Description

Consider Your Purpose

Passion for a research topic can get you through some tough spots when you're struggling with your hypothesis, buried under articles for your literature review, or plowing through your collected data. However, passion will not be enough to help you navigate through the murkier waters of assessing the viability of your proposed topic.

While there will definitely be times when a research project will completely take over your life, it doesn't mean that you won't move on to other studies on other topics in the future. For that reason, the first step in deciding the area of research to pursue should be what you plan to do with it once it's completed. Are you a graduate student looking for placement in a doctoral program? Are you a new faculty member looking to move forward on the tenure track? Are you a postdoctoral researcher looking to make a name for yourself or at least get your supervisor off your back with her constant reminders about how important it is to get published? Are you an established researcher, leading a large team, who is looking for the next major funded project to fully occupy the resources of your department?

Basic or Applied Research?

Research funds are increasingly being invested with an expectation of a more practical return than just contributing to the body of knowledge on a specific topic. There is no doubt that basic research enhances foundational knowledge and provides a more data-rich platform for applied research to build on, but if you are looking for a trend to factor into your decision, applied research would be a strong contender.

The Attraction of New Research

With so many researchers looking to get published in an increasingly smaller population of credible research journals, the trend towards new research has been clearly established. As a result, replication studies garner very little attention, and research studies with negative results rarely seem to make it to print.

For researchers looking to chase a trend, the fascination with new topics can leave you in a quandary. Any research that is considered new enough to warrant publication will cast such a long shadow that any follow-up work will run the risk of being dismissed as derivative or simply quasi-replication.

Think for Yourself

What kind of researcher do you aim to be? The emergence of open access publishing has presented multiple avenues to get published in journals of varying levels of prestige, but is that the direction in which you plan to take your career? If you're struggling with the pressure to *publish or perish*, you may

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be tempted to take a few shortcuts to put yourself on the first rung of the tenure ladder, but if academic research is your intended career for life, starting out by electing to follow the herd may not be the wisest choice.

Thinking for yourself is a tougher path to take, and if you're working with a research supervisor or mentor who constantly challenges you to think, you may resent him or her in the short term, but you will definitely be grateful over the long haul.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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daveishan

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