

FREE COMPANION WORKSHEET

Problem Statement & Objectives Builder

A fill-in worksheet for drafting a problem statement and research objectives your committee won't send back.
Companion to: "How to Write Chapter 1 of a PhD Thesis Proposal" on resourcefulscholarshub.com

How to use this: Work through the steps in order. Don't skip to the objectives before your problem statement feels solid — everything downstream depends on getting Step 1 right.

STEP 1 — State the Problem Directly

Complete this sentence: "The problem under investigation is..." Avoid opening with "there is a gap in the literature" — that comes later, as justification, not as the problem itself.

STEP 2 — Show Why It's a Problem

What evidence (data, statistics, grey literature) demonstrates this is real and significant? Why hasn't it been adequately addressed yet?

STEP 3 — Confirm the Doctoral-Level Bar

In one or two sentences, explain what NEW contribution to knowledge your study will make (not just a gap it fills, but what it adds).

STEP 4 — List What You'd Need to Understand

List 5–8 things you'd need to investigate to fully address the problem above. You'll group these into objectives in Step 5.

STEP 5 — Draft Your General Objective

One sentence restating your study topic in objective form.

STEP 6 — Draft 4-5 Specific Objectives

Group the items from Step 4 into 4–5 objectives. Choose an action verb for each — see the reference table below — and vary the verbs while staying consistent with your methodology (quantitative / qualitative / mixed).

ACTION VERB STARTER TABLE

A starter reference — the full toolkit version includes 30+ verbs mapped across all three methodology types.

Methodology	Action Verbs
Quantitative	to analyze, to determine, to measure, to test, to examine, to compare, to establish
Qualitative	to explore, to understand, to interpret, to describe, to investigate (contextually), to uncover
Mixed-methods	a combination from both columns above, matched to the specific objective's design

STEP 7 — Self-Test Your Objectives

- ☐ Does each objective emerge directly from the problem statement?
- ☐ Could a single paper be written from each objective on its own?
- ☐ Do the action verbs match your intended methodology consistently?
- ☐ Are the objectives distinct from one another (no overlap)?
- ☐ Is the number of objectives in line with your institution's requirements (typically 4-5)?

This worksheet covers the basics. The full **Research Objectives Worksheet** inside the PhD Thesis Proposal Toolkit includes the complete 30+ verb reference table, a verb-to-methodology alignment matrix, and a deeper self-test — plus the annotated Writing Guide, checklist, Word template, and Defense Prep Sheet. **Get the full toolkit → resourcefulscholarshub.com**