Outlining Your Prospectus

Four-Part Research Proposals

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Annenberg School for Communication

Today's workshop

- Goals of a proposal

  + Four questions

- Contextualizing your work

  + Topical vs academic significance

- Creating a Research Space (CARS)

  + Evaluating literature

  + Taking a stance on the literature

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Outlining Your Prospectus

Your dissertation committee will be in charge of the specific guidelines of your proposal (length, format, expected scope, etc.). That being said, all effective proposals do at least four things: Contextualize and ask an answerable question; identify what existing scholarship has and has not done to address that question; explain how the researcher will answer their research question (as well as why that's the best way of doing things); and elaborate on the significance of the proposed research.

This worksheet will give you a few questions that you should come back to again and again as you begin to outline your proposal. It's also a good primer for understanding the general logic of a proposal if you are unfamiliar with the genre.

Click here to download a copy of the Outlining Your Prospectus handout

First, prospectus vs proposal

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... I don't think it matters and I don't think there's a difference

Goals of a research proposal

Rather than think about what a proposal is, consider what a proposal should do for your audience—it should anticipate and answer their questions about the research you are proposing.

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  + What is/are your research question(s)?

- What is the context of your work?
  + Social Context (What real world situation/phenomenon does this work help us understand?)
  + Academic Context (What has prior scholarship said about this question or related issues?
    - What is the research gap that you will fill with your scholarship?
    - What is the problem with this gap not being filled?

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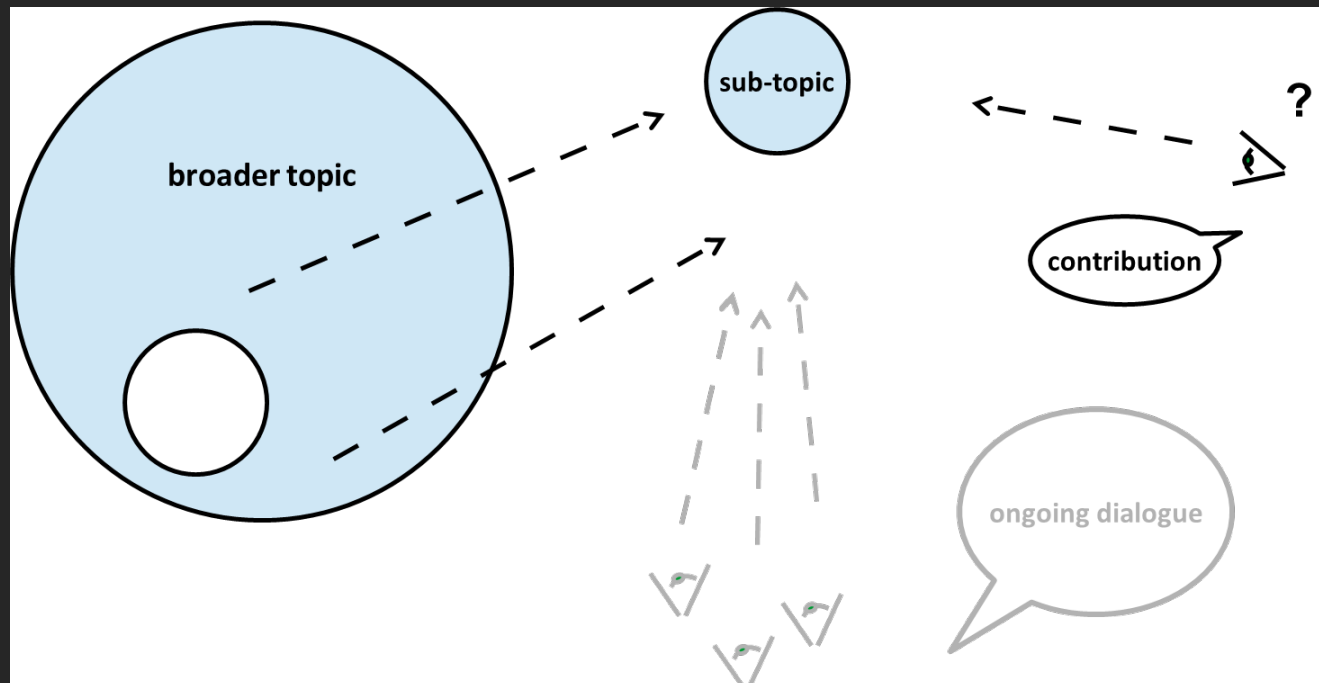
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- Why does any of this matter? So what?

