

# What is the mark of an expert?

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When an individual wants to know detailed information about a topic, one conducts research. Their research puts them into many resources of information on their quest. People search the internet, visit a library resource section, read a book and watch educational television programming. Some people's research leads them to speak with other people, more familiar and educated on the topic of their interest. Often times, their research leads them to discover an expert in the field.

What is an expert? An expert is defined as:

1. a person who has special skill or knowledge in some particular field; specialist; authority: *a language expert.*
2. possessing special skill or knowledge; trained by practice; skillful or skilled (often fol. by *in or at*): *an expert driver; to be expert at driving a car.*

(Ref. 1) Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/expert>)

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- An **expert** is someone widely recognized as a [reliable](#) source of [technique](#) or [skill](#) whose faculty for judging or deciding rightly, justly, or wisely is accorded authority and status by their [peers](#) or [the public](#) in a specific well distinguished [domain](#). An expert, more generally, is a person with extensive [knowledge](#) or [ability](#) in a particular area of study. Experts are called in for advice on their respective subject, but they do not always agree on the particulars of a field of study. An expert can be, by virtue of [training](#), [education](#), [profession](#), [publication](#) or [experience](#), believed to have special knowledge of a subject beyond that of the average person, sufficient that others may [officially](#) (and [legally](#)) rely upon the individual's [opinion](#).

(Ref. 2) Wikipedia.org (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expert>)

When I became interested in writing this article, I read numerous documentation, articles and snippets from websites, regarding the topic of the paranormal. At some point in my time researching and studying the paranormal, someone called me an “*expert* in the field” of paranormal research. I discussed with my family, colleagues and others that are knowledgeable in the field about what qualifies an individual to be an *expert* in any field. I began to think on it myself.

I read the above definitions as well as others. I thought about what I look for in an *expert*.” When I take my car to the mechanic, I look at his qualifications. I thought about what I look for when I want the perfect cut of meat when I see my butcher. I look at the time he has been cutting meat. When I need my computer fixed, I want to know what certifications my tech has, how long he has been doing it and for whom he has worked to know why I should pay him \$200/hr.

I tried to define the term *expert* based on my own thoughts and what I think qualifies someone to be an *expert*. To me, an *expert* is someone who knows a great deal about their field of study. They learned their trade through education, active performance and the time they have been practicing their art. Their expertise was perfected by performing a set of standard practices that are known well enough, to be thoroughly documented for others to learn. In order for someone to be named an *expert* they better know just about all there is to know about their field. It is unfair to expect a person to know everything. No one knows **everything**.

But the more I think about how the field of paranormal research and the paranormal in general and how it relates to other fields of knowledge, I keep coming back to facts. Mechanics know cars, engines & transmissions, etc, because machinery, its function, performance and purpose are documented and tangible. Someone familiar with internal combustion knows the function of each and every part, thus their ASE certification. Computer technicians know computers, because they know what happens when they prepare a component for installation, what happens as a result of installing better performing components and how the system reacts when a component malfunctions or breaks, thus proven by their A+ certification. A butcher knows how to cut a quarter of meat because of the tradition that has been passed down and of course the education he receives before he touches a bone saw. He has learned the quadrants from where he can cut a sirloin, strip or T-bone steak. He knows what meat makes the best ground product and knows the most, tender portions for the most succulent meal. All information is fact. The information is documented, it can be learned, taught to others and can be repeated to produce the same results. Although butchers are more of an artist, their skill is as close to perfect science as one can come.

But if one looks at the field of the paranormal, what do we **really** know? I mean, anyone can claim that an “orb” is a spiritual manifestation in the form of a glowing ball of energy. But **how** does anyone know this? Obviously enthusiasts have observed these phenomena more than once. If I kick the dirt on a dry night, when the ground is loose and dusty, snap a photo simultaneously, and capture the same observation, how can we call the “orb-phenomenon” factual? Now this article is not meant to be a “hater’s guide to those crazy ghost people.” But to be an expert, mustn’t an individual be able to have a list of rules that aids in the differentiation between a “spiritual manifestation” and a cloud of dust? Even if the value of an expert is someone who, by definition, “has a special skill or knowledge in a particular field,” or is “trained by practice,” shouldn’t an expert at least be knowledgeable in the facts and accurate in their assessments? Shouldn’t they be bound by a set of standards and procedures to ensure they judge their footage as accurately as possible?

