A Practical Guide to Dissertation and Thesis Writing

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By

Mark Stephan Felix and Ian Smith

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To my students, past, present and future – this one is for all of you.
—Mark Stephan Felix

To my beloved children, Andrew and Margot.
—Ian David Smith

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FOREWORD

As far as forewords go, we'd like to keep it to a minimum. There are enough words in this book for you to read and there are enough words for you to ponder and digest as you walk through your PhD journey. Suffice to say, this book was born out of an intense passion to share, educate, guide and assist students.

We've walked the same journey you're about to embark on (or have already embarked on). Having learned much from that journey we'd like to shed a little light on the path that you're on. It's a privilege if you allow us to do so. We wish you the best of luck in this undertaking.

PREFACE

Writing a PhD dissertation or thesis is probably the most challenging task that a young scholar attempts to do. We have traveled this journey ourselves and helped numerous students to achieve their goal of successfully completing a PhD. If you are about to embark on your own journey, you will want to start at the beginning of this book and work your way through the chapters which are structured in the order of most dissertation guidelines at most universities. If, however, you have already begun your journey, feel free to go straight to the chapter that best represents where you have reached.

There is no formula for writing a dissertation. Each one is customized to suit the problem that is being researched, the particular university guidelines and the individual creativity of the student. It is your baby and you want it to be the best outcome that achieves your goal of becoming a freshly minted Doctor of Philosophy. We urge you to read our chapters with a critical mind, ever thoughtful that you are creating a unique piece of writing that will not only satisfy your examiners, but also your own standard of excellence.

Good luck from us both!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED:
TOPICS, PROBLEMS, DEFINITIONS
AND MAKING A GOOD START

Expected learning outcomes of this Chapter

At the end of this Chapter you will be able to:

- Use seven active steps to state the social science issue you wish to study for your dissertation/thesis as a research problem.
- Actively ask critical questions that will build a solid base for the development of your dissertation/thesis.
- Critically assess the significance of your research problem.
- Avoid common mistakes made by students when expressing their social science issue as a research problem.

If you are reading this, you have begun an academic adventure. We say "academic adventure" because there will be discovery, tense moments and a great reward at the end of the journey. We want also to congratulate you on beginning this academic adventure that so few want to begin and fewer still complete.

This book is more a "how-to-do-it" manual than a piece of scholarly, academic work. Both of us wish to guide and assist you in this endeavor based on our experiences as researchers and as teachers over many years. We are providing you with exercises, tips and tools that will make your journey smoother and help you to anticipate some of the issues you will encounter along the way. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your academic adventure.

What is a dissertation or a thesis?

Many academics and even more students like to use the terms "dissertation" and "thesis" to describe the research work they are doing to meet university requirements for being conferred a Masters or Doctoral degree. The fact is these terms are often interchangeable and their use depends upon the country, discipline, faculty and even the department of the university where a student is enrolled for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree (Mauch & Park, 2003; Pyrczak, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012).

The first PhDs were awarded by German universities in the Nineteenth Century. In those days, a university's Department of Philosophy included the teaching of science, social science and liberal arts, as well as the study of philosophy. This is the reason why the term "Doctor of Philosophy" is still applied across most disciplines for an advanced degree beyond the Masters degree.

A dissertation is a piece of original research, undertaken as a part of a program of study. In German and US universities, research training courses were introduced to prepare their students for undertaking research and the writing up of the research findings in the form of an extended report, and, if they successfully defended their dissertation before a committee of examiners, they were awarded the research Masters or PhD degree. Through this academic route, students take a series of courses in the social sciences or any field for a specified time, and then are given a block of time to complete a piece of research that is closely supervised by a committee of academics from their academic department. A student's completion of a degree *via* a dissertation is dependent on grades from the classes, as well as the successful examination of the research by a committee of examiners.

In the British university tradition, on the other hand, a research degree by thesis requires no courses and the candidate does a lot of self-study to build a base of knowledge from the ground up on their own with occasional help from a supervisor. The degree is awarded solely on the quality of the original research, as reported in a thesis. This tradition has been eroded in recent years, as the knowledge explosion and complexity of the scientific methods employed to investigate many research topics have grown. Statistical knowledge, experimental knowledge and other forms of specialized knowledge are now considered so central to the study of many research topics that universities around the world are requiring certain coursework to be successfully completed before allowing their research Masters and PhD students to develop a research proposal and complete an

original research study for the award of the degree. Once their research topic and proposal have been approved by an academic committee, students develop their research ideas with the assistance and guidance of their supervisor. Their completion of the degree is totally dependent on the successful examination of the research thesis, often by expert examiners from other universities than the one where the student is enrolled. Usually, the examiners recommend changes, some minor and possibly major changes, to be made by the student before the thesis is acceptable for the award of the PhD degree.

