

Articulating a Research Agenda: Transcript

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Thank you for watching this Purdue OWL vidcast on Articulating a Research Agenda.

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An important part of conducting research is being able to articulate your purpose or research agenda. Your research agenda consists of the question or questions that motivate your research and the methodology you will use to pursue this question.

It is helpful to identify your research agenda towards the start of a project, but you will likely find that it evolves and becomes more refined as you work. You will likely also notice other questions that could be posed about your topic or additional gaps that need to be filled. These can help you to generate new ideas for future research. It can help to stay focused on your more narrow research question, but keep in mind that any article or dissertation can be part of a larger research interest that you pursue for years.

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A research question encapsulates the primary aim or objective of the paper.

While a study usually starts with a research question, it may not always be represented as a direct question. A research question can also take the form of a statement of purpose, statement of problem, or hypothesis. You can also find research questions laid out in a list of research aims. The way that you write your research question will depend on your field. There may be other accepted methods of articulating your research question in your field of study, and some fields may use multiple methods for articulating this information, even within the same article.

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The first step in articulating your research agenda is to come up with your research question. This can be harder than it seems, even if you've already been conducting research.

To help you pose your research question, you can start by answering two questions:

- What is your topic?
- And why does it matter?

If these are difficult to answer, check out our video on [Creating a Research Space](#).

Once you've brainstormed some information in response to these, you can draft a research question that would guide your investigation about this topic.

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You might find it helpful to brainstorm a few different possible research questions. Here are a few ways you can try generating new questions:

- Try a more focused, narrow version of your question
- Try a broader version
- Try changing from a question to a hypothesis, or from a hypothesis to a question
- Envision how another scholar would come up with a question for this topic. You can even try reading through articles and mirroring the structure of another writer's question.

After you've brainstormed a few possibilities, ask yourself which feels appropriate for the project you're working on. For example, a conference presentation will have a much narrower question than your dissertation. Keep in mind that you might be able to come back to some of these other questions to use for sub-pieces of your project, or for future work.

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Once you've identified a tentative research question, you can build to the second half of your research agenda. This includes the methods of data collection and analysis that you will use to investigate your question, and the types of data that you will use. This part of your agenda gives you a plan that your research will follow. When you write it into your project, it will tell the reader exactly how you approached your research.

Your field's values will determine which methods and data are viewed as valid for producing knowledge. Some fields may only use statistical data, while others value qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. Other fields may largely be interested in texts, artifacts, or theoretical claims. Use your reading in your field to inform the kind of data and methods you select for your project.

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To articulate your own research agenda, you can think about the data and methods you'll need.

First, what kind of data do you need to collect?

If your research will involve human subjects, you'll want to get it approved by the IRB office. This process takes time, so it's a good idea to start early.

For your methods, you'll want to think about what kinds of analysis are most appropriate for exploring your question, and what steps you need to take.

- Are there schools of theory and methods of interpretation you want to use? Why do you want to use those over others?
- Is your work quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods? You can start to get more specific here: will you be running a survey, an experiment, reading sources, and so on? What are the specific steps you will take?
- Do you need any particular tools, or kinds of technology, to conduct this research?
- What other works of scholarship use these methods? These can help to guide your research, and you may want to cite them in your work.

Outlining rough answers to these questions will help you to get started. As you begin to actually design your research project, you'll fill in your research agenda in more detail. As you begin writing, this can form the foundation of your methods section.

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Keep in mind that your research agenda may change as you research, and that's a productive part of the research process!

If you'd like tips for other parts of the writing process, check out the rest of our vidcasts on graduate student writing!

You can also find more information about graduate writing on the Purdue OWL website.

Thank you for watching!