

## Writing the Purpose & Problem Statement

Follow the steps below to write an effective Purpose & Problem Statement. Note that there are three parts to this document:

1. The purpose of the course
2. The purpose of the assignment
3. The statement of the problem – the problematic issue – that is the focus of your paper

Use the outline to organize your own Purpose & Problem Statement (PPS). You may wish to read the sample at the end of this document.

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### **A. The Purpose of the Course: two paragraphs**

1. Write a paragraph describing the “how” of the writing strategy for the class.
  - a. Information about the “how” is available under the “Key Concepts” link.
  - b. Sample text is available by visiting the “Purpose & Problem” link under “Tools.”  
Students are free to use that text for this portion of the PPS.
2. Write a paragraph describing the “what” of the course.
  - a. The right hand column of the home page discusses the topic we will write about throughout the term.
  - b. The topic becomes clear by reading all six assignments and looking at the titles of the readings.

### **B. The Purpose of the Assignment: 1-3 paragraphs**

1. Identifies key features of the assignment and its purpose:

### **C. The Problem**

1. Begin by reviewing your TEQ Sheets, and pay close attention to the questions you already have asked.
2. Continue by reviewing the web page that gives the assignment for Project-1
  - a. What should students ask about education, writing instruction, and class to better understand their own education?
  - b. What issues and problems do the readings recognize that you also see in your own experience?
  - c. How does your own experience lead to insights that improve/clarify/contradict the claims of the “they say”

**SEE SAMPLE PURPOSE & PROBLEM BELOW**

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### Purpose & Problem Statement: Project-1

#### **Purpose of the Course**

“This course teaches students how to understand information created by knowledgeable people who have already thought about a subject. Second, it teaches us how to read their work to spot the places where we can make a correction, add a new idea, or make things more thorough. Once we see where we can “add to the conversation,” we have the basis for a paper. This whole process can be summarized in a map metaphor: we map a topic, find the gaps in the map, and then re-draw the map to make it more complete. For each step of the map metaphor we have a tool: TEQ Sheets for the mapping; Purpose & Problem Statement for identifying gaps in the map, and the Prospectus for proposing a new map” (culik.com)

The course teaches these skills by focusing on a single topic throughout the term: how socio-economic class puts students in specific kinds of educational opportunities. The assignments seem to focus on first thinking about class, then thinking about types of education, and then noting how there is a system for “digitally redlining” working-class students so that their education restricts their opportunities. This assignment introduces us to ideas about class, class consciousness, and about education being part of a larger context. Throughout the term, it seems as if the focus on a writing *method* and the focus on *content* are the basis of teaching critical thinking.

## **Purpose of the Assignment**

This assignment asks students to create a paper that does three things. First the paper reports on the “they say” of Jean Anyon and the other readings. This provides a clear map of what has been said about education, class, and opportunity. Second, the paper presents a personal story of how Anyon’s insights were evident the student’s own K-12 experience. These two steps create a pathway toward the third section that discusses questions about class, education, and opportunity in a more general way. In this third section (a conclusion), the student offers a precise, logical, and insightful statement. It is the “we say” of the paper that integrates the insights of other writers such as Anyon with the student’s own values and beliefs. Thus, the assignment moves toward a big, final section with a claim. Remember that the first two parts of this paper are preparation for this final development of a complex idea of your own. The success of the paper hinges on the complexity of this third section.

## **Problem Statement**

I’m perplexed by the connection between education and class. I understand the general idea that there are differences in schools, and how k-12 schools reflect the values of the local community. But I don’t see how this can be some kind of “intentional plot.” Or is it some bigger set of values and beliefs shared by the schools, the teachers, the parents, and the students from a particular type of community? Are these differences even present in schools that are mostly working class or mostly upper class; are AP courses, and “tracking” part of the same thing? I wasn’t aware of these differences until I read Anyon and the others. Thus, the topic makes me think about the nature of my own community. I see other questions: does this connection between class and writing education limit the way I can think about things? What advantages are

there to thinking/writing in a critical way? Does my education force me into ways of thinking that aren't very complex? Who benefits from all of this? What do I think is the just and fair response to these differences?

I have a second kind of question about differences between types of colleges. We read the core curriculum from Barnard and compared it to that of Macomb; it's a big difference, but what does that difference tell us about types of colleges and who they serve or the kind of thinking they emphasize? Are colleges controlled by different types of class consciousness just like K-12 schools? What the place of community colleges in all of this?