

Determining Your Purpose in Researching and Writing

“Readers of research reports don’t want just information; they want the answer to a question worth asking. . . . Serious researchers, however, do not report data for their own sake, but to support the answer to a question that they (and they hope their readers) think is worth asking.”

(Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2003, p. 45)

I. Think about what inspires or drives your interest in your research area, topic, or project:

- * What topic or problem do you want to further research or study?
- * What question do you want to address?
- * Are there specific variables that you want to study, such as people, objects, functions, materials, or activities?
- * Why is this topic or problem important? To whom? Consider in what ways your topic is significant and what contributions it will make. For example, does it fill a gap in your discipline’s knowledge? Does it challenge previously held assumptions? Does it problematize current constructions of something? Does it offer a new approach to something, a new way of thinking, or a new method?
- * What kind of contribution will an exploration of this topic or problem yield? To whom?
- * Is the problem/question realistic for your particular paper, research project, etc. or does it need to be further defined?
- * For what kind of project (e.g., course paper, thesis, dissertation, conference presentation, etc.) is this topic or problem realistic, or does it need to be refined?

II. Engage in a multi-step process:

In *The Craft of Research*, Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) suggest using the following process to generate a more developed research question that has significance to a particular group (p. 56):

Step 1: Identify Topic: I am studying/exploring/investigating _____
{Try to avoid a broad topic; Have a narrow topic instead}

Step 2: Imply Question: because I want to find out what/why/how _____
{Pose a question that will help you decide what research to read, what data to gather, and ways to report that data}

Step 3: Point out Significance: in order to help my readers understand _____.
{Think about what readers will gain from reading your work}

Step 4: Indicate your potential **design/method:** I will analyze/find a solution/show/create _____.

Leads to a 2-Part Structure of Problems (p. 60):

(1) A situation or condition is named and (2) The costs or implications of that situation or condition are described.

***Source:** Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2003). *The craft of research* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

III. Practice—To determine the significance of your research question, complete the following.

Topic: I am exploring/investigating _____

Question: because I want to find out what/why/how _____

Significance: in order to help my readers understand _____

Design/Method: I will analyze/find a solution/show/create _____