  + Will your work further our understanding of this topic/question alone, or will it be helpful for related issue?

  + REGARDLESS OF WHAT RESULTS YOU ACTUALLY FIND, what is the value of this project?

Contextualizing your work

- What is the context of your work?

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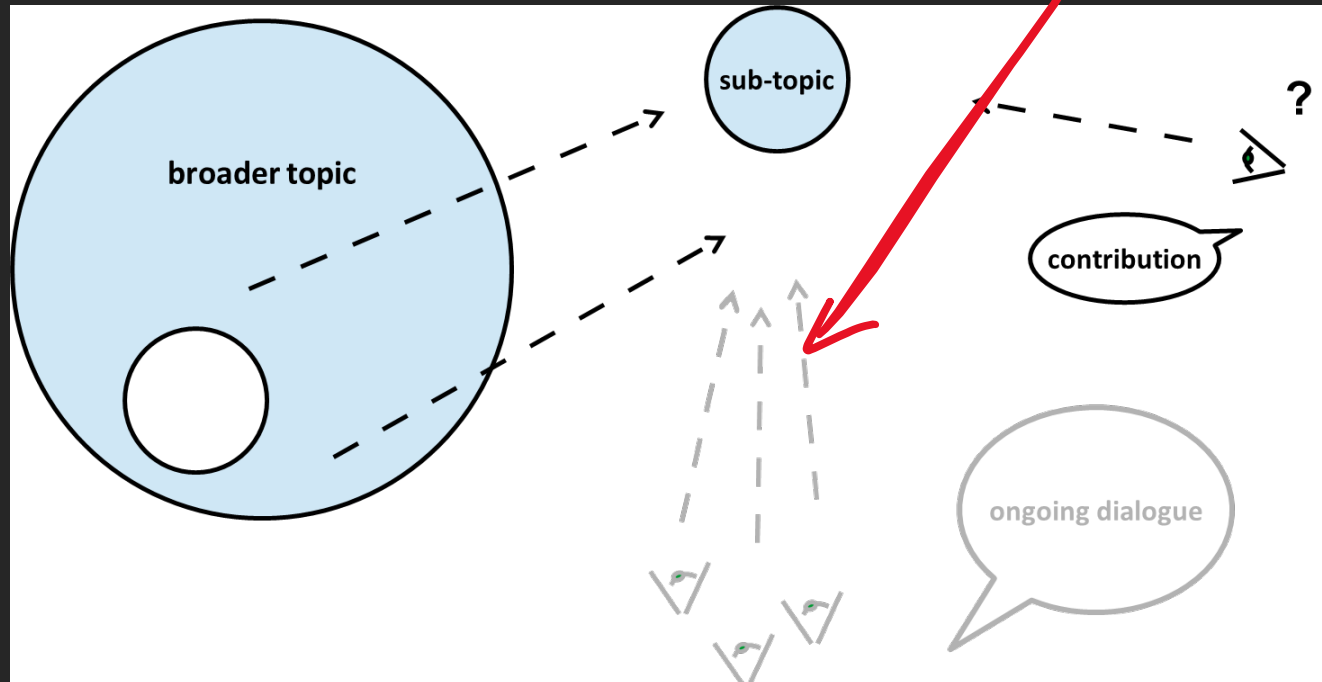
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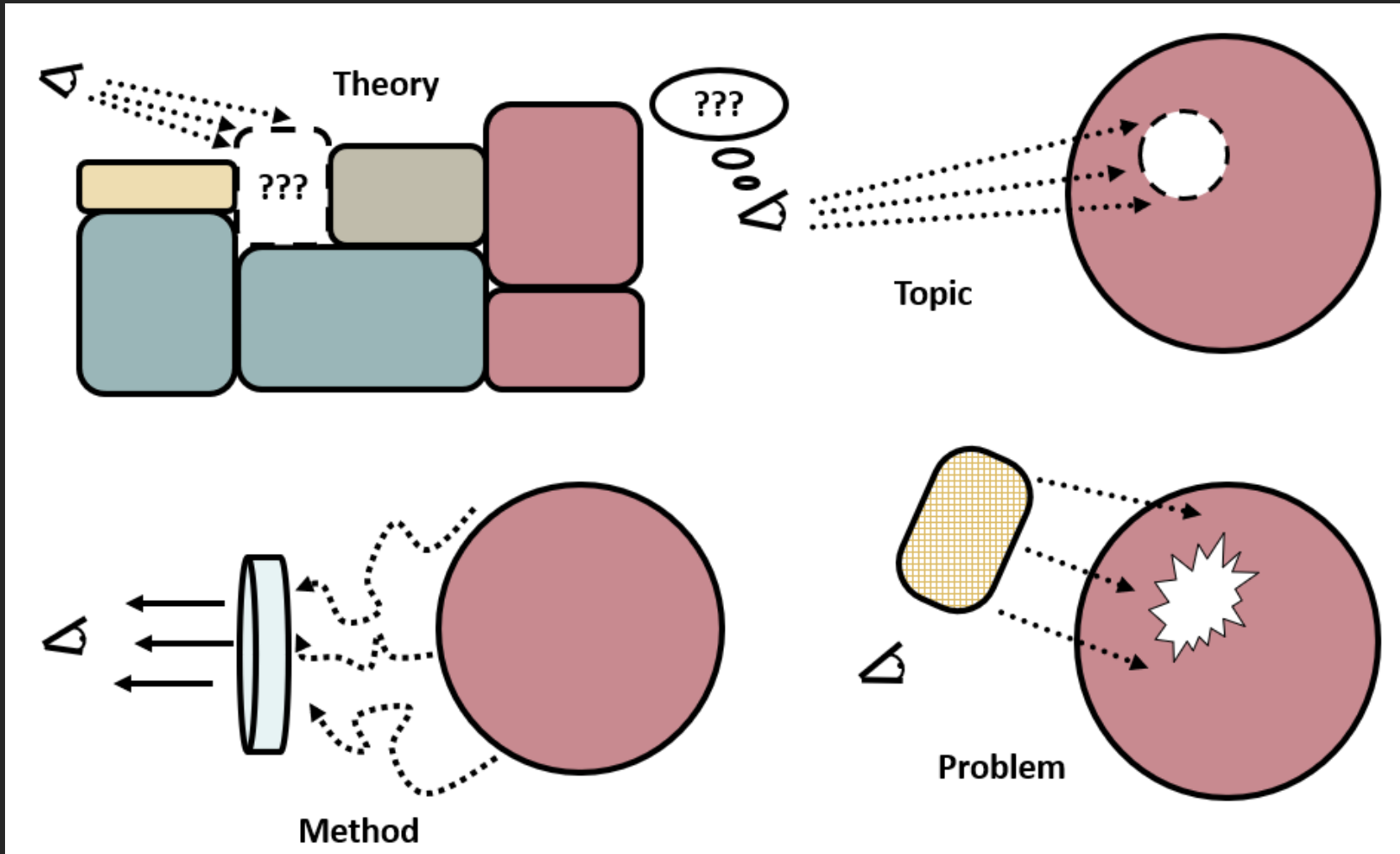   - What is the problem with this gap not being filled?

