

Handouts

A Socratic Approach to Project Design

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The following six questions are designed to help you in your problem definition and proposal design for your project. Please try to prepare your initial answers to these questions individually in advance of the workshop.

1. What do you want to focus on?
What is your central issue, problem or concern? ———> **Focal question.**
2. Why? What has and has not been done previously in this area? What is the gap in the literature? What is/has been the purpose of your work? What will you do differently or new? Why is this worthy of study and/or explication? Why is it important and of benefit to whom? ———> **Significance.**
3. What will be your new, original contribution to practical and theoretical knowledge in the field? Why is this new or different from anything that has been done before? ———> **Contribution to knowledge.**
4. How will you address your central research/explication question? How will you argue, demonstrate and produce evidence for the fact that your work makes/has made a substantial contribution to new, original knowledge in the field in (a) theory and (b) practice? ———> **Method/Methodology.**
5. When do you start and finish your reading, research and writing? What is your timetable from now to final submission? Is it realistic and manageable in that timeframe? What are the milestones in your timetable? ———> **Timeline.**
6. What is the international relevance of your proposal? ———> **International perspective**

Workshop activity

After you have tried to answer the above questions individually, form small groups of 3–4 participants. Each participant gets a chance to be in the ‘hot’ seat and to be asked many pertinent questions by the ‘critical friends’ in the group in relation to each of the above six sets of questions.

There is **one important ground rule**: No-one is allowed to talk in sentences (except the candidate in the hot seat) and to give advice, but only to ask questions. This Socratic approach is not easy for the critical friends nor for the candidate who is thus forced – and helped – to come up with the answers and to make his/her tacit, implicit knowledge more explicit.