Alignment Language in the Problem, Purpose, RQ
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Use this SMRTguide to draft the language in the problem, purpose, RQ, and ensure they are in alignment. Check out additional resources on alignment, such as the program-specific prospectus guides on the CRQ Programs page and the CRQ Research Planning page.

Begin by writing the problem statement.

The problem statement includes two components:

1. Discussion of the topic and the problem (typically identified by statistics or other indicators; coupled with a government or scholarly source).
2. Description of the gap. The gap, itself, is not the problem, but the gap is the second part of the problem statement. Once the problem has been identified, ensure that no existing research has already addressed this problem. Along with the gap, make sure there is sufficient explanation of why this research is needed.

Example:

Here is a sample draft of a problem statement:

[discussion and development of the coming-out processes and challenges, bullying, acceptance, etc.]... The problem is that gay, lesbian, and bisexual women often face challenges and adversity in the coming-out process (see Grov et al., 2006; Rosario et al., 2004). Though many members of the LGBTQ community face bullying and are often the victims of hate crimes (see Grov et al., 2006; Rosario et al., 2004), specifically, in Chicago, in 2017 hate crimes have been on the decrease (compared to previous years), especially among the LGBTQ community (Chicago Sun Times, n.d.). Though there is a vast literature on the coming-out process for gay, lesbian, and bisexual women, there is no current research focused on the changing cultural climate in which less crime is exhibited toward this group in a given area than in previous years and how this might help produce a different coming-out experience. It is important to understand the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual women who engage in the coming-out process and whether the changing Chicago cultural climate may be alleviating some of the challenges and adversity.

Check:

- Is there a clear problem?
- Is it supported by the literature, stats, or other source (including citations)?
- Is there an identified gap, demonstrating that this has not already been researched?
- Is there an explanation of why this research is needed?
Next, write a RQ that is related to the problem and the gap.

Remember that the language in the RQ determines the method and design:

- *What is the relationship between...?* OR *Is there a relationship between...?* implies a quantitative study focused on a regression analysis or correlation.
- *Is there a difference between (or among)...?* suggests a quantitative study of difference in means or variance (t tests or ANOVA).
- *What are the experiences of...?* typically indicates a general qualitative study.
- *What are the daily, lived experiences of...?* implies a qualitative study that is phenomenological, focused on how a phenomenon affects all aspects of daily life for a given population.
- *How...? or What are the barriers to...?* questions typically indicate a case study—and also need to express the bounded case (typically population, geographic location, or another firm boundary).

**Example:**

Here is a sample draft RQ that follows the above problem statement:

*What are the daily, lived experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual women who engage in the coming-out process during the changing cultural climate of reduced instances of hate crime against the LGBTQ community in Chicago?*

**Check:**

- Is the RQ focused on the same topics, same language as the problem?
- Does the RQ contain the same population/geography (if identified)?
- “What are the lived experiences...?” implies phenomenology, so does that language match the intended design?

Finally, write the **purpose statement**.

The easiest way to draft the purpose statement is rewrite the RQ as a statement: “The purpose of this xxxx[design] study is to...”. If the same language is used in both, alignment should be present.

**Example:**

Here is a draft of a purpose statement, written to follow the RQ above:

*The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the daily, lived experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual women who engage in the coming-out process during the changing cultural climate of reduced instances of hate crimes against the LGBTQ community in Chicago.*

**Check:**

- Is the design indicated?
  - And does that design language match the method? (“daily, lived experiences of...” signals phenomenology [see above]).
- Are the population and setting/location language the same as in the problem, RQ, and now purpose?
- Do the purpose and RQ also include the same concepts (coming-out process, cultural climate, hate crimes against LGBTQ community) and verbs (engage)?
Finally, check for overall **alignment among all three.**

Building one piece from another, and using the same language (regarding population, location [if necessary], concepts or variables, verbs, method/design) should ensure that alignment is present throughout. Here are some key ways to recognize if the problem, purpose, and RQ are *not* aligned:

**Example: How to know if there is *not* alignment across all three.**

- **Language is different—even if the writer may *mean* the same thing.**
  - Perhaps “Chicago” is discussed in the purpose and “Illinois” is used in the RQ. The writer may actually *mean* the same thing, but operationally these are different (one is a city; one is an entire state).
    - **Fix?** The writer should ensure that “Chicago” OR “Illinois” is used throughout and purposefully (but not both), and not used interchangeably.

- **Language is absent.**
  - The geographic location may be specified in the problem, but not in the purpose or RQ.
  - Maybe the discussion of Chicago is present in the problem and establishing the problem, but then in the purpose and RQ, the researcher does not mention that this study is specific to Chicago. This is an issue because the study should not be conducted outside of the context of the problem.
    - **Fix?** Make sure that the language regarding location, concepts, and general terminology are not only the same in the problem, purpose, RQ, but ensure that necessary descriptions that provide context are present in each.

- **The language does not match the design.**
  - Remember that the how the RQ is phrased (language used) determines the method and design of the study. Maybe the design that the researcher is considering does not fit with how the question is phrased.
  - What if the researcher wants to conduct a phenomenological study on how or why these crime rates have been reduced? **This is not in alignment** because that type of question does not fit phenomenology.
    - **Fix?** The researcher needs to choose a design that is appropriate for what the intended study (like change the design to a case study).
    - **Fix?** If what the researcher really means is to conduct a phenomenological study on the daily, lived experiences of the participants, then the researcher needs to ensure the language in the RQ fits that design. Rewriting the RQ with the appropriate language is necessary.

**References**

