The Dissertation Proposal: 
Aligning the Problem, Purpose, 
and Research Questions

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In this webinar you will learn how to:

• Define the concept of Alignment
• Explain why Alignment matters
• Develop the Problem Statement
• Align the Purpose of the Study with the Problem
• Align the Research Questions with the Problem and Purpose
• Frame the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions
Define the Concept of Alignment
Define the Concept of Alignment

What Is Alignment?

Alignment is the logical flow and consistency among the problem, purpose, and research questions.
Define the Concept of Alignment

Problem Statement

Purpose of the Study

Research Questions
Explain Why Alignment Matters
Why Does Alignment Matter?

- Alignment keeps your focus on your specific problem and purpose
- Alignment improves the logic and consistency of the study
Alignment Begins by Getting Your Ducks in a Row
Alignment Is All about Consistency

- Are the concepts the same in the problem, the purpose, and the research questions?
- Does the purpose of the study logically flow from the problem statement?
- Do the research questions reflect the purpose of the study?
Develop the Problem Statement
Develop the Problem Statement

Problem Statement

Purpose of the Study

Research Questions
The Problem Statement

- Moves from general problem to specific problem to be investigated
- Often points to a gap in the knowledge base
- Leads to the purpose statement
Write an Effective Problem Statement

• Indicate what specific problem will be investigated
• Indicate why it is a problem
• Use the declarative or question form
Develop the Problem Statement

The Funnel

- The Hook
- The General Problem
- GAP
- The Specific Problem
- The Anchor
The Hook

The Hook creates interest in your general topic.

*Example:* Despite continued reform efforts on the part of federal and state education agencies, disparities in achievement for disadvantaged students persist (Citations*).

*Be sure to provide research citations for support.*
The Anchor

The Anchor grounds the reader in the need for the study.

*Example*: A recent analysis of test performance trends for the past 5 years on 8th-grade reading achievement noted that, in some states, “Students with disabilities have made progress” but “differences in test performance between students with disabilities and non-disabled students are very large” (Citations*).

*Be sure to provide research citations for support.
The General Problem

The General Problem grows out of the Hook and Anchor.

*Example:* There are few studies that accurately assess the extent and reasons for this persistent gap, particularly with respect to students with disabilities. States have struggled to meet achievement goals for students with disabilities. Federal and state agencies do not understand the extent of and reasons for the disparity, nor can they identify practices to reduce the disparity (Citations*).

*Be sure to provide research citations for support.*
The Specific Problem

The Specific Problem is a narrowly focused, manageable, and researchable piece of the General Problem.

*Example:* Little to no data exists that examines national trends for disparities in students with and without disabilities on 8th-grade reading achievement over the past 5 years.
The Gap

The Gap is the piece of the problem that has not been addressed or is not well understood in the existing knowledge base.

Example: National studies have not accurately assessed the extent of this persistent disparity, particularly with respect to students with disabilities.
Align the Purpose of the Study
Align the Purpose of the Study

Problem Statement

Purpose of the Study

Research Questions
Purpose Statement Flows Directly from Problem Statement

*Example:* The purpose of this study is to examine national *trends* for disparities in students with and without disabilities for 8th-grade *reading achievement* over the past 5 years.
The Purpose of the Study

• Explains the primary goal of your study
• Identifies the setting and population of your study
• Answers the question, “How will you address the problem?”
Write an Effective Purpose Statement

Answer these questions about your proposed study:

• What?
• Where?
• Who?
• How?
Align the Research Questions
Align the Research Questions

Problem Statement

Purpose of the Study

Research Questions
Research Questions Flow Directly from Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine national trends for disparities in students with and without disabilities for 8th-grade reading achievement over the past 5 years.

1. What are the trends in 8th-grade reading achievement for students with and without disabilities over the past 5 years?
2. Do disparities between students with and without disabilities decrease for 8th-grade reading achievement over the past 5 years?
Research Questions

- Guide your research on your chosen topic
- Point to the type of data and research design to be used
- Identify variables to be used in quantitative study
- Identify a central phenomenon to be explored in a qualitative study
Write Effective Research Questions

• Clearly and concisely express your questions
• Use terms consistent with purpose of study and problem statement
• State how you will conduct your study
Frame the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

What are the essential concepts, models, and theories associated with your dissertation topic?
Frame the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

- Problem Statement
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions
Theoretical Framework:

Used in a *quantitative* study to test a theory.
Example: Performance-based accountability for school improvement

Conceptual Framework:

Used in a *qualitative* study as a guiding framework.
Example: Rights of students with disabilities to an equitable education
Disciplinary Orientation

Theory is the lens through which you view the world.
Disciplinary Orientation Example

Field: Public Education Policy

Theories: Performance-Based Accountability for School Improvement

Concepts: Achievement Gap, Adequate Yearly Progress, Disadvantaged Students (i.e. Students at Risk for School Failure), Measures of Implementation of Federal Education Policy Reform

Models: Performance Management, Organizational Research/Theory
The Dissertation Proposal:
Aligning the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions
Alignment Is All about Consistency

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- Do the research questions reflect the purpose statement?
The Dissertation Proposal

Problem Statement

Purpose of the Study

Research Questions
Action Steps

• Develop the Problem Statement
• Align the Purpose of the Study with the Problem
• Align the Research Questions with the Problem and Purpose
• Frame your Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions
A Dissertation Coach Can Help You:

- Develop your Problem Statement
- Align the Purpose of your Study with the Problem
- Align your Research Questions with your Problem and Purpose
- Frame your Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions
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Questions?
Thank You!