Problem Statement Template With Four Real Examples

A problem statement says what problem your study addresses and how your study will address it. This template breaks that job into five parts, gives you a scaffold to fill in, and shows it completed for an example study. Then it quotes four real problem statements from published theses in education, nursing and computer engineering, with what each part does and one thing worth borrowing from each.

Part	What it does	Sentence starters
1. The situation	Sets the scene: the setting, population or body of research your study sits in.	In [setting], [population] …
2. The problem	Says what is wrong. Practical: something isn't working out in the world. Theoretical: something we don't yet know (the gap).	However, … / Yet little is known about …
3. The evidence	Shows the problem is real, with citations or data, not just your opinion.	For example, [source] found … / [Data] show …
4. Why it matters	Names the consequence: who is affected, and what it costs if nothing changes.	As a result, … / This matters because …
5. How this study responds	States what your study will do about it. This leads straight into your aims and research questions.	This study therefore examines …

INSIDE

- The five parts of a problem statement
- A scaffold with sentence starters
- A worked example
- A checklist
- Four real examples, annotated:
- Education (PhD)
- Nursing (PhD and DNP)
- Computer engineering (MS)

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Part 1: The five parts of a problem statement

Template note: order and length. Most strong problem statements do these five jobs, though not always in this order, and a short one may do two in a single sentence. A practical problem often opens with why it matters; a theoretical one often opens with the situation. What matters is that a reader can find all five.

Part	What it does	Sentence starters
1. The situation	Sets the scene: the setting, population or body of research your study sits in.	In [setting], [population] …
2. The problem	Says what is wrong. Practical: something isn't working out in the world. Theoretical: something we don't yet know (the gap).	However, … / Yet little is known about …
3. The evidence	Shows the problem is real, with citations or data, not just your opinion.	For example, [source] found … / [Data] show …
4. Why it matters	Names the consequence: who is affected, and what it costs if nothing changes.	As a result, … / This matters because …
5. How this study responds	States what your study will do about it. This leads straight into your aims and research questions.	This study therefore examines …

Part 2: Your scaffold

Template note: fill it in. Write one or two sentences in each box, with a citation wherever you make a claim about the world or the literature. Then join them in the last box, reorder them so they flow, and edit until they read as one paragraph.

1. The situation. *Sets the scene: the setting, population or body of research your study sits in.*

2. The problem. *Says what is wrong. Practical: something isn't working out in the world. Theoretical: something we don't yet know (the gap).*

3. The evidence. *Shows the problem is real, with citations or data, not just your opinion.*

4. Why it matters. *Names the consequence: who is affected, and what it costs if nothing changes.*

5. How this study responds. *States what your study will do about it. This leads straight into your aims and research questions.*

Your problem statement, assembled

Part 3: The scaffold filled in

Template note: an example study. This is our example, written for this template: the study behind our APA 7 tables and research questionnaire templates. The [citation] markers show where a real statement needs a source; they are placeholders, not references.

Part	Example
1. The situation	Employees in education, healthcare and social care often take on heavy workloads early in their careers [citation].
2. The problem	Many leave within their first few years, and research has not yet shown how autonomy and support from managers shape that decision for people new to a role.
3. The evidence	Studies link heavy workload to burnout, and burnout to plans to leave [citation], and turnover is highest among newer staff [citation].
4. Why it matters	Each early departure costs employers the investment in training, and disrupts the pupils, patients and clients these employees serve [citation].
5. How this study responds	This study therefore examines how workload, autonomy and supervisor support relate to burnout and intention to leave among employees in their first three years in a role.

Assembled

> Employees in education, healthcare and social care often take on heavy workloads early in their careers, and turnover is highest among newer staff [citation]. Each early departure costs employers the investment in training, and disrupts the pupils, patients and clients these employees serve [citation]. Studies link heavy workload to burnout, and burnout to plans to leave [citation], but research has not yet shown how autonomy and support from managers shape that path for people new to a role. This study therefore examines how workload, autonomy and supervisor support relate to burnout and intention to leave among employees in their first three years in a role.

Template note: what changed when it was assembled. The parts were merged and reordered: the evidence about turnover joined the opening, why it matters came next, and the gap closes the paragraph just before the response. That builds from the problem in the world to the gap in the research, as the two-halves structure suggests. Rearranging is normal; the five parts are a checklist, not a fixed order.

Part 4: Four problem statements from published theses

Template note: real examples. These are quoted exactly as published, from theses we host in full under open licenses, so you can open each one and read the statement in context. Each is followed by what each part does and one thing worth borrowing.

1. Education: Culturally responsive teaching, belonging and self-efficacy

Yujie Huang (2019), PhD, Purdue University, section 1.9, pp. 24–25. Licensed CC BY 4.0. Full thesis: gradcoach.com/dissertation-thesis-examples/education/#culturally-responsive-teaching-belonging-self-efficacy

> There is a lack of application of culturally responsive teaching in university classrooms (Bonner, 2014; Wiens, 2015). Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of students' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices in higher education. Moreover, no quantitative measurement was found that could measure culturally responsive teaching from students' perspectives in higher education, and more specifically, in the context of agriculture and STEM programs (Hiramiak & Huang, 2015). Moreover, we do not fully understand the motivational mechanism of culturally responsive teaching on student academic motivation; especially to what extent that culturally responsive teaching can foster students' sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy in higher education. By understanding students' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching and its association with students' academic motivation, we could effectively promote the application of culturally responsive teaching as a way to improve diversity and inclusion in Agriculture and STEM disciplines within higher education.

