

# Purpose Statements and Research Problems

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# Overview

- **Goal of this lecture: discuss strategies that will help you contextualize your research within a “Purpose Statement” and “Research Problem”**

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- **Identify some questions that you should be asking yourself throughout the writing and revision process**

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- **Clarification: this lecture will treat “Purpose Statements” and “Research Problems” as if they are a single, standalone document**
- **This lecture will help you craft a 1-2 page document that outlines the goals and context of your research**

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- **Purpose Statements and Research Problems are used as standalone materials in some cases**
- **However, academic texts (journal articles, dissertations, and books) also have sections that serve the same goals**
- **Writing strategies we discuss today are transferable**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Research problems need to achieve a few goals**



# Identifying Purpose and Problems

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- **Identify a specific problem**
- **Explain the relevance of this problem**
- **Pose the question and methods that you will use to explore (and possibly resolve) this problem**
- **Narrate the larger significance of addressing this problem (the “so what?” of your research)**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Purpose Statements and Research Problems can help you consider the context and significance of your work**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Purpose Statements and Research Problems can help you consider the context and significance of your work**
- **It might help to draft a statement/problem at the onset of your work**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **There are several common strategies for identifying a problem and research purpose**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **There are several common strategies for identifying a problem and research purpose**
- **This lecture will discuss one strategy often used in academic publishing**
- **This strategy is not comprehensive but it is a useful model to structure your writing**



# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Common strategy: identify a problem in terms of causes and consequences**
- **If you use this strategy, you'll need to consider the following questions**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **First: what specific problem are you examining?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **First: what specific problem are you examining?**
- **Are you examining a socio-cultural problem?**
- **Are you examining limitations in previous research?**
- **Are you examining a debate or disagreement in a specific field-of-study?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

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- **When identifying a problem, you should offer a coherent timeline**
- **Is this problem recent or on-going?**
- **If the problem is recent, why has it emerged now? If the problem is on-going, are there new trends in addressing it?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Second: what are a few variables that are associated with the causes of this problem?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Second: what are a few variables that are associated with the causes of this problem?**
- **How have other scholars diagnosed possible reasons for this problem emerging?**
- **What key terms or ideas have scholars focused on when diagnosing the causes of this problem?**



# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Let's say that you are trying to overcome limitations when optimizing a specific process**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Let's say that you are trying to overcome limitations when optimizing a specific process**
- **In this case, you would explain what these limitations are and how other scholars have identified or diagnosed them**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Third: what are the most important consequences associated with this problem?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Third: what are the most important consequences associated with this problem?**
- **How have scholars discussed the short- and long-term impact of this problem?**
- **What communities or organizations are most affected by this problem?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **No need to discuss every consequence stemming from this problem**
- **Highlight the consequence that is most pertinent to your research goals and aims**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

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# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Let's say you are writing about low digital literacy skills in K-12 education**
- **There are many different consequences (lack of professional preparation, low college admissions, etc.)**
- **Acknowledge the range of consequences but focus on the one that is most relevant to you**



# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Fourth: what specific research question are you posing?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Fourth: what specific research question are you posing?**
- **How does your research question address the causes of this problem or mitigate the consequences associated with this problem?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Answering this question is contingent upon your unique research**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Answering this question is contingent upon your unique research**
- **Are you trying to prevent this problem from emerging?**
- **Are you trying to lessen or resolve the effects of this problem?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Need to clarify how your research question and methodologies are appropriate for achieving a specific goal when addressing a specific problem**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Fifth: what do we gain from undertaking your research question?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Fifth: what do we gain from undertaking your research question?**
- **Who can benefit from your research?**
- **How can your research help others continue exploring these issues?**
- **What questions for further inquiry have emerged from your research?**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Advanced research is often specialized and discipline-specific**



# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Advanced research is often specialized and discipline-specific**
- **Avoid the tendency to say your research can help everyone**
- **Don't be afraid of identifying the specific scholarly communities you want to respond to**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **Let's recap**

# Identifying Purpose and Problems

- **What specific problem are you addressing?**
- **What are the causes?**
- **What are the consequences?**
- **What is your research question? How does your question and methods resonate with these causes or consequences?**
- **Who can benefit from your findings?**

# Productive Criticism

- **Identifying shortcomings in other research is a delicate exercise in criticism**

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- **Identifying shortcomings in other research is a delicate exercise in criticism**
- **Yes, you are acknowledging shortcomings**
- **However, you are also contributing to on-going conversations**

# Productive Criticism

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- **Avoid right/wrong or good/bad binaries when discussing other research**
- **Saying other researchers are “wrong” or have “failed” runs the risk of alienating readers**
- **Acknowledging “limitations” is a form of criticism but doesn’t degrade the validity of other scholars**

# Productive Criticism

- **Highlight the accomplishments of prior research**



# Productive Criticism

- **Highlight the accomplishments of prior research**
- **Your goal is to build upon and enhance (not refute) other scholarship**
- **Your research will not be perfect but others will build upon it in the future**

# Productive Criticism

- In short, criticism should be a combination of acknowledging shortcomings and expanding the potential of other work

# Conclusion

- **Remember, the questions outlined in this lecture are meant to be transferable**

# Conclusion

- Remember, the questions outlined in this lecture are meant to be transferable
- Knowing what questions to ask yourself while writing is the most effective way of becoming a better writer
- It is also useful to find samples that you can model

# Conclusion

- **The ORS Lab has consultants to help with both quantitative and qualitative research questions**
- **Webinars that discuss writing strategies**
- **Resources to help authors draft writing at every stage**