

What are they?

The empirical chapter is where you present the findings from your study.

The discussion chapter is where you interpret those findings and relate them back to your aims, objectives and research questions, and to your literature review.

How does it relate to other chapters?

We can understand a PhD as having four distinct sections:

1. Introduction - this is where you introduce and outline the entire study.
2. Background - this where you lay the groundwork for your thesis (in your literature review, theory framework and methods.)
3. Core - this is where you present your findings.
4. Synthesis - this is where you relate the core to the background

The empirical chapter(s) is/are where you present the facts of your study. They occupy the core of the thesis.

The discussion chapter though is where you interpret and discuss your findings in relation to the thesis and wider discipline. That is why it occupies the synthesis stage of the research.

What should they include?

The emphasis in the empirical chapter is on factual recount and summary. You'll be categorising your findings into particular themes and using a variety of visual elements (tables, figures, charts, and so on) to present your results. You need to show the reader what your data 'looks like'.

By the time you have finished your empirical chapter, your reader should be able to answer six questions:

1. What are the results of your investigations?
2. How do the findings relate to previous studies?
3. Was there anything surprising or that didn't work out as planned?
4. Are there any themes or categories that emerge from the data?
5. Have you explained to the reader why you have reached particular conclusions?
6. Have you explained the results?

How can you make them great?

- Relate your findings and discussion to the aims, objectives, research questions, gap and any theory.
- Running through your thesis will be a central argument - your thesis statement - and it is in the empirical and, particularly, the discussion chapter that you will present all of the evidence and logical argument necessary to support that argument.
- Make sure you discuss the study's limitations, or if findings are inconclusive.

When writing your discussion chapter, you must answer the following questions:

- What are the relationships between observations?
- Are there any trends and generalisations amongst the results? Are there any exceptions to these?
- What are the causes of, or mechanisms behind, the underlying patterns you have uncovered?
- Do your results agree or disagree with previous work?
- How do your findings relate to the theoretical framework you developed, if applicable?
- How do the findings relate to the hypotheses you developed, if applicable?
- What other explanations could there be for your results? This issue is more pertinent if you are engaging in theory creation/ inductive reasoning.
- What do we now know as a result of your research that we didn't know before?
- What is the significance of these findings?
- Why should we care about the findings?

What should you avoid?

Avoid analysing your data in your empirical chapter. The discussion and empirical sections form two distinct chapters.

Notes:

