

Developing a Research Question

1. Introduction

1.1 Start

Developing a Research or Guiding Question!

1.2 Welcome

Welcome to *Developing a Research or Guiding Question!*

You can listen to or view the contents of this tutorial on the left menu.

To navigate forward click the NEXT button located in the bottom right hand corner of this screen.

1.3 Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this tutorial you will be able to:

- Differentiate between a search topic and a research question by defining both
- Use the characteristics of good research questions to successfully create one
- Articulate the purpose of and the ways you can construct a strong research question, and
- Apply guidelines for developing a research question using who, what, where, when, why and how questions.

3. Define a Search Topic and Research Question

3.1 Research Question

Before beginning research for an assignment, it's important to develop a research question.

Research questions serve as a guide for the kind of information you need to compile on your topic.

3.2 Topic vs. Research Question

A topic is the broad subject area that you will research.

A research or guiding question is a specific aspect of your topic that you want to learn more about.

Think of your topic as a question and your research as the answer.

What do you want to know about your topic that can be answered by compiling research? This is your research question.

4. Characteristics of a Successful Research Question

4.1 Characteristics

There are important points to keep in mind when turning your topic into a research question.

A successful research or guiding question has specific characteristics:

- It should be of interest to you and driven by your curiosity to learn something about the topic. You'll find it's much easier to write persuasively about a topic that interests you.
- Your question needs to focus your search for sources of information that can be gathered and analyzed, leading you to new knowledge or insights.
- The question and your conclusions should be significant and relatable to your readers.

5. Purpose of a Strong Research Question

5.1 Purpose

Give your research or guiding question interest by making sure it answers or resolves an important issue for you and for others as well.

You also want a question that leads you to a conclusion or recommendation that you can justify after you have gathered and weighed the evidence.

For example, a question such as “What are reality television programs?” will not be of much interest to most readers. All this question will lead to is a definition. Most people know what reality television programs are and probably wouldn’t take the time to read your report.

6. Construct a Strong Research Question

6.1 Aspects of Question

A good research or guiding question is a mechanism for focusing and narrowing your research and should generate interest by addressing an important issue. What you present and conclude should make your readers think about reality television in a new way.

For example, a better question using the “How” prompt might be, “How does regular viewing of reality television programs influence viewers’ perceptions of human behavior over time?”

This is a very complex question with many different aspects or potential directions, but the question gives you a clear direction for your research and will lead to some interesting discussion, analysis, and conclusions.

Keep in mind you do not need to use only **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, **why**, and **how** questions for your research question, but they are good prompts to get you thinking.

6.2 Question Characteristics Activity

(Drag and Drop, 10 points, 3 attempts permitted)

Take a moment now to identify the characteristics of a good research or guiding question. A variety of characteristics are listed here.

Drag those that best describe a successful research or guiding question to the question mark on the screen.

When you’re ready, click “Submit” at the bottom to check your answers.

Drag Item	Drop Target
news event	
significant issue	Picture 1
current sources	
sources are available in library	
leads to new insights	Picture 1
provides research direction	Picture 1
of interest to you	Picture 1
provocative topic	
complex issue	Picture 1
can be analyzed	Picture 1
leads to conclusions	Picture 1
relatable to others	Picture 1
provokes interest	Picture 1
can be answered with a yes or no	

6.3 Disciplinary lens

As university students, you can refine a research question by looking at the question through the lens of a common academic discipline or disciplines.

For example, if you are interested in how reality television:

... may change or influence people individually or within relationships, you will be looking at your topic through a psychological lens.

OR

... developed as a television staple, you may be using a media, history, or communications lens.

OR

... might be changing stereotypes about certain groups of people, you will be using a sociology lens.

Use the lens in your field of study to assist in defining your research question. Keep in mind that some questions can be viewed through many lenses.

6.4 Research Questions

In the following slides, we'll examine possible research questions.

For each pair of research questions, select the better option for research and provoking interest.

6.5 Research Question 1

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct	Choice
X	In the aftermath of another recent Major League Baseball doping scandal, what should Major League Baseball do to ensure players do not dope in the future?
	In the aftermath of another recent Major League Baseball doping scandal, what penalties do the players involved face?

6.6 Research Question 2

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct	Choice
X	How can social media be used most effectively to encourage the engagement and involvement of young people in social issues?
	Is social media a factor in how young people view social issues?

6.7 Research Question 3

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct	Choice
	Who are the biggest celebrity social activists, and what are their causes?
X	Do celebrities misuse their influence as public figures by championing their favored social causes, and what effect does it have on the public?

6.8 Research Question 4

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct	Choice
	Why should society imprison drug users for long periods of time?
X	What meaningful steps can society take to educate people and alleviate drug addiction problems?

6.9 Research Question 5

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct	Choice
	Do elephants experience emotions like grief and friendship?
X	How should we treat elephants when we know they experience many of the same emotions we do as humans?

6.10 WWWWWH

One way to start generating questions you can answer with research is to use the journalistic practice of asking who, what, where, when, why, and how questions.

For example, let's say your topic is reality television. Click on each question prompt on the screen to see how that prompt could be applied to this topic.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Learning Outcomes

Now that you have completed this tutorial, you can:

- Differentiate between a search topic and a research question by defining both
- Use the characteristics of good research questions to successfully create one.
- Articulate the purpose of and the ways you can construct a strong research question.
- Develop a research question using who, what, where, when, why and how questions.

7.2 Conclusion

Congratulations!

You have completed the *Developing a Research or Guiding Question* tutorial!

Click on “Tutorials” to return to the Tutorials page or “Next” to complete a brief quiz.