Other differences between a dissertation and a thesis include its length, depth and breadth. In the British and German tradition, a thesis is longer in number of words, has deeper utilization of theoretical applications, as well as analysis, and is wider in its breadth of research and implications, than in the United States tradition. The difference in length is due to the candidate having to share with the examiners more details in the research (e.g., history of the field of research, background of the study, findings, interpretation of the findings and discussing the findings in greater detail in respect to theory and concepts). Differences in depth occur when thesis students are expected to express a deeper understanding of theories in their field of research, be able to grasp implications of the theories and to apply these theories to their area of research. The difference in breadth is because thesis students are expected to study more widely than dissertation students and are also expected to see wider implications of their field of research and to be able to make recommendations that have wider implications than dissertation students. In some theses, two original empirical studies may be necessary to propose and test a hypothesis.

However, both dissertations and theses are expected to meet the same standard of originality, approaching a new area of study and contributing significantly to the universal body of knowledge (Athanasou *et al.*, 2012). Originality is a key issue in both dissertation and thesis development and writing (Bailey, 2014; Ferguson, 2009). The ideas, the subject and the method of approaching a piece of research cannot be identical to another piece of research (especially published research) if it is to be acceptable to a committee of examiners. Identical research is considered to be a **replication** of previous research, or even worse, **plagiarism**, which is a serious offence in academia. By approaching an area of research with an open mind, and by doing the necessary background reading, your thesis or dissertation will contribute significantly to the body of universal knowledge - a vital part of being a scholar (Beglar & Murray, 2009; Biber & Gray, 2009; Murray, 2011).

So, you should study carefully the requirements of the university Masters or PhD program that you have enrolled in to ensure that you are clear about the criteria for the evaluation of your research and courses. Successful meeting of those criteria will allow you to graduate in the minimum time period permitted by the university's requirements. If you are confused about any of the requirements, please consult with the admissions administrators for university requirements and with your appointed supervisor for academic requirements.

So, what's the problem?

When we approach the social sciences as a whole, we see that the common denominator is people. Chances are very high that, as a student of the social sciences, you are concerned with issues that affect the everyday lives of people. For example, you may be concerned with the basic human rights of migrants, the health of sex workers or the political climate of a country that affects people who live on the margins of society. Asian culture places a lot of emphasis on the human values of community, sharing and harmony. We dare to say that seeking out answers to help others through studies in the social sciences is part of our culture.

However, a common pitfall in being so influenced by the Asian culture is that we tend to get emotional and passionate about the issues that are important to us. We do not use the terms "emotional" and "passionate" in a pejorative sense, as you need to be able to understand emotions and be passionate about your studies in order to complete your academic endeavor. But, being overly emotional or caught up in the passion of setting right social wrongs can cloud your judgment and objectivity when approaching the issue that you wish to deal with. What is important is to go to the heart of the problem and to understand the different facets and implications of the problem as a social scientist (Evans, Gruba & Zobel, 2011). Let us give you a scenario:

While eating your lunch in a park, you are approached by a beggar who asks you for some money. You give her or him a few coins and wonder why, in such a prosperous world, there are still people who go hungry. You become emotionally charged with the inequality and inequity that many people face. Your emotion fires you up and you declare that you want to study the issues surrounding hunger, and you rush into your supervisor's office declaring that you want to study hunger. You provide no further details. Your supervisor, hopefully, will look at you admiringly, state that

you are coming along well as a student and then ask you to think more about the social scientific value of studying hunger. You are stunned. You are angry. Most of all, you are confused. This supervisor of yours is supposed to immediately see that hunger is an important issue and that your research has great academic value. You give in to the internal monologue of what a decrepit, inhumane and (frankly) incompetent person your supervisor is. You stew in your indignation and begin thinking of looking for another supervisor, another department or another faculty. You may even go hard on yourself and think that perhaps you are not cut out for academic pursuits.

Now stop and take a deep breath. Your supervisor is merely doing her or his job. You have been all fired up by your encounter with the beggar and want to help those who are hungry. However, what you have missed out is the critical thought process that your supervisor needs to see in your academic work (Dunleavy, 2003; Gillet, Hammond & Martala, 2013). Ask yourself:

SO WHAT?

