

4: From Questions to a Problem

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From Questions to a Problem

“ In this chapter, we explain how to turn a question into a problem that readers think is worth solving”

- Create a significance that matters to others.
- Poses a problem

4.1: Understanding Research Problems

- Make research matter
 - Address a problem that others, your readers, also want to solve.
- Understand what a research question looks like.
 - 2 kinds of problems, practical and conceptual.

4.1.1 Practical Problems: What Should We Do?

- Research usually begins with a practical problem.
 - If you ignore these problems there will be trouble
- You have to figure out a solution.
 - Pose and solve a research problem

Practical Problem: The chain on my bicycle broke.

Research Problem: Can I find a bike shop that will fix it?

Research Solution: Here it is: Cycle Source, 1401 East 55th Street.

Practical Solution: Walk over to get my bike fixed.

- Caused by some condition that troubles us.

4.1.2 Conceptual Problems: What Should We Think?

- The need for knowledge raises a conceptual problem.
 - Not understanding something as well as we would like
- Solved by answering a question to understand it better.
 - Answered through research

4.2 Understanding The Common Structure of Problems

4.2.1 The Nature of Practical Problems

- Has 2 parts
 - A condition
 - The costs
- You must describe both of its parts

Condition: The ozone layer is thinning

Cost: Many will die from skin cancer

- Readers judge the significance of the problem by the cost *they* pay.
 - From their P.O.V
- Academic research problems will likely be conceptual ones

4.2.2 The Nature of Conceptual Problems

- Condition is always some form of not knowing or understanding something.
- Cost is ignorance and not understanding something of significance.
 - Show how solving your problem helps solve theirs

4.2.3 Distinguishing “Pure” and “Applied” Research

- Pure- conceptual, not real world applicable, knowledge for knowledge’s sake
- Applied- practical consequences
- Telling the difference:
 - Topic/Question/Significance (aka Objective) refers to knowing or doing

4.2.4 Connecting Research to Practical Consequences

- Often force link between Research Question and Objective to make it applied
- To form good applied research project ask:
 - Do readers want to achieve goal of ____ (Objective)
 - Would they be able to if answered ____ (Question)
- Can add potential application on top of objective as 4th step to make research applied

4.3 Finding a Good Research Question

4.3.1 Ask for Help

- Talk to anyone who may have interest
 - Why want an answer?
 - What would they do?
 - What new questions may arise?
- Start with small problem of the bigger picture
- Ask teacher for suggestions
 - Reach beyond and don't limit to what they said
 - Use as start to thinking not end

4.3.2 Look for Problems as You Read

- Find research problems in sources
 - Contradictions
 - Inconsistencies
 - Incomplete explanations
- Ending of source may also propose more problems that need to be answered

4.3.3 Look at Your Own Conclusion

- Critical reading of your draft can help you find a research problem

4.4 Learning to Work with Problems

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- May find new problem no one ever thought
- First ask yourself
 - Can you solve it?
 - Will readers think it should be solved?
- Formulate a question you think is worth answering