

In modern science, the term “theory” refers to scientific theories, a well-confirmed type of explanation of nature, made in a way consistent with scientific method, and fulfilling the criteria required by modern science. Such theories are described in such a way that any scientist in the field is in a position to understand and either provide empirical support (“verify”) or empirically contradict (“falsify”) it. Scientific theories are the most reliable, rigorous, and comprehensive form of scientific knowledge, in contrast to more common uses of the word “theory” that imply that something is unproven or speculative (which is better characterized by the word 'hypothesis').

Scientific theories are distinguished from hypotheses, which are individual empirically testable conjectures, and scientific laws, which are descriptive accounts of how nature will behave under certain conditions.

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