

# Articulating a Research Agenda

An important part of conducting research is being able to articulate your purpose or research agenda. Doing so is part of [creating a research space](#). Articulating your research agenda might start with articulating a research question. This can take several different forms: an actual question, a statement of research purpose, a statement of problem, or a list of hypotheses. 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.

A research agenda grows out of a research question. A research agenda includes a research question and the methods of data collection and analysis that you will use to investigate your question. A field's values will determine which methods and data the scholars in the field view as valid for producing knowledge. Some fields may only value statistical data, while others value qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. Other fields may largely be interested in texts, artifacts, or theoretical claims.

When composing your research question, you want to ensure that the data, methods, and methodologies for researching your question are recognized as valid by your field or can be recognized as valid if the research is conducted appropriately. As an up-and-coming scholar in your field, you'll want to become familiar with the ways in which research questions and research agendas are commonly articulated among scholars in your field so that you will be able to use your research to join the conversation they have already started.

## Research Questions

A research question encapsulates the primary aim or objective of the paper. Sometimes the research question might be presented outright, such as in this example:

“How does empathy emerge in writing center consultations?”

In the example above, the research question is an actual question. It is clearly stated and specific. Research questions may not be this overt in other scholarship. They may be reconceptualized as a hypothesis, a list of aims, or a thesis statement, which would then be explored or proven over the course of the paper, as in the three following examples:

## Examples of Research Questions

- “The goal of this study is to examine factors associated with the depressive symptoms of National Guard members and their partners during pre-deployment.”

- “Pulling from relational maintenance and equity theories, this study examines how the perceptions and re-division in household labor and conversations surrounding this renegotiation affects feelings of closeness in romantic relationships in the months after a deployment.”
- “*Primary Research Aims:* (1) To evaluate the extent to which significant others’ relationship-focused coping during deployment is predicted by both their own depressive symptoms during predeployment, in addition to service members’ depressive symptoms during predeployment; (2) To evaluate the extent to which significant others’ relationship-focused coping during deployment is predictive of their own depressive symptoms during reintegration and service members’ depressive symptoms during reintegration; and (3) To evaluate...”

Often research questions are implicit because they are articulated as part of a larger research agenda that is not in the form of a question. The researchers likely started with a simple question but revised the question into a research agenda. It takes work (i.e., active reading) to discover the parts of a research agenda.

## Activity: Identifying a Research Agenda

**Learning Objective:** To use active reading skills to analyze research questions in published material using the information from the [Creating a Research Space \(CARS\) framework](#).

When you are looking for an article’s research agenda, start by looking for clearly presented research questions, statements of purpose or problem, or hypotheses. The first portion of this activity has you try this out with an article from your field.

### Directions

Step 1: Skim the abstract and introduction to one article of research interest in your field. You could also use an article that you have read for class or cited in your own papers. Look for places where the author(s) articulate their research question. Remember, it may not be an actual question.

Step 2: Fill in the table on the next page for where in the document you find each item and how it is communicated to the reader. Note that any particular article may not have all of these.

<b>Item to Find</b>	<b>Where in the document do you find this?</b>	<b>How is the item communicated in the document? What did the author(s) include in the item?</b>
Research Question		
Statement of purpose for the research		
Statement of problem		
Hypotheses		
Other articulations of research agenda		

Step 3: Once you have a sense of a scholar's research question, you can begin to look at the larger research agenda which they used to investigate that question. To identify the research agenda in a document, you can use targeted reading strategies to answer the following questions:

1. What is the aim or primary objective of the paper?
2. What results does the paper plan to report on?
3. What is the main purpose of the experiment?
4. What is the study designed to evaluate?
5. What models might the work explore?
6. What interactions might the paper report?
7. What kind of investigations were conducted or tested?

Skim through the abstract and introduction of your article again, look for the answers to those seven questions, and fill in the chart on the next page. These form the basis of the scholar's research agenda.

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What kind of investigations were conducted or tested?	

## Activity: Generating a Research Agenda of Your Own

**Learning objective:** To pose a research question for a topic of your choice using the Creating a Research Space (CARS) framework.

### Directions

Brainstorm a research topic [using the Creating a Research Space \(CARS\) framework](#). You should be able to begin to articulate a research agenda by answering the following questions with a single, complete sentence for each question.

What is the topic?	
Why does it matter?	
What is <b>one</b> research question you could further investigate about this topic?  (Remember that it could be in any of the formats listed in the table on page 2)	

## Next Steps for Research

This is the *first draft* of a potential research question that you can use to begin to build a research agenda. You may change and refine your research question over time. As you work with experts in your field on your research design, you can answer the following questions to further investigate your research question and construct your research agenda:

- 1) Is your question narrow enough for the proposed document (e.g., conference presentation vs. dissertation)?
  - a) If not, can it be divided into multiple research projects, such as a presentation or article?
- 2) What data do you need to collect to answer your question? (e.g., people's stories, algae samples, literary or historical texts, scientific measurements, etc.)
  - a) If your research will involve human subjects, you'll want to get it approved by the IRB office.

- 3) What mode of data analysis is most appropriate for exploring your question?
- a) If your work is empirical, would qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods be most appropriate?
  - b) If your work is non-empirical, which schools of theory and/or interpretation would be most appropriate?
  - c) Which other studies use these methods and methodologies? What are the texts scholars in your field cite to explain these methods and methodologies to their audience?