

# 10 Golden Rules to Good Social Science Research

**1 Make a contribution & say so**  
Identify the theoretical gap or puzzle. If you can't state your contribution in one sentence, keep thinking. A new case that confirms old findings is not a contribution.

**2 Start and end with theory**  
Unless your work is explicitly exploratory, anchor everything in theory. Stop reading once you have ~20 key papers that locate your gap. Search specific literature to support your hypotheses later.

**3 One research question, one paper.**  
RQs stem from theory, not from datasets or personal taste. They connect an outcome to explanatory factors. If you have 2–3, find the overarching umbrella RQ.

**4 Keep your hypotheses tight**  
Max 3–4 per paper. Falsifiable and mutually exclusive. Everything stated inside a hypothesis must be tested. If a causal mechanism is not measured or modelled, move it to the theory.

**5 Let the method serve the question**  
Choose your method based on your DV and identification strategy. There is always something you can do to improve causal identification. If you can't, acknowledge your limitations.

**6 Invest in good measures**  
Indicators are a theoretical commitment. Report reliability and validity. When you don't use standard measures, explain and justify them. A novel measure can be a contribution.

**7 Be transparent and replicable**  
Pre-register hypotheses. Share your questionnaire and analysis plan. Write clean, documented code. You will be asked for it. If the data are yours, publish them openly as soon as possible.

**8 Connect results to hypotheses**  
State explicitly whether each H is supported or falsified. Don't interpret a null as zero effect. Don't use causal language for correlational designs.

**9 Make your work open and useful**  
Deposit papers in open repositories. Publish pre-prints if possible. Communicate beyond academia. If you promise policy relevance at the outset, your conclusions must include concrete proposals.

**10 Write every day & write well**  
Once you've found the gap, stop reading & start writing. 1 page a day, even if you delete it. Save dated versions. Cut digressions. If you write "as stated above", something is wrong. Follow journal conventions.