

Guide: Writing a Positionality Statement for Biorepository Research

Reflecting on the perspective you bring to your research

Positionality means how a person's identity "positions" them in relation to others. For example, a professional chef might judge food differently than the average person.

A positionality statement helps researchers recognize and acknowledge the personal "lens" they bring to their work. This lens is shaped by identity, background, and lived experience.

This worksheet includes questions to help you reflect on your own perspective and write a positionality statement for your project.

Instructions

Positionality statements are usually written by individuals, but they can also be created as a shared statement for a research team. First, decide whether you want to do this activity alone or with your group.

On a piece of paper or in a shared document, jot down your responses to the questions below. Then, use your notes to draft a brief positionality statement — either for yourself or, if working together, for your group.

You don't need to include every answer in your final statement. Choose the parts that feel most meaningful and relevant to your research.

Questions

These prompts were adapted from several existing resources (see More Resources below) and tailored for repository-enabled research.

Step 1: Your Background

1. Identities and Experiences
 - a. Are there any aspects of your identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, nationality, religion) that feel significant to this work, and why?
 - b. Are there personal experiences (e.g. where you grew up, a loved one with the condition you are studying, people you worked with in the past or currently) that feel relevant to this work?
 - c. How might these identities or experiences help you relate to, or distance you from, the communities represented in your dataset?
2. Training
 - a. In what discipline did you train?
 - b. How has this training shaped the way you frame research questions, what you see as “valid” data, or what kinds of findings you find interesting or important?
 - c. What dominant worldviews come from your field—and how might you be reproducing or challenging them in your work?

Step 2: How Your Identity and Background Shape Your Research Choices

1. How have these aspects of your identity impacted your decision to pursue this research question?
2. Does your position give you an insider’s perspective, an outsider’s perspective, or both? What does that mean for how you interpret data?
3. How might your background affect the way you frame or share your results?
4. What might you miss because of your perspective? How will you mitigate this?

5. What strengths might your position bring (e.g., deeper empathy, sharper critique, unique access to a dataset)?

Pull your reflections together into a short paragraph (3–6 sentences). You need NOT include every answer in your statement – use your judgement to decide what is relevant to your project.

Examples

Here are some examples of positionality statements in the context of repository-enabled research. These include fictional statements written for this worksheet, and one real-world example from published research.

Examples for Individual Researchers:

Example 1

As a researcher studying Down syndrome, my work is deeply shaped by my experience as a parent of a child living with this condition. This personal connection is what first drew me to this field, and it gives me a unique sense of urgency, empathy, and insight into the day-to-day realities families face. While this perspective is a source of passion and motivation, I am also aware that it introduces potential biases. I strive to remain critically reflective, to ground my work in rigorous methodology, and to ensure that I center the voices and experiences of a diverse range of patients and families—not just my own.

Example 2

As someone who survived a cancer diagnosis, my personal experience has played a significant role in shaping both my research interests and the questions I choose to ask. This lived experience provides me with an insider's perspective on the challenges, gaps in care, and day-to-day realities that may not always be visible through clinical data alone. At the same time, I recognize that my perspective is just one among many, and that my own

experiences may introduce unconscious biases. I am committed to grounding my work in rigorous, ethical research practices and to amplifying the diverse voices of others affected by this condition, including those whose experiences differ from my own.

Example 3

As a first-generation college student from a low-income, Indigenous background, I recognize that my experiences shape how I approach research on educational inequality. My identity as an Indigenous woman influences my interest in exploring barriers to higher education access for underrepresented communities. While I bring personal insight into these issues, I also acknowledge that my perspective is not universal. I strive to remain critically aware of my assumptions and to center the voices of those whose experiences may differ from mine.

Real World Example (from Published Research)

Excerpted from “Including multiracial individuals is crucial for race, ethnicity and ancestry frameworks in genetics and genomics” by Martschenko et. al.¹ See paper for more examples.

