

ECF Sophomore Seminar Assignment: Positionality Statements

Introduction & Motivation:

A positionality statement is a description of the author's identity in society, especially as it relates to a particular project. (See dictionary.com's definition of "positionality", right.) By including a positionality statement in a research document, we are admitting that no research can ever be 100% objective, but that our background gives us a particular lens through which we see the world. We also acknowledge that the same information could have different meaning for someone of a different identity.

positionality

[puh-zish-uh-nal-i-tee]

WHAT DOES POSITIONALITY MEAN?

Positionality is the social and political context that creates your identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status. *Positionality* also describes how your identity influences, and potentially biases, your understanding of and outlook on the world.

In this assignment, you will practice writing a positionality statement that could be included in your own work.

Genre: Positionality statement for use in a research article or author/artist's biography

Audience: Readers of research in your field or audiences of your art

Purpose: To clarify the contexts that inform a piece of research or artistic work—including those that shape the researcher or artist and those that shape the research subject, host institution, or intended audience of the work

Length: 150-300 words

Process:

1. Read the sample positionality statements below.
2. Discuss as a group what positionality statements normally include in your discipline.
3. Draft a practice positionality statement for an assignment you are currently working on. If you don't have an assignment in any of your current classes involving research, craft a potential positionality statement for a hypothetical ECF project.
4. Working in groups of 3-4, take turns reading your positionality statement aloud and listening to feedback from your group members. How could it be expanded to be more explicit? How could it be refined to be more concise? What questions do you have about positionality statements for the class to consider?
5. As a class, discuss any questions that this exercise raises for you.
6. As homework, revise and polish your positionality statement and turn it in on Moodle.

Assessment Criteria:

- Does this statement acknowledge group identities that might impact the researcher's or artist's work including racial, cultural, ethnic, religions, linguistic, racial, and economic groups?

- Does this statement identify how the research or piece of art may have blind-spots or limitations due to the contexts in which the researcher or artist is operating or their own background? Does the statement address strategies employed as a consequence of these limits to strengthen the work?
- Does the statement identify strengths of the research or piece of art due to the contexts in which the researcher or artist is operating or their own background?
- Does the statement meet the length requirement and demonstrate polished prose?

Sample Positionality Statements:

1. Alexandra Brown is a tenured professor at a university with a predominantly white student body and faculty. She is a former public school teacher with seven years of experience in a diverse classroom (approx. 40% African American, 40% Hispanic American, and 20% Caucasian American). Her research is conducted at a local community tutoring program in Los Angeles that serves 120 high school students each week. Most of the students served work part-time jobs at least 12 hours a week in addition to attending school full time.

Brown is fluent in English and has some ability to communicate in Spanish. Working with community students who are fluent in Spanish and have some ability to communicate in English is within her skill range, but when interacting with students new to English, she relies on translators to help ensure clear communication. Sometimes these translators are professionals employed by the school district or community center and sometimes they are other students. Her research is informed by a commitment to recognizing language diversity and the expertise that many multi-lingual high school students share with their peers, teachers, and community.

Brown's research is funded by grants from UCLA and the Arthur Vining Davis Corporation.

2. Jason Park grew up in a vibrant Orlando, Florida suburb where he attended public high school and participated in community theater. He is a first-generation college student supported in his studies by the generosity of his parents, one of whom is a proud immigrant from Korea and one of whom is a proud third-generation Floridian. He identifies as a cis-gender male, but he has chosen to focus his one-act play on the experiences of a nonbinary young adult due to his commitment to diversifying the populations represented on stage. He has co-authored two earlier one-act plays focusing on the experience of growing up bi-racial. Park's research was supported by a grant from the Undergraduate Research Council that was used to enroll in two workshops aimed at helping writers avoid cultural appropriation when writing outside their identity. He is grateful to three non-binary readers who helped him address some of the problems in two early drafts of this play; the grant also enabled him to compensate the readers for their time and expertise. He welcomes supportive feedback that will help him grow as a writer.

Additional Resources:

Holmes article on positionality statements and qualitative research:

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1268044.pdf>

Enns-Kananen Guide:

<https://www.languageonthemove.com/coming-to-terms-with-ourselves-in-our-research/>

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