This is the hardest part, and will continue to be the hardest part of the rest of your dissertation and thesis writing. This will lead to you being able to problematize the issue you wish to study. "Problematize" means being able to state a problem that is researchable. Idealistic and altruistic reasons aside, any graduate or postgraduate student must problematize the issue they wish to study when asserting the significance of their area of research. Logic and reason should weigh more heavily than emotional responses (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011).

So, what do you do? Let's take it step by step to give you a firm grounding for your dissertation or thesis writing.

Problematizing the issue that you are interested in studying[1]

The first step in problematization is to identify the present characteristics of the issue you want to study. It is almost impossible for a

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[1] Please note: While the authors have a basis in other texts for this suggested pattern of problematization, the suggestions put forward here are mainly from the experiences of the authors.

single thesis to address and answer all the characteristics of a problem. Ask yourself:

- Is hunger a huge problem in your home nation? If your answer is "Yes", how do you judge it as being a huge problem? Do statistics in your country show that many of your fellow citizens go hungry each day? If the answer is "No", do not think you have faced a dead-end in your questioning. There is the possibility that you may look at the issue of hunger within small, but specific populations in your nation.
- Is there statistical or empirical evidence to confirm that hunger is a condition faced by a significant number of your fellow citizens?
- If hunger is an issue, what are the national policies that are in place to curb hunger within the nation? Are there Government Organizations, Non-government Organizations or Civil Society Organizations that deal directly with the issue of hunger?

The second step in problematization is to identify the barriers and the positive characteristics of the issue:

- You need to read widely from several reliable sources in order to identify barriers in your home nation.
- Seek out information regarding food distribution policies, economic policies and social barriers that exacerbate and alleviate hunger in your home nation.
- It is important to be objective when weighing all positives and negatives that are involved in the issue. **Logic and reason** must take precedence over **emotion**.

The third step in problematization is to seek out the social scientific implications of the issue:

- If hunger is not curbed, what would be the implications for society? Would hunger lead to involvement in activities such as stealing, sex work or drug trafficking?
- If hunger is an issue, would physical, mental and emotional health be important social issues? How would deficiencies in this area affect the society you live in?
- If hunger is not curbed would it be an issue of economics, politics or education? Would it be an issue of socio-cultural factors or is hunger more an issue along the lines of ethnic divides?

The fourth step in problematization is pulling the relevant information from all these questions into a cohesive whole. Let us say, hypothetically, from each of the three steps you have been able to logically and justifiably state that:

1. Empirical evidence shows that "X" % of the population of your home nation lives along the margins of poverty. Poverty is defined in your home nation as any household where the cumulative income of all persons in the household is below "Y" amount, which is insufficient to provide for adequate food, housing, clothing and health. Empirical data shows that for these individuals, food and shelter are necessities that are not met on a daily basis. Empirical evidence also shows that "Z" % of those who fall below the poverty line beg in order to seek food and/or shelter. At present, the Government Organizations and Non-Government Organizations provide welfare for citizens who qualify for such aid, but Civil Society Organizations do not participate heavily in this exercise.

2. Policies show that food and provisions are distributed through various Government agencies and that Non-Government Organizations are co-opted into the effort. Few Civil Society Organizations in your home nation provide food for the hungry. Barriers to this food distribution include lack of transportation of food to rural areas, collection of food by individuals who are ineligible due to fraud and a lack of systems to track cases of fraud, and a growing number of the population who are falling below the poverty line. Objectively, efforts are made to curb hunger in your home nation, but demand for assistance is larger than the supply that is provided.

3. The implications, based on extensive reading, suggest that theft is a likely result of hunger. Statistics demonstrate that petty theft and burglaries have risen in your home nation progressively in the last five years. Past research also suggests that involvement in sex work may be an implication of hunger, and that physical, mental and emotional health is affected by hunger. Therefore, hunger has economic and socio-cultural dimensions.

As a consequence, you may problematize the issue of hunger by stating that hunger is a problem in your home nation and, despite attempts to curb hunger, it remains an issue that has yet to be solved. You should also state that, if the problem of hunger is not solved, it will have implications for society in the economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Social scientists

in many countries have studied hunger in terms of the larger issue of poverty and how to minimize it.

At this point you may be tempted to, once again, run into your supervisor's office with a look of smugness on your face. Please do not do this. We are far from over in this process of stating your problem in researchable terms. You have managed to problematize the issue, but there are several steps to putting forward a persuasive research argument that will gain the approval/support of your supervisor and will lead to a research proposal that is accepted by your committee (Becker, 2010).

