

Conceptual Problem and Significance Worksheet

MMW 14, MMW 15, and MMW 122 requires that you explain identify a Conceptual Problem and the significance of your argument in your final paper. We define the “conceptual problem” as the gaps, inconsistencies, contradictions, complexities, curiosities, and surprises that you find in your initial exploration of a topic: it is often the things that don’t seem to make sense that lead to the best research. Writers call these conceptual problems or “mental itches” that you will scratch with more research.

For your homework assignment, for **PART 1**, **Re-type** the approach and fill in and include the information appropriate to your topic (you may need to modify the wording to fit your particular situation). Then answer the questions for **PART 2**.

PART 1 – Types of Research Approaches

1. Omission/Gap

Regarding the question _____, I have observed that current scholarship on the issue of _____ (particular issue you are asking about) is lacking, flawed, or incomplete in the sense that _____. While [scholar’s name] _____ argues that _____, and [scholar’s name] _____ argues that _____, they have both failed to recognize that _____. I think filling in this omission is important because _____, and if, as scholars, we don’t fill this omission we risk _____, thus I will argue that _____.

2. New Outlook

Regarding the question of _____ I have noticed that while some scholars argue _____, and other scholars argue that _____, no scholars (as far as my own research has determined) have argued that _____. I want to provide this new outlook on the question because I think it is important to explore/show that _____. By failing to show _____, scholarship on this issue is lacking or problematic because _____.

3. New Combination Approach

Many scholars have attempted to answer the question of _____, but in this paper I plan to combine pieces of different scholars’ arguments in a new way. In my approach to the question, I am combining [scholar’s name] _____’s theory about _____ with [scholar’s name] _____’s theory about _____. From my research, it appears that the particular combination of _____ theories that I have put together have not been argued before, which is unfortunate because my thesis makes an important contribution to the debate because it _____.

4. Dispels Assumption or Corrects False Info Approach

Regarding the topic of _____, it seems that both [scholar’s name] _____ and [scholar’s name] _____ are both assuming _____ to be true. However, I think this is a problematic assumption because _____, and observe that the implications of continuing to assume _____ is problematic because _____. Thus, I want to ask a question *about* the assumption these scholars are making by asking the following: _____ [you can take this same approach but instead make it so that your argument disagrees with information or historical “ facts”].

5. Hybrid Degree Approach

Many scholars have attempted to answer the question _____, but in my research I have noticed that scholars’ approaches to this topic are somewhat polarized. While some scholars argue that the answer to the question is _____, other scholars argue that the answer is _____. My research suggests that both of these answers are correct, though one of these answers is slightly more

influential/plausible/etc/ than the other. Thus, I am adding to the scholarly debate by combining two sides of the scholarly debate, showing that both sides are plausible, and showing that one side is more significant/influential/etc. than the other. This is important to do because _____.

PART 2: Summarize and Explain

1. What questions arise from your initial reading?
2. Will you address an *omission* in scholarly research? A *new outlook*? Will you *expand* on already existing scholarly arguments?, etc. (See above for “Types of Research Approaches”).
3. Why is your question important to ask? And what are the costs or implications or not knowing or misunderstanding your question? (consider this when explaining the “significance” of your project)
4. How does your proposed research question address the problem, culture, conflict, or phenomenon that you are investigating?
5. Why is your particular argument (your answer to the research question) important? That is, what are you *contributing* to the academic debate with your *thesis*? (consider this when explaining the “significance” of your project)

****NOTE**** - It usually makes sense to allude to the significance portion of your paper in the introduction of your essay (and throughout your paper). This is because the significance portion is your reason for writing the entire paper. In your final paper you may want to put PART I in your introduction and PART II in your conclusion.