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(Some) ways to contribute

Examples of topical/problem-solution significance

University of Manchester Academic Phrasebank

Academic Phrasebank

The University of Manchester

[ ] Search

Introducing work | Referring to sources | Describing methods | Reporting results | Discussing findings | Writing conclusions

Academic Phrasebank

GENERAL LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Being cautious

Being critical

Classifying and listing

Compare and contrast

Defining terms

Describing trends

Home page

The Academic Phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers. It aims to provide you with examples of some of the phraseological 'nuts and bolts' of writing organised according to the main sections of a research paper or dissertation (see the top menu). Other phrases are listed under the more general communicative functions of academic writing (see the menu on the left). The resource should be particularly useful for writers who need to report their research work.The phrases, and the headings under which they are listed, can be used simply to assist you in thinking about the content and organisation of your own writing, or the phrases can be incorporated into your writing where this is appropriate. In most cases, a certain amount of creativity and adaptation will be necessary when a phrase is used.The items in the Academic Phrasebank are mostly content neutral and generic in nature; in using them, therefore, you are not stealing other people's ideas and this does not constitute plagiarism. For

Academic significance: creating a research space (CARS)

Apart from demonstrating the topical/real-world significance of your research, you also have to locate it within some broader academic conversation

CARS

Literature review

Creating a Research Space (CARS)