Now stop, take a deep breath and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you interested in researching the economic or the socio-cultural dimensions of hunger? Do not think they are one and the same. It is important to choose one area and one area only. Otherwise, your supervisor may comment that he/she believes your topic is too broad.
2. What are socio-cultural and economic factors? How are socio-cultural and economic factors defined? Who has proposed these definitions? Have these definitions been accepted by the academic community? Please understand that your definitions of socio-cultural factors and economic factors need to be supported by the published work of other experts and researchers who have conducted **recent research** in this field.
3. Of the many socio-cultural and economic factors that you find, which one factor, when studied empirically, will give you an answer to the problem of hunger in your home nation? The answer to this question is crucial, as it will shape the entire direction of your research.

From these questions you will be able to choose one specific area of research, be able to further define your area of research and be able to pinpoint possible answers for the problem at hand.

It is not yet time to make that all-anticipated trip to your supervisor's office. You need to look at the issue you want to research through the structure of a **conceptual framework** and the lens of a **theoretical framework**.

A few quick words on conceptual frameworks and theoretical frameworks

A conceptual framework allows you to clearly define what you mean when you say "hunger", "poverty" and "the hungry". Remember that in the social sciences we throw around a lot of concepts that are very subjective. A strong conceptual framework will allow you to clearly **define** what you mean when you use such terms. A theoretical framework, on the other hand, will give you a lens through which you will analyze your findings on hunger and poverty, to explain your findings in terms of previous research and theories, and allow you to make a significant contribution to knowledge. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in future chapters.

Getting back to asking "So What?": The significance of the research

It is time to take a step back and ask a series of questions that begin with "SO WHAT?". **So what** if hunger is a problem in your home nation? **So what** if present Government Organizations and Non-Government Organizations work towards curbing hunger**?** **So what** if Civil Society Organizations are hardly involved in the same effort? **So what** if there are socio-cultural implications of hunger? **So what** is so different and ground-breaking about your research? **So what** if you have a conceptual framework and a theoretical framework?

The whole idea behind this line of questioning is to filter through the details to be able to clearly state the **significance** of the problem (Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011). Any piece of academic work must have strong significance to national, regional and universal knowledge. If it does not, then it is not worth pursuing (Fulwiler, 2002). So, spend time pondering the significance of the issue you wish to study.

Once you are convinced that your problem is significant, you may want to do one more check to ensure that you have avoided the following common *mistakes* made by students:

1. Proposing a **philosophical** problem instead of an **empirical** one. Please take note that in the social sciences we try to solve problems where the findings may be implemented through solid action, for example, through policy change, advocacy or recommendations to

a government organization that deals directly with the affected populations. Do not fall into the trap of philosophizing about a social problem, where the solution is a change in human values or social priorities. Rather, focus on a problem that needs **empirical research** to solve the problem and then recommend specific social changes based on your findings.

2. Proposing a topic that is too narrow or too broad in scope. For example, wanting to solve the issue of hunger in the whole of your home nation is too broad a scope, while wanting to solve the issue of hunger on one street in your home nation is too narrow a scope. Find a balance, where your academic endeavor has academic significance by approaching hunger within a well-populated town or city of your home nation.

3. Adding a new population to past research that has been conducted and considering it "new" and "original". Let us say that you have found that hunger has been studied in your home nation. You have a lot of data from these past studies. Focusing your research on a new population of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 does not add significant new knowledge to the field. However, questioning what are the **health needs** of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 who face chronic hunger, questioning what are the **mental health needs** of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 who face chronic hunger, or questioning what are the **coping mechanisms** of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 who face chronic hunger may be new areas of research for you to pursue. The whole idea is to make your research original and to make a worthwhile contribution to solving the complex issue of poverty.

4. Adding on new variables to an old problem and presenting it as "new" or "original". Again, let us say that, in the past, research has been done extensively on the area of poverty and the elderly in your home nation. Do not add on "with no children" to the variables of poverty and the elderly and pass it off as new research. Is there significance to that issue? If not, then it is best to leave it alone.

5. Repeating past research. Replicating past research is not original. If you are the researcher of the original research and you are doing longitudinal research then it is fine, but if you are replicating research by someone else, then it is not original work.

6. Proposing research where the problem has already been solved. This mistake speaks for itself – why bother solving a problem when it has already been solved?

