

Developing a Research Question

An Exercise

Formulating a Research Question - Tips

Common Problems in Question Posing

The Deceptively Simple Question

A question that demands a simple answer to a complex question.

Ex: *When did women achieve equality?*

The Fictional Question

Ex: *If Hitler had been accepted to art school, would World War II have happened?*

The Stacked Question, aka The Assumption

Ex: *Why did the Carter presidency fail?*

The Semantic Question

A question that hinges on the definition of terms.

Ex: *Are all radical revolutions violent?*

The Impossible-to-Answer Question

Ex: *Was World War I inevitable?*

The Opinion or Ethical Question

Ex: *Was Truman wrong to authorize the use of the atomic bomb?*

The Anachronistic Question

Ex: *How good was ancient Athens' record on civil rights?*

Exercise

Step 1: My topic of interest: _____

Step 2: Use one technique to explore your topic: free writing, 5Ws, or mind mapping (again):

- 5Ws: answer the following questions:
 - Who does your topic impact?
 - Who cares about your topic?
 - What is influenced by or influences your topic?
 - When was or is your topic relevant?
 - Where is your topic relevant? Why is your topic important?
- Free writing:
 - write continuously for a set amount of time. Ignore grammar and spelling. Write what you know and identify gaps and questions to pursue.
- Mind mapping:
 - a visual form of brainstorming. Include related subtopics, concepts and words and connect to them to your topic.

Step 3: My preliminary research question: _____

- TIP: Your research question should be more formed than your initial topic of interest. Use your free writing, 5Ws, or mind map to help you formulate your research question.

Step 4: Based on your exploration of this topic so far, what do you need to learn more about in order to answer your research question? Write down at least two aspects of your topic that need further research.

Step 5: Is this a good research question? A Self Test.

- Does my question allow for many possible answers? Is it flexible and open-ended?
- Is it testable? Do I know what kind of evidence would allow an answer?
- Can I break big “why” questions into empirically resolvable pieces?
- Is the question clear and precise? Do I use vocabulary that is vague or needs definition?
- Have I made the premises explicit?
- Is it of a scale suitable to the length of the assignment?
- Can I explain why the answer matters?

Step 6: Post your answers from Steps 1-5 on Slack, [#research-question](#)