

## 18. Developing Research Questions

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Good research papers start with good research questions. Here are some tips for and types of research questions to consider.

### General Tips

Is our question focused? Be sure your research question is focused on a single topic/issue and can be reasonably answered.

- Avoid questions that you know have no answer
- Avoid questions that are too subjective. Be sure your values can be measured.
- Be specific: who, what, where, when, etc. should be identified in your question

Is your question arguable? Be sure that you are asking a question that is complex and worthy of researching and writing about.

- Avoid closed off questions that can be easily or definitively answered with a quick Google search
- Avoid “yes or no” questions
- Provide the opportunity for debate. Research papers are conversations. You are responding to others, so leave room for others to respond to you.

Is your question interesting? Often, research projects will take a significant amount of time, so you want to be sure that your questions are related to your interests.

- Try to ask a question that you care about
- Avoid questions that have already been answered
- Build on what you’ve been learning, but take a new angle on it.

### General Examples

Descriptive research questions allow you to learn about specific things, events, texts, etc. Descriptive questions will lead to essays that inform readers about something complex. Generally, these types of questions are focused on a single concept or subject.

- What are the characteristics of \_\_\_\_\_?

- How has \_\_\_\_\_ changed over time?
- How do (people) experience/deal with \_\_\_\_\_?

Explanatory research questions look at relationships like cause and effect and often seek to connect multiple concepts together in new or interesting ways through research.

- What is the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the role of \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the impact of \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are the causes of \_\_\_\_\_?

Evaluative research questions help you judge and critique something. These kinds of questions set up strong argumentative essays and are often effective at helping you develop proposals and plans of action.

- What are the advantages/disadvantages of \_\_\_\_\_?
- How effective is \_\_\_\_\_?
- How can \_\_\_\_\_ be achieved
- How can \_\_\_\_\_ be improved?

Developing strong research questions will help you gather sources in your research and draft your essay. Your thesis should be the answer that you develop through research, and the body of the essay should demonstrate how you got that answer by “showing your work” (the research and how it applies).