

Framing the Topic/Research Question... (Templates and Examples)

A)...to tease out significance and implications:

from Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research, Fourth Edition*. The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Template:

I am studying/working on _____

because I want to find out who/what/when/where/whether/why/how

in order to help my reader understand how/why/whether _____

Example 1:

I am studying the causes of the disappearance of large North American mammals **because I want to find out** whether the earliest peoples hunted them to extinction, **in order to help my reader understand** whether native peoples lived in harmony with nature or helped destroy it.

Example 2:

I am working on Lincoln's beliefs about predestination and their influence on his reasoning **because I want to find out** how his belief in destiny and God's will influenced his understanding of the causes of the Civil War, **in order to help my reader understand** how his religious beliefs may have influenced his military decisions.

B) ...as a problem to be solved:

from *AP Research: Workshop Handbook and Resources*. CollegeBoard, 2017.

Template 1 (recommended for science/social science):

There is a problem in or with _____.

Despite _____ (something that is/should be happening),
_____ (the conditions/symptoms/results of the problem)
is/are occurring.

This problem has negatively impacted _____ (victims of problem)
because _____.

A possible cause of this problem is _____. Perhaps a study which
investigates _____ by a _____ (method) could remedy
this situation.

Example for Template 1:

There is a problem that people who may want to find an alternative to plastic straws still use them frequently.

Despite these persons' expressed intent to change their habits regarding plastic straws, they seem unable to break these habits.

The problem has negatively impacted the environment, as plastic debris is threatening the entire food chain in the form of microplastics and sea turtles in particular when larger plastic debris gets lodged in their nostrils.

A possible cause of this problem is that too many businesses do not provide easy alternatives to plastic straws. Perhaps a study which investigates which alternatives would be most attractive to both businesses and consumers could remedy this situation.

Template 2 (recommended for history):

There is a problem in or with the understanding of _____.

Despite the belief that _____ (something that is generally accepted in current scholarship), _____ (something that refutes accepted thinking).

This problem has negatively affected our ability to understand _____ because _____.

A possible cause of the problem is _____. Perhaps a study which investigates _____ through _____ (method) could remedy this situation.

Example for Template 2:

There is a problem with the understanding of why far-right populist movements have arisen in several countries across the world in the past decade.

Despite the belief that economic downturns and large scale immigration have fueled these movements, the fading of cultural memory of the dangers of right-wing populism better accounts for the rise of these movements in recent years.

This problem has negatively affected our ability to adapt politically to these movements because more moderate politicians fail to understand the root causes and thus underestimate the size and scope of these movements before it's too late.

A possible cause of this problem is a failure to appreciate the power of cultural memory in shaping the political outlook of a nation's people. Perhaps a study which investigates the fading of cultural memory in a variety of Western-style democracies through correlative comparison of generational population data with cultural markers of formerly oppressive right-wing regimes could remedy this situation.

Template 3 (recommended for the humanities):

There is a problem in or with determining the root cause of _____.

Despite the pervading theory that _____ (a commonly accepted explanation), _____ has been offered as an explanation.

This problem has negatively impacted _____ (something influenced by the theory) because _____.

A possible cause of this problem is _____. Perhaps a study which investigates _____ by _____ (method) could remedy this problem.