

Starting a Research Paper: Goal Statements, Guiding Questions, and Implications

1. Create a research goal statement.

Your research goal statement is different from your thesis statement because you can develop your research goal statement before you have the expertise (evidence) to create a refined thesis. You can create your goal statement before you begin researching.

Here is an example:

I am studying the topic of the correlation between social media friendships and real-life friendships because I wonder how many of the average person's Facebook "friends" could be considered actual friends. I want to study this topic in order to help my readers (young, active on social media) to consider what goes into fostering a true friendships beyond simply clicking a button on a website. Ultimately, I hope that my readers might be better able to draw a more clear distinction between social media "friendships" and real-life friendships and value those friends more as a result.

Let's look at this goal statement's three sentences:

- A. I am studying the topic of ... because I wonder if ...
- B. I want to study this topic in order to help my readers (define audience) address the bigger and more important question of ...
- C. Ultimately, I hope that my readers might ...

2. Make a list of key questions and assumptions.

Use your research goal statement to brainstorm some key questions and assumptions that your paper will have to address.

Here are some examples:

- How many social media "friendships" actually reflect real-life friendships?
- How many true friendships can the average person maintain?
- How many social media friends does the average person have?
- Do people with fewer "friends" on social media have a healthier understanding of friendship?
- How can people better appreciate the bond that friends share?

Forming questions and assumptions is fun and easy. Use your imagination. Don't edit yourself. If you have trouble generating, use freewriting to push your ideas onto paper.

3. Develop a list of implications about your research.

Consider the "so what?" of your argument before you begin researching. What conclusions do you hope your audience will draw from your discussion?

Here are some examples:

- Suggestions for better appreciating the bond of friendship in one's everyday life
- Suggestions for distinguishing between social media friendships and real-life friendships
- Suggestions for healthy use of social media