

Memo

To: All Technical Communication Students

From: Technical Communication Instructor

Date: February 3, 2017

Re: How to Complete the Problem Definition & Plan of Research

The purpose of this memo is to explain how to complete your Problem Definition & Plan of Research project.

Project Overview

This project consists of the following parts:

1. An extended definition (250-500 words) of the problem you plan to address in your proposal.
2. Sentence definitions of at least five key terms you plan to use in your proposal.
3. A plan of research that describes 5 specific pieces of evidence/information you will need to locate to prove (1) your problem/need exists, (2) your problem has negative effects or (3) your solution will be beneficial and/or will work.

Format & Length

Format: Memo form with bolded headings for each of the three sections. If you use subheadings, please include them in italics.

Length:

- Extended definition 250-500 words
- Five key-word definitions: *only* one sentence each.
- Plan of research: At least 5 specific pieces of information you need, with a full paragraph describing what information is needed and why it will be necessary to have this information in the proposal for each of those 5 pieces of information.

If you use any sources to compose your definition (s), you should cite them according to Chicago Author-Date style. Please refer to the instructions on Moodle for information about how to do this appropriately. Include a section titled “Works Cited” at the end of the memo.

Section 1: Extended definition of the problem

Step #1: Write an extended definition. Begin with a simple sentence definition of what you think the problem, challenge, or issue is:

Skipping meals is a regular pattern of not eating breakfast, lunch, or dinner/supper on three or more days of the week.

Poor diversity awareness is a failure to understand or value the diverse groups on Trine's campus, including international students, racial and ethnic minorities, members of various religions, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Inadequate study space is the lack of sufficient areas to accommodate groups and individuals who wish to study outside of their dorm rooms.

Step #2: Expand the definition using one or more of the techniques explained on pages 390-394 of your book. Below are some examples of how you might use some of the techniques. Keep in mind, though, that I am primarily looking for a clear definition of the problem. You might use one of the techniques in the book. You might use a combination of several techniques. Or, you might use something a little different, not described in the book. Ultimately, what I want to see is a very clear explanation of how you understand this problem right now.

Examples:

Using the Technique of Partition

Skipping meals is a regular pattern of not eating breakfast, lunch, or dinner/supper on three or more days of the week. This pattern can result in a number of physical, emotional, and academic issues:

- *Physically*, it has been found that [insert cited research about the physical effects of skipping meals]
- *Emotionally*, people who skip meals can often exhibit marked mood changes, such as [insert cited information about mood changes]
- *Academically*, students who have skipped a meal [and so on]

Using the Technique of Examples

Poor diversity awareness is a failure to understand or value the diverse groups on Trine's campus, including international students, racial and ethnic minorities, members of various religions, and members of the LGBTQ community. For example, Trine University has multiple organizations devoted to diversity, including the Multicultural Student Organization (MSO) the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), and the Office of International Services. A student with poor diversity awareness might not know that these organizations exist or understand what they do. More critically, a student who lacks diversity awareness might describe international or gay students in negative terms or express dislike about their presence on campus [and so on, continue definition]

Using a Combination of Techniques (Sentence definition, graphics, examples etc.)

Inadequate study space is the lack of sufficient areas to accommodate groups and individuals who wish to study outside of their dorm rooms. Trine currently has approximately 2,000 students enrolled full time on the main campus. Each of these students is expected to study 1-2 hours per week for every hour of class time. Thus, if they are taking 15 credit hours, they should study 15-30 hours per week. As can be seen from the diagram of the LINK, below there are only X seats available with access to computers and Y seats available at tables [and so on, continue definition]

Section 2: Sentence Definitions of Key Terms

Choose and write proper single-sentence definitions for five key terms someone would need to know in order to understand your topic. In the case of "inadequate study space," these might be Trine or university-specific terms, or terms you invent, such as:

- The LINK

- The Academic Success Center
- Individual Study Space
- Group Study Space
- Required Group/Collaborative Work

In the case of diversity awareness, the terms might be more general:

- Diversity
- Transgender
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Micro-aggression

Think carefully about the terms you choose and how you define them. Don't choose the "easiest" terms – chose the most important. Also, think about how your group wants to define the term for the purposes of THIS project. Sometimes that will involve modifying an existing definition. Sometimes it will involve writing your own.

Section 3: Plan of Research

Determine 5 *specific* pieces of information you will need to find to successfully complete your proposal. This information could take one of three forms:

- To help prove your problem/need exists
- To demonstrate your problem has negative effects
- To prove your solution will work OR to prove your solution will provide some benefit

Questions you might ask as you think about what to research are

- How many people are affected by your problem/need?
- How many people could benefit from your solution?
- What are the visible/measurable effects of your problem?
- What are the potential causes of the problem? Which is the most likely cause?
- How will our potential solution address the cause(s) of the problem?
- How will our potential solution address the effect(s) of the problem?
- What benefits are there to addressing the need we've identified?

For each piece of information, you will need to compose a paragraph that

- Identifies the piece of information
 - a. Each paragraph should begin with a statement such as *"We need to know the number of people who are unable to study because of lack of study space."* or *"We need to know what factors prevent students from studying to determine how big a factor lack of space is."*
- Explains why the information is necessary for the proposal

Note: You need to think carefully about what you need to substantiate your claims. Being successful in your proposal is partially dependent on how well you can use evidence, not simply your intuition, opinions, or beliefs, to show why your proposal is necessary and worthwhile.

Important Dates

- February 24 One copy submitted to Moodle before the beginning of class