

## **Scope Exercises: Objective Statements**

### **Part 1: Examples for Class Discussion**

#### **What to Consider in Regard to Scope**

This exercise will help you to grasp the importance of thinking very carefully about the scope and nature of a project proposal for an analytical, policy-oriented essay. You should think very carefully through some of these common sense criteria:

- what is the overall purpose of the project?
- is there a basic chain of logic from the questions to the alternative answers that will be explored?
- who is the audience? what is the level of expertise?
- what is the length and timeline for the project?
- are there previous examples?
- are the data/evidence readily available?
- am I really in a position to conduct this research in an appropriate fashion?

#### **Choosing a Topic or Issue for Study**

A topic is what the essay or research paper is about. It provides a focus for the writing. Of course, the major topic can be broken down into its components or smaller pieces (e.g., the major topic of nuclear waste disposal may be broken down into medical, economic, and environmental concerns). But the important thing to remember is that you should stick with just one major topic per essay or research paper in order to have a coherent piece of writing.

An issue is a concept upon which you can take a stand. While "nuclear waste" is a topic, "safe and economic disposal of nuclear waste" is an issue, or a "point of discussion, debate, or dispute" (American Heritage Dictionary).

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#### **Choose a Question that is Neither Too Broad Nor Too Narrow**

For example, if you choose juvenile delinquency (a topic that can be researched), you might ask the following questions:

- a. What is the 1994 rate of juvenile delinquency in the U.S.?
- b. What can we do to reduce juvenile delinquency in the U.S.?
- c. Does education play a role in reducing juveniles' return to crime?

Once you complete your list, review your questions in order to choose a usable one that is neither too broad nor too narrow. In this case, the best research question is "c." Question "a" is too narrow, since it can be answered with a simple statistic. Question "b" is too broad; it implies that the researcher will cover many tactics for reducing juvenile delinquency that could be used throughout the country. Question "c," on the other hand, is focused enough to research in some depth. While plausible, feasibility must be proven

through your annotated bib which will show that there are both a literature and data on this topic.

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## **Class Exercise**

In this exercise, you should think through the above criteria and others that occur to you and apply them to the 5 example proposed topics below. For this exercise, the project in question is a semester research paper for an advanced undergraduate student. Think and discuss the strengths and where these proposals might hit pitfalls and then we will discuss as a class. If you have time, think about what advice you would give to someone who was writing the essay.

1- Latin America is a continent doomed to underdevelopment. From the start of its history, it has been dominated by imperialistic powers. This essay will show that no matter what Latin America has done, it has not developed...

2- Globalization is leading to the homogenization of all cultures. By examining the spread of the film industry throughout the globe, this essay will show that the poor in the developing world are being programmed to follow the same materialistic values as the unsustainable North...

3- This essay will examine the recent Argentine financial crisis, demonstrating that the source of problems lies in the inability to follow macroeconomic fundamentals, such as balancing government budgets, and ensuring property rights for investors. If those 2 things are done, the Argentine economy will take off....

4- This essay argues that a South American Free Trade Agreement should be signed as soon as possible. The essay will show that through the mutual gains of trade and investment, South America can increase its autonomy from the external domination. By reducing external pressures, poverty will decline in the region.

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### **Exercise 3: Evaluate Your Own Research Question with a Peer**

Take 5 minutes to write a 1-5 line summary of your topic. Consider the following 8 questions to evaluate the quality of your research question and the ease with which you should be able to answer it:

1. Does the question deal with a topic or issue that interests me enough to spark my own thoughts and opinions?
2. Is the question easily and fully researchable?
3. What type of information do I need to answer the research question?  
e.g., The research question, "What impact has deregulation had on commercial airline safety?," will obviously require certain types of information:
  - statistics on airline crashes before and after
  - statistics on other safety problems before and after
  - information about maintenance practices before and after
  - information about government safety requirements before and after
4. Is the scope of this information reasonable? (e.g., can I really research 30 on-line writing programs developed over a span of 10 years?)
5. Given the type and scope of the information that I need, is my question too broad, too narrow, or o.k.?
6. What sources will have the type of information that I need to answer the research question (journals, books, internet resources, government documents, people)?
7. Can I access these sources?
8. Given my answers to the above questions, do I have a good quality research question that I actually will be able to answer by doing research?

Keep in mind that if you are writing a proposal, your task is slightly different from a literature review in that your objective is to show the need to gather primary data about a question that can not be answered without it.

If you are writing a literature review, your objective is to analyse the key paradigms of how authors have addressed the question, and give your own argument as to what is the correct view, and what is the frontier of what we know about the question (including data).

If you are writing an exploratory research paper, you are again writing a paper analyzing what we know about a topic on the basis of secondary information, this time seeking to answer a question.

**After you have thought about your question, discuss it with a peer for their feedback.**