

## Hermeneutics

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Hermeneutics: Want to understand what patients are feeling before surgery or about an ongoing treatment for chronic illness? Hermeneutics might come in handy.

Hermeneutics is the interpretation of texts, such as biblical texts, laws, literary works such as poems, and accounts of dreams. It is a methodology used in such fields as literary studies, theology, and philosophy.

In healthcare, you can make a sort of methodological mash-up of phenomenology and hermeneutics: phenomenological hermeneutics. That is, you could study the lived experience and perceptions of patients or other subjects (e.g., family caregivers). That would be the phenomenology part. And source material could be data collected by interviews, surveys, diary entries by subjects that they provide to the researchers, etc. These would be examples of the texts that would constitute the hermeneutical aspect of the study.

The use of such methodologies as hermeneutics enables researchers to study the subjective perceptions of patients (e.g., feelings of hopelessness in the face of dire diagnoses such as AIDS or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis). Ideally, the study of texts produced by patients themselves will endow healthcare providers with a keener understanding of the fears and feelings of patients, thereby resulting in ever more compassionate, empathetic behavior by such providers.

Hermeneutics are just the thing  
For understanding suffering  
Ensuring those providing care  
Address depression and despair