

Reflective Essay

From the onset of this project, I knew that I would be required to do copious amounts of library research. Initially, I thought this meant perusing the library isles in search of some old, dusty textbooks. What I did not know was how integral these scholastic investigations would be to the scope of my research. In actuality, nearly all of my references and sources came from Cal Poly Pomona's online library resources, services, and collections. I was able to complete my research through the use of professional scholarship without having to spend hours sifting through Cal Poly's exhaustive, but impressive, resources. This is a solution that I might not have previously reached if I hadn't consulted a librarian at the research-help desk. Who knew that the entire scope of my research would begin with a simple conversation?

The benefits to using these online databases and collections were astonishing. As a graduate student pursuing TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), I knew that I wanted to conduct topical research in regards to ESL writing. Sadly, I felt as if I had nothing new to contribute to the field. It seemed like everything that *could* be said about the subject had already been published. It wasn't enough for me to study these concepts in my textbooks; I wanted to publish and present my own research in this field.

Naturally, the first step was to figure out what had already been said about ESL writing and grade performance. Specifically, I was interested in investigating the affect of sentence variety [simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex] on ESL academic writing grades. I went through an intricate series of drafting which eventually led me to my research question. First, I went to the library in search of these texts, but instead chose to ask a library employee about where I might find these sources. I soon came to realize that the niche scholarship I was

exploring would be better accessed online. Thus, I took to Cal Poly's library homepage in search of these academic journals. Although I had used these databases years ago during my undergraduate career, I felt a bit uneasy as there was an extensive variety of subject-related links. I first navigated through the general ProQuest Databases, but thought that the specific "Language and Linguistics" might better serve my needs.

Here, I found some suggested academic databases including the Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics, MLA Bibliography, JSTOR, and Project Muse. Some were familiar, but I chose to explore each of these by searching terms and phrases like "ESL writing" and "sentence variety." It soon became obvious that JSTOR housed the most applicable scholarship. This database allows users to refine their searches in regards to content type, publication date, subject, and access level. Although I may never explore the majority of these filters, I feel at ease knowing that these resources are available to Cal Poly students.

As mentioned previously, I tried a variety of entries because my topic of research was too broad. I moved from grander concepts like "linguistics" and "ESL writing" to refined topics like "sentence types." With such enormous returns, I chose to use a bit of creativity to simplify my entries. Instead of pursuing broader abstractions, I chose to search for examples of what I was investigating (e.g., simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences). Ultimately, this is what gave me the scholarship I required.

Consequently, I was able to initiate and conclude my pre-research investigation in a single, concise session. Referred to as a Literature Review, this step is essential when conducting ESL-related research. This is where the researcher is able to determine what has already been published about the field of interest in addition to what needs to be said. Using Cal Poly Pomona's database resources gave me that opportunity. Not only was I able to effectively

determine that there had been research done in this particular area, but that the scholarship was outdated. In fact, I was able to cite academic journals and books that dated from 1928 to 2008. My research is not only a synthesis of these past publications, but also an up-to-date investigative inquiry which considers the professional implications of teaching sentence variety in the classroom. I was once again inspired to conduct my research because I felt as if I was going to be adding something new to the field. My research question transformed from something ill-defined to: “Does sentence variety correlate with superior academic writing grades?”

Looking back on the prolonged process, I earnestly conclude that I will be better equipped to approach research projects in the future. I now know that using library research tools transcends merely scouring floors and physical bookshelves. The process, depending on the type of research, can entail sitting at home and working through online library databases. These resources include access to online books, periodicals, and academic journals.

In terms of my research, I now feel prepared and equipped with the necessary tools to jumpstart future projects. This includes the role of search terms. For example, if I’m writing a paper examining the gendered rhetoric of Dove commercials, I may first consult Cal Poly Pomona’s online databases with terms like: “masculinity” and “femininity.” If these search queries didn’t work, I may then try something broader like “gender stereotypes.”

In brief, I can now appreciate the intricacies involved in conducting research where academic scholarship is essential. This process requires drafting, editing, and rearticulating of not only the research question(s), but also, as aforementioned, the search terms. From there, this path can develop creatively, complexly, or flexibly depending on the tools and resources the researcher is familiar with.

In my own project, the services of the Cal Poly Pomona print and digital resources, special collections, and academic journals was invaluable. Although I am not an expert, I am eager to help anyone questioning the importance of library research. For anyone feeling intimidated by this feat, I say to look no further than the Cal Poly Pomona library homepage!