The Empirical Research Essay

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The goal of the empirical research essay is to research a topic you're interested in and conduct primary research via surveys, interviews, experiments, observations, or content analysis. **Quantitative research** collects data in the form of numbers, while **qualitative research** collects data in the form of words. In most cases, surveys and experiments provide quantitative data, and interviews and content analysis provide qualitative data. Observations can go either direction. It is possible to collect both types of data throughout your primary research, but it's easier if you focus on one or the other.

Example Questions:

Quantitative:

- How prevalent is insomnia? (survey – specific questions might ask people how often they have trouble sleeping, to rate how severe their trouble is, etc.)
- How does reducing the use of screens at night affect people's sleep? (experiment – ask people who normally look at screens before bed to rate their sleep every night for a period of time, and then to avoid screens at bedtime and rate their sleep every night, then compare these ratings)
- How many computers in the SSOC are in use at different times of day? (observation – set a particular interval, like every half hour, and count how many computers are in use at each interval)

Qualitative:

- How do people with insomnia describe its effects on their life? (interview – identify people with insomnia and ask them to describe how it affects them)
- What kinds of health messages are being conveyed by the most popular TikTok accounts? (content analysis – identify most popular TikTok accounts that deal with health and then identify messages in each)
- How do people move throughout the SSOC? (observation – watch people and note where they go, with whom they interact, how long they spend and what they do in different locations, etc.)

The research question you seek to answer should be specific and empirically answerable, and you will need to provide context for your research and support your analysis with relevant peer-reviewed sources (scholarly literature).

Choosing a Topic

What is a question you've been wanting an answer to, but haven't had the time to research? Maybe you want to know why people like McDonalds more than Burger King, or why people try to enter through the "exit only" door at Walmart. Perhaps you've watched a documentary or YouTube video recently and would like to analyze the motivation for its creation. It's helpful to

start with a **broad interest** and narrow it down to a **specific topic**. The flowchart of this process might look something like this:

Poetry → Ezra Pound's poetry → Ezra Pound's poetry translations.

The next step is to determine whether your topic is researchable: do you have enough time to conduct research about it? Do you have a personal connection to this topic that may hinder your ability to remain relatively unbiased? Do you know enough about the topic to easily gather relevant scholarly literature? The example interest flowchart above could generate the following researchable question:

Are Ezra Pound's translations of Chinese poetry accurate?

If you feel confident about your research question, move forward with it, and start compiling sources you may want to use for the annotated bibliography/literature review.

Annotated Bibliography
For the annotated bibliography (if your professor requires it), find six sources - with at least three being peer-reviewed scholarly articles - pertaining to your research question. Summarize the articles, addressing the arguments the authors make, what background information they provide about your topic, and/or what evidence they provide to either support or oppose your argument. The layout of your annotated bibliography will **first include a full citation of your source in either MLA or APA format** and then your **summary** below.

Here is an example of an annotated bibliography pertaining to the research question: Are Ezra Pound's translations of Chinese poetry accurate?

Cao, Shunqing, and Lu Zhai. "Ezra Pound, Chinese Culture and the Variation
    Theory." *Neohelicon*, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 225-238. *ProQuest*,
    https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ezra-pound-chinese-culture-variation-
    theory/docview/2832898269/se-2.

Cao and Zhai detail Pound's introduction and subsequent emersion into Chinese poetry; they explain that he first drew inspiration for his own work from Chinese literature and later decided to translate selected poems from Chinese to English by utilizing art historian Ernest Fenollosa's manuscripts. The authors then explain the reception of his translations beginning with T.S. Eliot's comment - which included the word "invention" regarding the way Pound translated subject matter – and ultimately argue that, through the perspective of variation theory, Pound's poetry is an accurate translation of Chinese poetry because it successfully combines Eastern and Western poetic practices. They assert that the Imagist mindset Pound approached translation with both hindered and enhanced his ability to understand the uniquity of Chinese poetry; they cited his inaccurate belief that the entirety of Chinese characters are ideographic as one example of hindrance. Pound's translation of Chinese imagery and rhythm, however, were near perfect.

Wang, John C. "Ezra Pound as a Translator of Classical Chinese Poetry." *The Sewanee Review*, vol.
    73, no. 3, 1965, pp. 345–57. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27541320.

Wang begins his article by providing a brief explanation of Chinese characters and their idiographic nature as well as the typical design of classical Chinese poetry. He then compares two translations – one from Witter Bynner and the other from Pound - of the same poem by Li Bai, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter." Bynner's version, he argues, is accurate because it is a direct translation, but he states that Pound's is also accurate in its own right because he captured the meter and brevity of the original work.