Let us say that you have taken all these hints and tips to heart. You have gone through the processes we have described above and you are able to see the bigger picture of the issue you are interested in, you are able to problematize the issue, you have been able to find a focus for the issue and you have been able to avoid the common mistakes made by most students. Now is the time to pool together your logical thoughts and present them to your supervisor. Let us revisit the scenario again, but with many added changes.

Another look at the scenario

While eating your lunch in a park, you are approached by a beggar who asks you for some money. You give her or him a few coins and wonder why, in such a prosperous world, there are still people who go hungry. You stop. You take a deep breath and ask yourself "SO WHAT"? You take another deep breath. You challenge yourself to do intensive background research on the issue of hunger in your home nation. In other words, you begin to problematize the issue.

You scour academic journals, reports from international organizations like the World Health Organization and UNICEF for information. You talk to Officers in the relevant Ministry in your home nation. Your research shows that hunger is a problem in your home nation for 35% of the population. Your findings also show you that while Government Organizations work towards alleviating the issue, support from Non-Government Organizations and Civil Society Organizations is scarce. Statistically, you have also found that those who face daily hunger are those who have come from rural areas to find better employment opportunities in major cities in your home nation. You stop. Take a deep breath.

You remember that the second step in problematization is to seek out barriers to solving the issue. You discover that the barriers to alleviate hunger include lack of financial savings, lack of food distribution centers to the destitute and lack of volunteer personnel to ensure that the destitute receive the necessary food that they need. Also, you discover that the rate of unemployment has gone up in your home nation by 12% in the last three financial years.

You take the third step of problematization. You ask yourself what the implications of such barriers would be. You again turn to the necessary reading in academic journals and official reports to find out the effects of

hunger in urban areas. You discover that theft, turning to the sale of narcotics in order to make a living as well as narcotics use, coercion into sex work and damaged physical and mental well-being are some of the implications that have been found in other studies conducted in your home nation.

Next, you take the fourth step of problematization. You can now say, with the necessary evidence to back you up, that despite the state of prosperity of your home nation, 35% of your fellow countrymen go hungry and that the bulk of this percentage are those who travel from rural to urban areas to seek better employment opportunities. You can also say that despite the efforts of Governmental Organizations to alleviate this issue, there is a lack of assistance from other quarters. Barriers to feeding the hungry who come from rural areas to seek employment in urban areas include financial difficulties, a lack of employment opportunities, inadequate avenues for food distribution, as well as the necessary personnel to carry out the task. The implications of hunger have wide ranging social effects, such as narcotics, theft, sex work and psychological well-being.

Now stop and take a deep breath.

Your reading has shown you that there are many socio-cultural and economic factors that influence and impact hunger. Draw up a list of these socio-cultural and economic factors. Take your time when doing so. When you have finished this task, you look at these factors and ask yourself, which one of these factors do you think would be most interesting for you to study? Let us say, for example, you decide that you want to focus on socio-cultural factors that influence and impact hunger. These factors include educational qualifications, language proficiency, skill-sets, religion, ethnicity, geographic origin, materialism and consumerism. Again, for example, let us say you have found in your reading that there exists a cultural bias in your home nation against people of certain ethnicities. They may share your nationality, but be from a different ethnicity. Your reading shows that while hunger is uncommon in your ethnicity, it is common in other ethnicities in your home nation. Again, stop. Take a deep breath.

You deepen your reading and this time you specifically look for research done on hunger in a particular ethnicity in your home nation. You not only look in academic journals, but also in dissertations and thesis databases in your university. If your university has a national archive or database of dissertations and thesis, so much the better. If you find that another scholar has done the exact same research as you have had in mind,

you must drop the idea, as it will be merely a repetition or replication of previous research. However, if you search and find that no such research has been done then you have hit upon something significant.

Just to be sure, ask yourself "SO WHAT?". If you can honestly say that the research you have planned on ethnicities and hunger in your home nation will answer the question of why hunger is still an issue in your home nation, then you have taken the first and most challenging step towards completing a significant dissertation.