“I self-identify as a biracial African American and I am most often identified by others as Black. My parents both immigrated to the USA — my father as a child from the Ukraine and my mother as an adult from Nigeria. I was born in England and spent portions of my childhood living in various Eastern European countries, ever aware of the curiosity my biracial family sparked in passersby. My multicultural upbringing and challenges with my racial identity motivate my work investigating the social and ethical implications of genetic/genomics and the fraught and violent relationship between race, genetics and human behavior.”

Examples for Teams:

Example 1

As a multidisciplinary research team, we are united by a shared commitment to reducing barriers to care—particularly for communities that have historically been underserved or marginalized within healthcare systems. Our team includes members with diverse professional and personal backgrounds, including clinical practice, public health, social work, and lived experience with navigating complex care systems. We recognize that our own positions—shaped by factors such as race, class, education, geography, and professional training—influence how we interpret data, engage with communities, and define what “access” means. We are committed to reflexivity throughout our research process and to ensuring that our work is guided by the voices, needs, and leadership of the communities most impacted by the barriers we seek to address.

Example 2

As a research team, we acknowledge that we do not have lived experience within the community we are studying. Our identities, backgrounds, and professional training differ from those of the individuals and communities whose realities we aim to better understand. We recognize that this distance may limit our ability to fully grasp the cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape their experiences. Because of this, we approach our work with humility, an openness to learning, and a commitment to building trust through meaningful collaboration. We are actively working to ensure that our research is guided by the voices and priorities of community members, and we aim to reflect their perspectives accurately and respectfully throughout every stage of our work.

Real-World Example (From Published Research)

This example appeared earlier in our “Soft Conflicts of Interest” reading as a “soft” conflict of interest statement, but it also works as a positionality statement.

Excerpted from the paper “The Social Validity of Behavioral Interventions: Seeking Input from Autistic Adults” by Baiden et. al.²

“While none of the authors expects to directly profit from publication of this paper, we aim to be maximally transparent in our potential conflicts of interest as suggested by Bottema-Beutal and colleagues (2021). RKS and KMPB are both certified in Pivotal Response Treatment and have worked as graduate student clinicians at a university autism center that provides PRT. KMPB is also a board certified behavior analyst who provides training at a community agency. PD and ZJW both serve on the ANSWER (autistic researcher) committee of the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P), and ZJW is a member of the family advisory committee of the Autism Speaks Autism Care Network Vanderbilt site. ZJW also serves as a consultant for Roche on multiple projects related to autism intervention and clinical trials.”

More Resources

Hyperlinks are available in the web version of this reading.

- **How to Write a ‘Positionality Statement’ (and Why Positioning Identity Matters in Decolonising Research and Knowledge Production)** –
<https://www.equalityinstitute.org/how-to-write-a-positionality-statement-and-why-positioning-identity-matters-in-decolonising-research-and-knowledge-production/>
- **Reflexivity in quantitative research: A rationale and beginner's guide** –
<https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/spc3.12735>
- **Positionality practices and dimensions of impact on equity research: A collaborative inquiry and call to the community** –
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jee.20377>

- **Disclosure without Engagement: An Empirical Review of Positionality Statements at FAccT** – <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3715275.3732079>
-

Sources and Further Reading

1. Martschenko DO, Wand H, Young JL, Wojcik GL. Including multiracial individuals is crucial for race, ethnicity and ancestry frameworks in genetics and genomics. *Nat Genet.* 2023;55(6):895–900. doi:10.1038/s41588-023-01394-y
2. Baiden KMP, Williams ZJ, Schuck RK, Dwyer P, Wang M. The Social Validity of Behavioral Interventions: Seeking Input from Autistic Adults. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2025;55(4):1172–1186. doi:10.1007/s10803-024-06297-3
3. Bottema-Beutel K, Crowley S, Sandbank M, Woynaroski TG. Research Review: Conflicts of Interest (COIs) in autism early intervention research – a meta-analysis of COI influences on intervention effects. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry.* 2021;62(1):5–15. doi:10.1111/jcpp.13249