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
Overview

• 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
Overview

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• However, academic texts (journal articles, dissertations, and books) also have sections that serve the same goals
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• 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

• Identify a specific problem
Identifying Purpose and Problems

• Identify a specific problem

• Explain the relevance of this problem
Identifying Purpose and Problems

- 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
Identifying Purpose and Problems

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- 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
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• 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

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• 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

• When identifying a problem, you should offer a coherent timeline
Identifying Purpose and Problems

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• Is this problem recent or on-going?
Identifying Purpose and Problems

• 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?
• Second: what are a few variables that are associated with the causes of this problem?
Identifying Purpose and Problems

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• 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
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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

- Let’s say you are writing about low digital literacy skills in K-12 education
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.)
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
• Fourth: what specific research question are you posing?
Identifying Purpose and Problems

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• 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

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• 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.
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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• Yes, you are acknowledging shortcomings

• However, you are also contributing to on-going conversations
Productive Criticism

• Avoid right/wrong or good/bad binaries when discussing other research
Productive Criticism

- 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
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• 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