An *expert* should not only be knowledgeable, but also fearless. The *expert* must be willing to try new things. They are usually a pioneer in their field, constantly learning new things. If every investigator uses the next party’s standards and methodologies, nothing new will be accomplished. New standards must be explored. New methods must be devised. Those who deviate from the accepted “norm” are often looked down upon.

What does this mean and how does it apply to the paranormal world? If we take a serious look at what might constitute an *expert* in the paranormal field, what would be the necessary qualifications? Well let's break it down a bit. An *expert* would need to be wise in the ways of psychology. Dealing with the topics of ghosts, demons, visions, magic, healing, ESP, possession, conjuring and MANY other areas, one would need to consider such effects on a subject's state of mind. When dealing with EVPs, an investigator should be knowledgeable in acoustics and sound structure. Knowing that sound travels and can reflect off many different surfaces helps with understanding how sound waves function. Someone should have a keen understanding of light waves and the light spectrum. Knowing how Ultraviolet, visible and Infrared light waves function and interact, and how specialized video recording equipment works in the presence of each seems necessary. Then, considering the possible effects of electromagnetic fields, mold, chemicals and other foreign agents on the human body, one should be educated in chemistry, electricity, biology and medicine to know how certain contagions & legitimate stimuli might affect the human body, its own electromagnetic field and bio & brain rhythms. Someone might be suffering migraines not because of the paranormal but because artificial, electromagnetic fields might be interfering with a subject's brain physiology. Even seasoned scientists are not sure of the long term affects of electromagnetic radiation and cell-phone radiation on the human body. If an investigation takes place outside, one should know zoology. Knowing the nocturnal patterns of the local wildlife might be helpful in understanding unusual eye reflections and unique animal sounds. Having spent considerable periods of time outside would also be a plus.

There are many other fields where thorough familiarity would aid in a complete assessment of legitimate, explainable activity. These fields may include, but are not limited to videography, photography, history, other sciences, journalism, folklore & mythology, physics, astronomy and meteorology. In order to be trustworthy and respected, one must be able explain unusual, but naturally occurring phenomena. At a minimum, have people to which an investigator or analyst can turn to help explain such things.

Not only with vast experience, one would need to have applied their knowledge in the appropriate field or context, if the experience is to be considered valid. Why would someone be called an *expert* in computers if they only used a computer as a receptionist? Yes, that receptionist is familiar with how a computer applies to an office environment, but if the same person is unable to access the network or internet, they are likely to be lost in attempting to resolve that problem, unless they have been specifically educated to support that task. It takes someone with experience, and having been trained to resolve the specific issue, to find a resolution with the utmost efficiency.

In order to be considered an *expert* in the paranormal, one does not **need** to be an expert in all fields. It is necessary however, that the person be very familiar with the related fields that surround and influence the shared environment in the search for paranormal fact. The field of paranormal research encompasses many different fields of knowledge. An investigator cannot just see an “orb” and assume it is a paranormal phenomenon. The event must be recorded, reviewed, analyzed, tested, documented and debated. All arguments must be weighed for opposing views. An expert must be willing to find the facts, even if those facts do not agree with his or her personal beliefs.

People do not like to be told they are wrong, especially if they have been doing it a very long time. Everyone wants to be right. But true learning assumes findings, methods and standards will not agree with what they thought was accurate and understood. Being wrong is not a bad thing, if in figuring out the wrongs, leads to correction and the discovery of what is right. Knowing the way the world works around the paranormal, will help an individual to find information that will lead to factual discoveries in the paranormal.

Perhaps all those that are considered *experts* in the paranormal, for accuracy sake, should not be called *experts*, but instead, “advanced students” of the paranormal. We are all students of the paranormal; some of us have just been studying it longer than others. Before classifying someone as an *expert*, what must we consider? What does it take to convince you that an individual **really** knows their stuff? Is it the time in which they have been involved in paranormal research? Is it the information they possess about the paranormal? Everyone has their own standards by which an individual is an *expert*. Just keep in mind, declaration of a true *expert* must be based on 2 things:

1. The **factual information** the individual possesses about his or her chosen field.
2. How willing the individual is to find the truth based on a set of standards and/or methods.

If an individual is quick to jump to conclusions or make assumptions based on belief before understanding the circumstances, facts and known truth, they should probably be carefully scrutinized.

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