

Dissertation Proposal Problem Area Worksheet

This worksheet is for you to assess the current state of your proposal research and thinking. Below is a list of questions that reflect the major burdens of proof for your proposal. The strength of your proposal, and thus your dissertation, will depend on how thoroughly you are able to answer these questions. But for now, the goal is for you simply to take stock of which ones you can answer and which you can't – your strengths and areas for development.

Answer the questions in the left-hand column; write as much as you can and be as thorough as possible. In the right-hand column, provide brief citations for any sources you have researched, e.g. "(Smith 1999)," that you believe you will need to demonstrate your answer to that specific question. This will help you to identify gaps in both your argumentation and your research.

1a. The Research Territory	Citations
<p>Why is the <u>topic area</u> of your research important? <i>Why is the general subject you are exploring significant, and to whom?</i></p>	
<p>What is the <u>problem</u> in your topic area that you are trying to address? What is unknown? <i>What is the problem you are going to be tackling? What is wrong in/with this important topic area?</i></p>	
<p>What are the <u>harms or effects</u> of the problem? What impact does the problem have (on people, businesses, systems, knowledge, etc.)? <i>So what? Why is the problem a problem? Who or what is being harmed, and what happens if the problem continues to go unaddressed?</i></p>	

1b. The Status Quo	Citations
<p>What <u>efforts</u> have been made currently (in the real world) to address the problem? <i>What has been done to address so significant and harmful a problem?</i></p>	
<p>Why are those efforts <u>inadequate</u> to address the problem? <i>Why isn't that enough?</i></p>	
2. The Current State of Scholarship	
<p>What <u>previous scholarly research</u> has been conducted into your problem? <i>What do other scholars say about your problem? What research are you building on, and/or what are you refuting?</i></p>	
<p>What are the <u>limitations</u> of that research? What is the <u>gap</u> in the existing research that you are going to fill? (NB "no one has done this before" is not a sufficient reason on its own) <i>What have "they" not said?</i></p>	
3. Your Intervention	
<p>What is the <u>purpose</u> of your research? <i>How does your research fill the gap you've identified above?</i></p>	

What are your research questions and/or hypotheses?

*What are the specific questions you are trying to answer in filling that gap?
(I.e., you will know your dissertation is complete when you have answers to
these questions and nothing else besides.)*

Adapted from Christine Feak and John Swales, *Creating Contexts: Writing Introductions Across Genres* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 55.