

Grey Areas

There may be times when it is uncertain where research ends and audit begins. In some cases there may be no standards and no prior knowledge of best practice on which to base standards. This is where a pre-audit investigation may be performed to measure baseline performance on which to base your standards. However, if at any time you are comparing treatments or introducing new treatments you will be performing research.

Is my project research or audit?

Complete the questions in the table overleaf to determine if your project is research or clinical audit.

If you answered:

Yes to Q1 and Q2 and No to Q3 then your project is **clinical audit**. If you answered differently, your project may be **research** for which you will need ethical approval.

For further advice on whether your project is audit or research contact the Clinical Audit and Effectiveness Department.

No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Question 1. Is the purpose of your project to improve the quality of patient care in your local setting?	Question 2. Will the project involve comparison of practice against standards?	Question 3. When performing your project, does it involve changes to treatment / services?

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The Difference Between Audit & Research

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Clinical Audit and Research

This leaflet details the similarities and important differences between the two disciplines.



Remember - “Research is concerned with discovering the right thing to do: Audit is ensuring it is done right” (Smith, R. 1992, Audit & Research, BMJ, 305:905-6)

Research..

..Creates new knowledge and forms the basis of agreed guidelines and standards i.e. what practice should be.

Clinical Audit..

..Looks at actual practice, compares it with guidelines. Are we doing it as we should? If not, why not?

Similarities between Audit and Research

Both answer questions about quality of care or service.

Both involve sampling, data collection and analysis of findings.



Stakeholders are the staff who can change practice and those whose work may be affected by the audit

Differences between Audit and Research

The table below lists some of the key differences between clinical audit and research.



Remember - Without research we cannot know the most effective practice. Without audit we cannot know if it is being practised.

Research	Clinical Audit
Creates new knowledge regarding most beneficial practice	Creates knowledge of current clinical practice and need for improvement
Based on an idea (hypothesis) or explores themes	Based on the comparison of practice against standards
Usually large scale over a long time period	Usually small scale over a short time period
May involve patients receiving a completely new treatment	Never involves patients receiving new treatment
May involve patients being given different treatments	Does not affect normal treatment of patients
Needs a statistically valid sample size	Does not necessarily need a statistically valid sample size
Extensive statistical analysis is required	Basic statistical analysis usually suffices
Results may be generalisable to a wider population	Results are usually only relevant to the area evaluated
No built-in mechanism to act on findings	Clear responsibility to act on findings through development of an action plan
Findings can have a wide influence on clinical practice	Findings usually only influence practice within the area evaluated
Always requires ethics committee approval	Does not usually require ethical approval.

Taken from: COREC (2005), Differentiating Audit, Service Evaluation and Research

www.corec.org.uk/recs/guidance/guidance.htm