' Ways to Say Stupid

- As illustrated by some very smart pups

10 Words from Place Names

- Bikini, bourbon, and badminton were places first

'Pride': The Word That Went From Vice to Strength

- Do you take pride in Pride?

When Were Words First Used?

- Look up any year to find out

ASK THE EDITORS

Literally

- How to use a word that (literally) drives some pe...

'All Intensive Purposes' or 'All Intents and Purposes'?

- We're intent on clearing it up

Lay vs. Lie

- Editor Emily Brewster clarifies the difference.

Hot Mess

- "The public is a hot mess"

WORD GAMES

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