Swales, John M. and Christine B. Feak. 2004 *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Research gap (academic problem)

CARS

Literature review

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- **Move 1: Establish Territory**
  - **Demonstrate the importance of the topic**
  - **Introduce and review items of previous research in the area of study (survey the field: DESCRIPTIVE)**

- **Move 2: Indicate a gap in the previous research, establish that previous knowledge needs to develop in some way, or evaluate the state of the field (take a stance: ANALYTICAL)**

Research gap (academic problem)

CARS

Introduce and review items of previous research in the area of study

↓

Indicate a gap in the previous research, establish that previous knowledge needs to develop in some way, or evaluate the state of the field

CATS

Introduce and review items of previous research in the area of study

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Indicate a gap in the previous research, establish that previous knowledge needs to develop in some way, or evaluate the state of the field

↓

Identify ho your own project will address this research gap; how your work will contribute to the conversation you have described

CARS

Introduce and review items of previous research in the area of study

Survey the literature

↓

Indicate a gap in the previous research, establish that previous knowledge needs to develop in some way, or evaluate the state of the field

Evaluate/analyze the literature

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Identify ho your own project will address this research gap; how your work will contribute to the conversation you have described

Contribute to the literature

Introduce and review items of previous research in the area of study

Survey the literature

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indicate a gap in the previous research, establish that previous knowledge needs to develop in some way, or evaluate the state of the field

Evaluate/analyze the literature

Identify ho your own project will address this research gap, how your work will contribute to the conversation you have described

METHODOLOGY

Contribute to the literature

Constructing a gap: "We still don't know…"

Although online dating is gaining prominence as a strategy to find a romantic partner, academic research into the antecedents of Internet dating is still scarce. This survey study has two aims. The first is to investigate the demographic antecedents of online dating. The second is to investigate the validity of two opposing hypotheses that explain which

Valkenburg, Patti M., and Jochen Peter. 2007. "Who Visits Online Dating Sites? Exploring some Characteristics of Online Daters." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 10(6): 849-852.

Constructing a gap: "Something has changed"

2002). Mediated matchmaking is certainly not a new phenomenon: Newspaper personal advertisements have existed since the mid-19th century (Schaefer, 2003) and video dating was popular in the 1980s (Woll & Cosby, 1987; Woll & Young, 1989). Although scholars working in a variety of academic disciplines have studied these earlier forms of mediated matchmaking (e.g., Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992; Lynn & Bolig, 1985; Woll, 1986; Woll & Cosby, 1987), current Internet dating services are substantively different from these incarnations due to their larger user base and more sophisticated self-presentation options.

Ellison, Nicole, Rebecca Heino, and Jennifer Gibbs. 2006. "Managing impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11: 415-441.

Constructing a gap: Flaws in prior scholarship

Comparison of meeting partners online versus offline has already been conducted in previous studies.[4,8] Findings from these studies suggested that married couples who had met their partners online reported greater relationship satisfaction and relationship quality and lower divorce rates compared to couples who had met their partners offline. There are three issues that have been overlooked in these studies. First, the studies have primarily focused on marital relationships. However, not all online-initiated relationships result in marriages. As a matter of fact, only 49% of online daters

Paul, Aditi. 2014. "Is Online Better Than Offline for Meeting Partners? Depends: Are You Looking to Marry or to Date?" *Cyberpyschology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17: 664-667.

Filling a Gap: Here's what I'll do about it...

2006). Although existing research reveals suspicions about lying in online dating profiles, it has been limited to self-report data that do not describe actual deception practices. The reliance on self-report methods is an important limitation for deception research in general, as it involves asking participants to be honest about lying (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996).

In the present study, we address this issue by comparing the information presented by daters in their online profiles with their observed characteristics in an effort to establish *ground truth* about the information in online dating profiles. Ground truth is defined as the actual

Toma, Catalina L., Jeffrey T. Hancock, and Nicole B. Ellison. 2008. "Separating Fact From Fiction: An Examination of Deceptive Self-Presentation in Online Dating Profiles." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34(8): 1023-1036.

