Research Questions 101

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Today we will learn about...

The Research Question
How do I create a research question?

Three common starting points:

1. Mind/concept mapping
2. Using your source as a guide
3. Background research

The Research Process

- Define and explore the topic
- Analyze the information
- Find sources
- Create research question

Background research
Mind Mapping/Concept Mapping

Image retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.
Using Your Source as a Guide

1. Determine what source or portion of a source you are going to use as a base for your question.

2. Read your source. Take a short break (5 min at most) and reflect on what you just read.

3. Read your source a second time, writing down questions that you think of or other topics that come to mind as you are reading.
Background Research

Where to look:

- Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias
- Open access journals and databases
- Books or eBooks about your topic
  - Kids books are great for short, general summaries about many topics
- Newspapers and magazine articles
- Online searching for your topic of interest
  - Google is great but make sure to carefully tailor your search
Three Parts of a Research Question

• What is the relationship between…

• **Parent’s education level** and **pre-reading skills in children**

• What is the relationship between **a parent’s education level** and **the development of pre-reading skills in children**?
Part One: Starter Phrase

Recommended Starters:
Should...
To what extent...
At what point...

Useful Starters:
What is the relationship between...
How does...
Part Two: The Topics of Interest

• Should have at least two topics (nouns) so you can either:
  • Compare topics
  • Find a relationship between topics
  • Interpret the effect of one topic on another

• Be specific!
  • Having clearly identifiable topics will help later on when you are searching through the library’s databases

• Optional: add a community or group for even more specificity
  • Examples: children, residents of a specific area

Example: Parent’s education level and pre-reading skills in children
Part Three: Make it Make Sense

• Add **action words** (verbs) and **connector words** to make your question grammatically correct, in the right tense, and coherent.

**Example**: What is the relationship between a parent’s education level and the development of pre-reading skills in children?
Things to Avoid

• Creating an informative or factual question
  • Example: describing a viewpoint or just simply answering a question

• Making a question that is too complicated or that contains too many topics to be tackled in one paper

• Opinion or bias in your topic selection or question

• Assuming that your instructor has knowledge of your topic or a point-of-view on it already
Elements of a Quality Research Question

These criteria will help you create and test whether your research question is of high quality.

- Concise
- Complex
- Clear
- Focused
- Arguable
- Original
- Balanced
- Interesting
# Measurable/Objective Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concise</th>
<th>Clear</th>
<th>Focused</th>
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| • The question is worded in a very precise manner.  
• Your question is specific to a few topics and does not have pieces that contradict each other. | • It is easy to figure out what your question is asking without having to ask further questions about it. | • You are able to adequately answer your question in the page limit of your assignment. |
# Measurable/Objective Elements

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Arguable</th>
<th>Complex</th>
<th>Original</th>
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<td>• You are able to use evidence (your research) to explain your side or view of the question.</td>
<td>• A high quality research question is more than just a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question.</td>
<td>• Your question is one that you thought of on your own and you did not plagiarize it from elsewhere.</td>
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<td>• The way that you argue your chosen perspective is meant to sway the point-of-view of your reader.</td>
<td>• You are able to analyze an idea with your writing rather than just writing a description of a point of view.</td>
<td>• A simple Google search of your question can be done to determine originality.</td>
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## Subjective Elements

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<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
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<td>• You (as a writer) are genuinely interested in</td>
<td>• You are able to find a useful amount of information about your topic</td>
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<td>what you are writing about. Pick a topic or</td>
<td>and it is neither too broad (you find too much general information on</td>
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<tr>
<td>issue that you are interested in knowing more</td>
<td>your topic) nor too narrow (you do not have many resources to choose</td>
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<td>about.</td>
<td>from).</td>
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How to Use the Elements

1. Make a draft of your research question or use multiple questions if you cannot decide on one.

2. Use the six measurable criteria to analyze it. Do they meet the criteria?

This may take some time and multiple drafts of your question.
Examples of Research Questions

Activity Example

Low quality: How does reading books help children?

This question is not very complex – the answers can be easily found and there is no argument to be made here. What you would end up writing is an informative paper on why reading to children is important – not necessarily expressing a point of view.

High quality: What is the relationship between a parent’s education level and the development of pre-reading skills in children?

This question asks you to analyze two different topics in a specific population/community and explain whether there is a relationship (or not!). It needs evidence to be answered and is clear in its intent.
Summary

• When creating a research question, make sure it is open-ended and presents something to be argued with proper evidence and thoughtful writing.

• Your question should be able to meet the six measurable criteria (clear, concise, focused, original, complex, and arguable) and that you are interested in learning about your question through research.

• Having a clearly stated question will be helpful when it comes time to find sources for evidence and do the actual writing of the assignment.
Writing Tutors are available online!

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