

DBA METHODOLOGY FACILITATION TOOLKIT

Socratic Challenges for DBA Research Questions

12 Probing Diagnostic Questions to Stress-Test Student Topics for Rigor,
Access, and Paradigmatic Alignment



Testing Realia & Empirical Grounding

Q1

Symptom vs. Root Cause

"Is this artifact a root cause or merely an organizational symptom?"

PURPOSE:

Pushes past surface phenomena (e.g., turnover) to structural drivers.

Q2

Policy vs. Reality

"If we removed this document, would the underlying problem still exist?"

PURPOSE:

Separates formal corporate paperwork from actual workplace practice.

Q3

Anomaly vs. Paradox

"Is this an isolated company glitch or a recurring industry paradox?"

PURPOSE:

Ensures broader scholarly value beyond localized internal consulting.

Testing Paradigmatic Rigor

Q4

Paradigm Contrast

"How would an Interpretivist vs. Critical Realist design this study?"

PURPOSE:

Tests understanding of how stance directly dictates methodology.

Q5

Grievance Filter

"How does your paradigm prevent personal workplace bias?"

PURPOSE:

Prevents students using research to litigate personal management disputes.

Q6

Pragmatist Metric

"What metric defines whether your proposed intervention 'works'?"

PURPOSE:

Requires Pragmatist studies to define clear evaluative criteria.

Testing Actionability & Access

Q7

Gatekeeping Risk

"Who benefits from this staying unsolved, and will they grant access?"

PURPOSE:

Reality check on political barriers and data gatekeepers.

Q8

Espoused vs. Enacted

"Are you measuring executive claims or what managers actually do?"

PURPOSE:

Challenges over-reliance on superficial interview statements.

Q9

Executive Decision

"If delivered to the C-suite tomorrow, what decision changes?"

PURPOSE:

Distinguishes applied doctoral work from theoretical PhD essays.

Testing the FINER Threshold

Q10

Scope Control

"Can this be completed in 12–18 months, or is it a decade-long project?"

PURPOSE:

Enforces realistic timeline boundary and scope management.

Q11

Hidden Premise

"What is the single biggest assumption embedded in your wording?"

PURPOSE:

Unpacks biased, leading, or outcome-presuming question syntax.

Q12

The Ultimate Test

"Why couldn't a consultant solve this in a 2-week engagement?"

PURPOSE:

Ensures the topic demands true doctoral research depth.

In-Class Activity: Peer "Devil's Advocate"

FORMAT & TIMING

10-Minute Pair Sprint

Pair students together to stress-test their draft DBA questions before submitting their portfolio entry.

- Step 1:** Partner A presents their realia and proposed research question (2 mins).
- Step 2:** Partner B picks TWO Socratic questions to challenge the design (3 mins).
- Step 3:** Switch roles and repeat (5 mins).

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Sharpened Portfolio Entry

Students leave the session with a revised research question that actively anticipates methodological criticism, gatekeeping barriers, and epistemological ambiguity.

FACILITATOR TIP:

Highlight Q12 on the board—if a consultant can solve it in a fortnight, it is not yet a DBA thesis.