Research gap templates

University of Manchester Academic Phrasebank (again)

Scaffolding

Scaffolding

- Start by assuming that your proposal should have four sections

  + Introduction

  + Literature review

  + Methodology

  + Conclusion/significance

Scaffolding (ask your advisor)

- ~~Start by assuming that your proposal should have four sections~~ ask your advisor if they want anything particular

  + Introduction

    - Background

    - Statement of the problem

    - Research question

  + Literature review

    - Sub-divided by relevant fields/themes

  + Methodology

    - Theoretical framework

    - Data gathering/analysis

    - Hypotheses

  + Conclusion/significance

    - Sub-divided by relevant audience/purpose

Scaffolding

- Start by assuming that your proposal should have four sections

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  + Literature review

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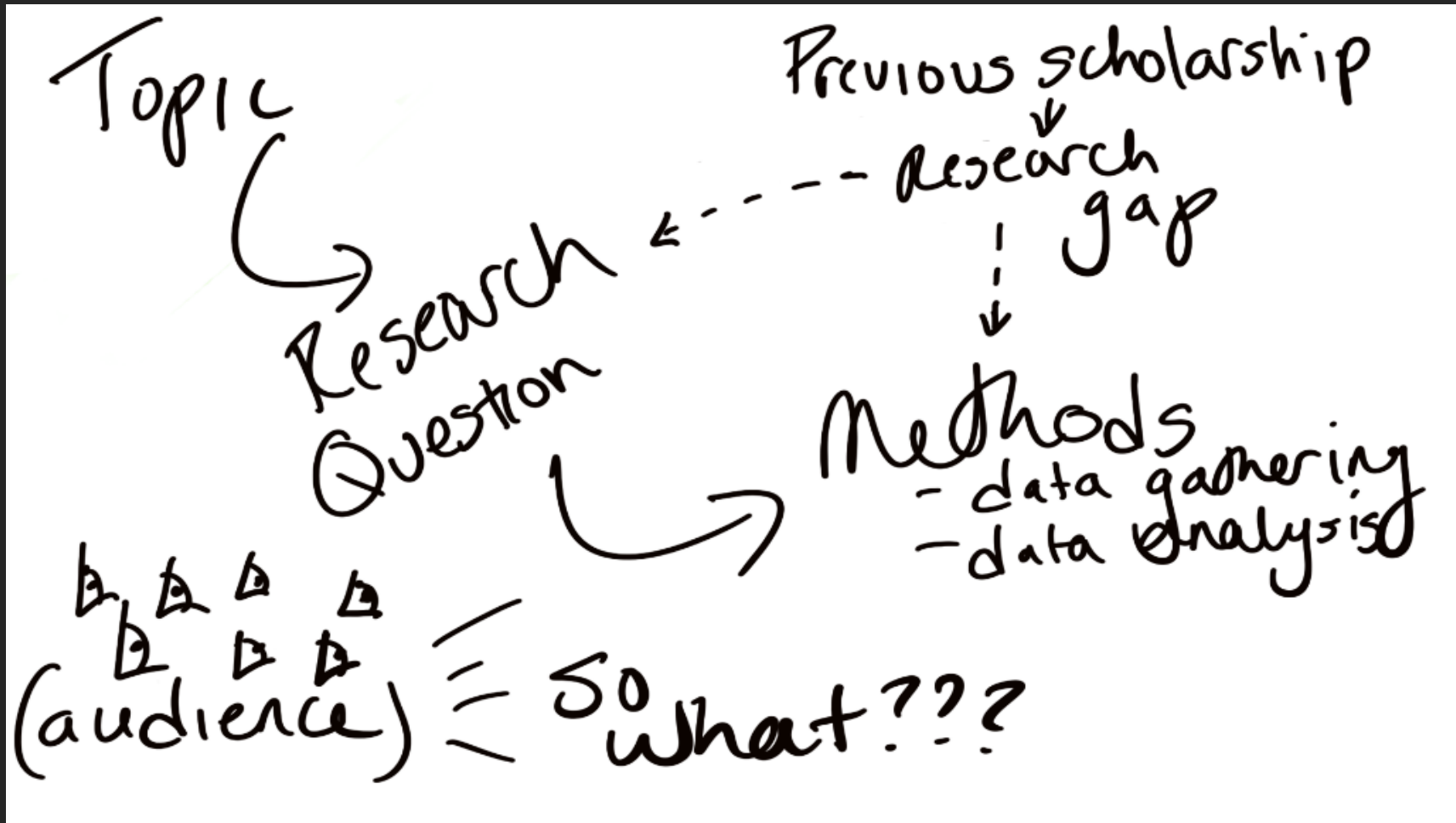 + Conclusion/significance

Scaffolding with questions

- Start by assuming that your proposal should have four sections

  + Introduction

    - What is your research question?