Now you make an appointment with your supervisor. You sit down with her or him and after the usual pleasantries you tell her or him that you would like to study the socio-cultural impact on the issue of poverty from the angle of ethnicity. You share with your supervisor that you have done the background work and that the issue of hunger affects 35% of the population of your country and the bulk of those who go hungry belong to a particular ethnicity in your home country. This hunger continues despite Government intervention. The people from this particular ethnicity come from rural areas of your country to more urban settings in search of employment opportunities but face hunger when they do so. The implication is that, although the people from this ethnicity come to urban settings to seek honest employment, due to the cultural bias against their ethnicity they face difficulties in seeking employment. In order to make ends meet and to stave off starvation, they are likely to turn to activities, such as theft, sex work or peddling narcotics. Based on the conceptual framework you have mapped out and also the theoretical framework you have decided upon, you would like to begin more intensive work in developing your idea into a working proposal that you can use for writing a dissertation or thesis. You ask for the help of your supervisor in developing this idea further, strengthening your basic argument, as well as your conceptual and theoretical frameworks of your topic. Finally, you ask your supervisor for help in refining a research question, research objectives and a research design that will assist you in providing an answer to the question of ethnicity on hunger in your home nation.

We will not draw this scenario out further by imagining what your supervisor's exact reaction will be, but when you compare the first scenario with the second scenario, what do you realize? Instead of going with an immediate emotional response, you took logical steps to research, problematize and scrutinize the issue at hand. You provided many details that are necessary to understanding the issue and problematizing it. You also realize that in order to fully understand the issue at hand you have to read

widely from different sources who are experts on this issue. Additionally, you have to start thinking like a social scientist, and not as a layperson. This is necessary in the social sciences, just as it is in many other disciplines. Please also understand that this process will take a lot of time. So be patient with yourself.

In Summary

What this book will help you do is to take those steps to refine your ideas into a cohesive whole for the completion of, first, your dissertation proposal and, then, your final dissertation or thesis. To assist you in this process, at the end of each Chapter there are exercises, as well as reflection and discussion activities to guide you along. Take your time to read each Chapter carefully. Do not rush. Trust us, anything worth accomplishing in academia takes time.

Exercise 1.1: Problematization of the Issue

Step 1: Identifying the important characteristics of the issue.

- Is the issue a problem in your home nation? Assess the current situation using statistics, available data and reports. Write down the main statistics/data/information you have found in the following box.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Box 1.1 Identifying the important characteristics of the issue

- Following that, write down the populations, sub-populations or communities who are potentially affected by the issue. Identify four of these populations, sub-populations or communities in the box below:

1. _____
    _____
2. _____
    _____
3. _____
    _____
4. _____

Box 1.2 Populations, sub-populations or communities who are potentially affected by the issue

- Identify the major stakeholders or groups of people involved in the issue that you wish to study. While six spaces are included below, identify as many as are relevant to the issue you wish to study.

1. _____
   _____
2. _____
   _____
3. _____
   _____
4. _____
   _____
5. _____
   _____
6. _____

Box 1.3 Major stakeholders

Step 2: Identify the positive characteristics and barriers of the issue

- Identify three positive aspects of the issue. This will assist you in ensuring you do not research an issue that has already been thoroughly investigated or one that does not warrant further research, because it is trivial. Write these positive characteristics in Box 1.4 below.

- Positive characteristic 1:
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Positive characteristic 2:
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Positive characteristic 3:
  _____
  _____
  _____

Box 1.4 Positive characteristics

Identify what are the barriers that prevent the problem from being solved. Challenge yourself to identify at least three barriers to the solution of the problem. Then, identify in your opinion and the opinion of your supervisor, the main barrier to solving the problem. Please note that the main barrier may be a combination of all three of the barriers, but we would suggest you stick to one barrier to clearly define the scope of your research. Please use Box 1.5 below to assist you in this exercise.

```
•  Barrier 1:
      _____
      _____
      _____

•  Barrier 2:
      _____
      _____
      _____

•  Barrier 3:
      _____
      _____
      _____

•  Main Barrier:
      _____
      _____
```

Box 1.5 Barriers

Step 3: Identify the social scientific implications of the issue.

- This area of writing requires you to be as specific as possible. This part of problematization of the issue may take you the longest time to complete, but it is well worth investing the necessary time.
- First, identify the implications of the issue from a general perspective.

- If the issue is not solved, what is the implication for society as a whole?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Does the issue have mental, physical or emotional implications for society?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Does the issue have an economic, political, educational, health or environmental implications for society?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

Box 1.6 Social scientific implications of the issue

- Next, give an assessment of the issue with relevant implications if the issue is not studied and the relevant recommendations are not made.
- It is best to stick to one main assessment with two or three implications that are directly tied to the main implication. List these down based on the model provided in Box 1.7 below.

- Main assessment:

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Implication 1:

  _____
  _____
  _____