

Go Looking for Trouble in Your Topic (Catherine Savini):

1. **Notice something** that stands out, is confusing or surprising, doesn't have an answer, reveals the unexpected, needs further discussion. Describe what you notice, particularly what is puzzling, hard to understand, unclear, confusing, or hard to believe. Identify the questions that you have, the problems that need to be solved to lead to more clarity, and the nature of your confusion.
2. **Articulate a problem and its details:**
 - a. Juxtapose texts on the same topic and identify tensions or contradictions in terms of their ideas or definitions of key concepts.
 - b. Identify conflicts between your own experiences and values and the theories, arguments and values offered by the texts.
 - c. Identify troubling assumptions that underlie the arguments or ideas of the texts
 - d. Notice a gap or something relevant the text overlooks.
3. **Pose fruitful questions about the topic:**

Fruitful questions lead you to new ideas or information, tend to start with Why, How, or What, and can't be answered quickly and definitively with a short answer (particularly not YES or NO – revise these questions by adding a how or why or “what does it mean that...”):

 - a. What questions will the various groups of writers who want to sort through this problem want or need to ask?
 - b. What common/conflicting values, goals and standards does each group have?
 - c. What common/conflicting specialized vocabularies do they use to discuss these issues?
4. **Identify what is at stake in the conversation:**
 - a. What makes this question worth asking, problem worth solving?
 - b. Who will benefit from answering the question, solving the problem? Why?

Observation – Conversation – Complaint – Pitch

1. **Describe a puzzling observation about the world that you or others have made.** Describe and define the phenomena that need explaining, questions that need answering, problems that need solving, ideas that aren't clear and easy to make sense of. Identify the questions that you have, the problems that need to be solved to lead to more clarity, and the nature of your confusion.
2. **Describe the conversations that other writers have been having about the thing you have observed.** Who is writing about this and why? What have they said? What are the defining questions they ask? What issues do they raise? What concepts do they use? What is the range of positions in the discussion? From what different values or perspectives do these positions arise? What gaps exist in this conversation?
3. **Identify your complaint.** What about the existing conversation motivates you to contribute to it?
4. **Identify your pitch.** What ideas do you want to endorse? How will you contribute to the conversation?
5. **Identify your project.** What are you trying to achieve with your paper? What is at stake in it for you and your readers? (See “What is at stake” above.)