According to Rhine (1973), who coined the term itself, extrasensory perception (ESP) refers to the perception that is without the function of recognized senses. More and more research evidences show that ESP has all the non-sensory characteristics: it is different from the sensory processes fundamentally, lacks any sense organ, highly independence in the recognized energy forms, non-radiative, cognitive but not analyzable in sensory components. ESP is interpreted as “perception in a mode that is just not sensory”. In this paper, existing literature of the topic will be discussed and studies will be evaluated. Also, information will be compared to the existing knowledge of the sensation and perception mechanisms.

The first study is conducted by J.B. Rhine and Karl Zener (1973), who have made one of the most famous and earliest methods in testing ESP – Zener cards experiment. It mainly tests for clairvoyance. Cards with different symbols were shuffled between trials by the experimenter. Participants were asked to guess the symbol of top playing card in a deck with 25 cards. In the experiment, five symbols were used: star, wavy lines, plus sign, circle and rectangle. These designs were chosen by Dr. Zener so as to avoid undue overlapping, difference in familiarity and complication. In the first series, only 1 out of 300 trials got all alphabet correct. In the second series, 35 correct were recorded among 205 trials which is lower than the chance expectation by 15%. In the last series with 430 trials, 82 of them were yielded. All 935 Zener cards tests are within the negative side of the probable error range. The deviation is approximately equal to the percentage error. The success rate is greater than the probability of hits. Rhine concluded that no highly appreciable extra-sensory perception is found in those particular groups under those conditions.

The Zener cards experiment has great significance. Rhine and Zener are the pioneers in the topic of ESP. The history of EPS can also be traced back to the 1930 at Duke University when Zener’s cards experiment is developed (Rhine, 1973). It builds the foundation of the later investigation of such topic. Apart from that, Zener cards experiment has great accessibility in which people can just complete the experiment.