What each part does

- **The problem, in four parts.** Four sentences each name a separate gap: the practice isn't applied, students' views aren't understood, there is no student-side measure, and the link to motivation is unclear. The last three gaps each become something the study does.
- **The evidence** sits inside the sentences, as citations, rather than in a sentence of its own.
- **Why it matters** comes last: closing the gaps would help promote the practice and improve diversity and inclusion.
- **What to borrow:** if your study has several aims, a statement that lists one gap per aim makes the link to your research questions obvious.

2. Nursing: The lived experience of nurses witnessing end-of-life dreams and visions

Sherilyn L. Herron (2025), PhD, University of Massachusetts Amherst, p. 5. Licensed CC BY-ND 4.0. Full thesis: gradcoach.com/dissertation-thesis-examples/nursing/#herron-2025-lived-experience-nurses-witnessing-end-of-life-dreams

> End-of-life dreams and visions are not uncommon among patients approaching death (Dam, 2016). With the publication of Dr Moody's (1977) work on near-death experiences (NDE), which is the experience of people dying and coming back with stories of an afterlife, there had been increasing interest in ELDVs. However, very little research focuses solely on nurses' lived experience with caring for patients discussing or demonstrating an ELDV and how this affects their personal and professional lives.

What each part does

- **The situation** in two sentences: the phenomenon is common, and research interest has grown.
- **The problem** is introduced by one word, "However": the gap is nurses' own experience of it.
- **How the study responds** comes in the next section of her thesis, a separate Purpose Statement. Some programs ask for the two apart, as here; others want them in one paragraph.
- **What to borrow:** a three-sentence statement is enough when the gap is narrow and clearly defined.

3. Nursing (practice project): Improving health care proxy procurement rates

Johanna Baldassari (2026), Doctor of Nursing Practice, University of Massachusetts Amherst, p. 6. Licensed CC BY 4.0. Full thesis: gradcoach.com/dissertation-thesis-examples/nursing/#baldassari-2026-improving-health-care-proxy-procurement-rates

> There is risk of potential harm to hospitalized adults such as prolonged length of stay, increased risk of hospital acquired conditions, loss of autonomy, and not providing care that is aligned with patient wishes. This risk is indicated by the low advance directive completion rate, specifically the health care power of attorney, in adults ages 18 and older in an urban community hospital, and results from lack of clinician awareness, time, and interdisciplinary coordination. The purpose of this DNP project was to implement a nurse led intervention to increase the completion rate of advance directives, specifically that of the healthcare proxy, for patients ages 18 and older admitted to an urban community hospital in Massachusetts.

What each part does

- **A practical problem**, so it opens with **why it matters**: the harms to patients.
- **The problem** comes in the second sentence: a low completion rate, in a named setting, with its causes.
- **How the study responds**, in one sentence: what the project did, for whom, and where.
- **What to borrow:** naming the causes ("lack of clinician awareness, time, and interdisciplinary coordination") tells the reader what your intervention has to change.

4. Computer engineering: Software supply chains and generative systems

Tanmay Singla (2026), MS, Purdue University, section 1.1, p. 12 (the first three of its four paragraphs). Licensed CC BY 4.0. Full thesis: gradcoach.com/dissertation-thesis-examples/computer-science/#software-supply-chains-generative-systems

> Modern software development depends heavily on externally sourced components. Applications are commonly assembled from third-party packages obtained through software ecosystems such as npm, PyPI, Maven, and Cargo [1, 2]. As a result, software supply chains have become central to how functionality is obtained, inherited, and maintained in contemporary practice. This model enables rapid development and extensive reuse, but it also exposes downstream projects to inherited security, maintenance, and governance risks [3, 4].
>
> At the same time, generative systems are beginning to change the structure of software sourcing. Large language models and agentic systems do not only assist with localized code generation. They increasingly operate at the level of repositories and engineering tasks, where they can modify code, tests, and dependency manifests as part of producing working solutions [5, 6]. In doing so, they interact directly with software supply chains, influencing how external functionality is selected, integrated, and maintained.
>
> This thesis studies two related ways in which generative systems may reshape dependency-mediated software reuse. First, AI coding agents already participate in dependency decision-making within existing package ecosystems by adding, removing, and updating dependencies in real repositories. Second, increasingly capable generative workflows may support dependency replacement through use-case-oriented regeneration, where the functionality a repository uses from an upstream dependency is regenerated locally rather than obtained through continued reliance on the full external package.

What each part does

- **The situation** gets a full paragraph that sets the scene and its risks, because the reader needs to understand how software is assembled before the problem makes sense.
- **The problem** is a change: the second paragraph shows a new technology altering that situation.
- **How the study responds**: the third paragraph names the two things the thesis studies, which become its two contributions. The section's fourth paragraph, not quoted here, then states its central question outright.
- **What to borrow:** for a technical or fast-moving field, it's fine to spend longer on the situation, as long as the problem and the response are just as clear.

Part 5: Checklist

☐	It says **what** the problem is, specifically: a named population, setting or body of research.
☐	It shows the problem is real, with **evidence**: citations or data, not opinion.
☐	It says **why it matters**: who is affected, and what happens if nothing changes.
☐	It says **how your study responds**, and that response matches your aims and research questions.
☐	The gap is a reason to study something, not just a statement that nobody has (a missing study isn't a problem on its own).
☐	It fits in one paragraph, or two short halves if your program expects a longer statement.
☐	Every claim about the world or the literature has a source.

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