  + Literature review

    - What have other scholars said on this topic/question and what is missing?

  + Methodology

    - What are you going to do to contribute to the literature?

  + Conclusion/significance

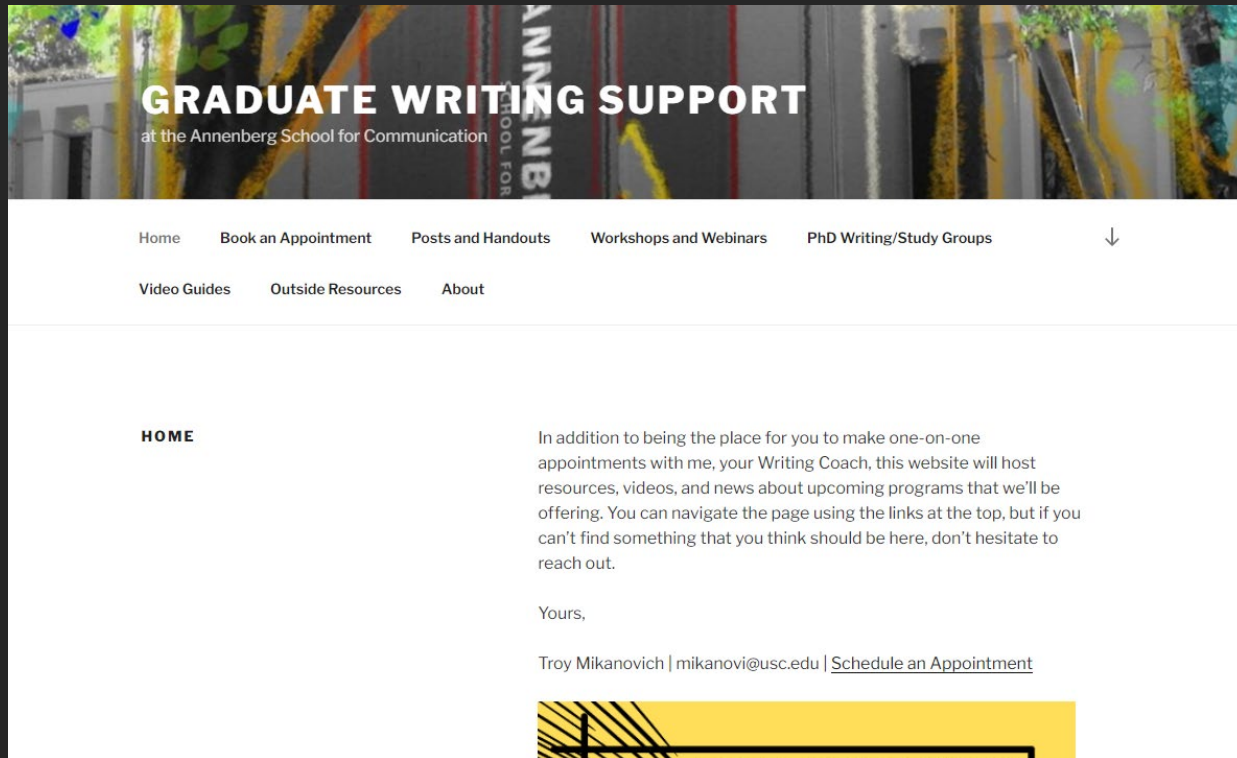   - Why is your research important?

Scaffolding with more questions

- Start by assuming that your proposal should have four sections

  + Introduction

    - What is your research question?

      + Why is this research question important to ask?

  + Literature review

    - What have other scholars said on this topic/question and what is missing?

      + What are the consequences of the research gap that you have outlined?

  + Methodology

    - What are you going to do to contribute to the literature?

      + What kinds of data will you be gathering and why? How will you be analyzing your data and why? How have you operationalized your research question?

  + Conclusion/significance

    - Why is your research important?

      + Regardless of your specific results, what is the significance of this proposed work?

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Troy Mikanovich | mikanovi@usc.edu | Schedule an Appointment

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6/23 2:00pm — Outlining Your Prospectus

6/28 11:00am — Developing Research Questions

7/7 4:00pm — Literature Reviews and Creating a Research Space

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