Chang, Hongjing, et al. "Ezra Pound's English Translation Practice of Li Bai's Poems in Cathay
    Based on Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Theory." *E-bangi*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2023, pp. 58-70.
    ProQuest, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ezra-pounds-english-translation-
    practice-li-bais/docview/2853065334/se-2.

Chang et al. states that Pound's translations of Chinese poetry – specifically Li Bai's poetry – are accurate, and furthermore promoted a wider foreign reception of Li Bai's poetry. They assert that Pound chose specific poems by Li Bai to translate due to their intrinsic alignment to his Imagist principles and because they resonated with his emotional sensibilities. Both of these motivations incentivized the way he translated each poem, focusing on concise and emotionally powerful language. They also allege that, due to Pound's social standing and cultural upbringing, his translations were subject to much scrutiny, allowing the public to study the originals more urgently.

You might struggle to find sources pertaining to your chosen research question or feel that your question is not researchable at this level. At this stage, it's not too late to consider developing a new research question about the same topic or an entirely different topic!

Literature Review

After you've completed the annotated bibliography, you will combine the summaries of your sources into cohesive paragraphs by adding **topic sentences**, **transition words,** and **references or connections between the articles.**

Many scholars argue that Pound's translations were merely recreations without regard to the original works, but Cao and Zhai, in their article "Ezra Pound, Chinese Culture and the Variation Theory," argue that Pound's poetry is an accurate translation of Chinese poetry because it successfully combines Eastern and Western poetic practices. They detail Pound's introduction and subsequent emersion into Chinese poetry; they explain that he first drew inspiration for his own work from Chinese literature and later decided to translate selected poems from Chinese to English by utilizing art historian Ernest Fenollosa's manuscripts. The authors then explain the reception of his translations beginning with T.S. Eliot's criticism - which included the word "invention" regarding the way Pound translated subject matter – and assert that perhaps the Imagist mindset Pound approached translation with both hindered and enhanced his ability to understand the uniquity of Chinese poetry; they cited his inaccurate belief that all Chinese characters are ideographic as one example of hindrance. Pound's translation of Chinese imagery and rhythm, however, were near perfect.

Pound's translations were not simple imitations, and John C. Wang, author of "Ezra Pound as a Translator of Classical Chinese Poetry," further argues this. Wang begins his article by providing a brief explanation of Chinese characters and their idiographic nature as well as the typical design of classical Chinese poetry. He then compares two translations – one from Witter Bynner and the other from Pound - of the same poem by Li Bai, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter." Bynner's version, he argues, is technically more accurate because it is a direct translation, but he states that Pound's is accurate because he captured the meter and brevity of the original work. **This is the same assertion that Cao and Zhai ultimately make, and all authors agree that while Pound did translate some words or images inaccurately and ignorantly, overall, he recreated classical Chinese poems with respect to the originals.**

Chang et al. provide another consideration to the conversation – whether Pound's contributions were important to literary scholarship. They agree with Cao, Zhai, and Wang that Pound's translations of Chinese poetry – specifically Li Bai's poetry – are accurate, and furthermore promoted a wider foreign reception of Li Bai's poetry. They assert that Pound chose specific poems by Li Bai to translate due to their intrinsic alignment to his Imagist principles and because they resonated with his emotional sensibilities. Both motivations incentivized the way he translated each poem, focusing on concise and emotionally powerful language. They also allege that, due to Pound's social standing and cultural upbringing, his translations were subject to much scrutiny; critics and supporters of Pound alike were enthusiastic to study the original works to draw comparison between the two and make their judgements.

Methods

The Methods portion of your essay will explain how you investigated your research question. Specifically describe the details of your research by answering the five W questions; who did you survey/interview/observe, what did you study, when did the study take place, where did you conduct the research, and why did you choose this person/demographic/content to study? Be specific about how you conducted research as well; Did you conduct your research in-person or online? Are respondents anonymous or named?

Results/Discussion

Summarize the results of your primary research. Then discuss if your research question was answered; consider discussing how your primary research data answered your research question and if the results were supported or discussed in the scholarly literature you included.

Conclusion

Consider what the consequences of your research are. Why do you think your research lead to these results? What do the results tell us about your topic? This is the time to also discuss any limitations or flaws in your research. Lastly, what future research do you think could build on this study? What would you do differently if you were to research this subject empirically again?