

Formulating a Research Question

All research begins with a question derived from a general topic that piques your interest, often through general reading, topical discussion, lectures, family experiences, etc. In many cases the general topic is set by your Instructor.

Generally, the question should be:

1. Relevant.

The question should have some bearing on the topic and remain within the limits that were set beforehand.

2. Interesting.

Choose a topic that interests and stimulates you otherwise searching could become tedious.

3. Focused and specific.

The question should not be too broad or vague. You can however begin with a broad question and then narrow it down to be more specific. You can narrow the question down by:

- a particular aspect, e.g., economic, psychological
- a particular time period
- a particular event e.g., 9/11, rape, divorce
- a geographical area
- gender
- age group

The result should be a question for which there are two or more possible answers. The following examples illustrate how to narrow broad topics to create focused research questions.

<u>Broad topic</u>		<u>Narrowed topic</u>		<u>Focused topic</u>		<u>Research Question</u>
Women's health	→	Women and cancer	→	Women smokers and breast cancer	→	Is there an association between cigarette smoking and breast cancer risk?
Computer games	→	Computer game violence	→	Computer game violence and children	→	How does violence in computer games affect children?
Eating disorders	→	Teenagers and eating disorders	→	Teen peer pressure and	→	What role, if any, does peer pressure play in the

bulimia

development of bulimia
among teens?

4. Researchable.

You should get a feel for what materials will be available to you. Know what the Library has to offer in the way of books and standard reference sources, indexes/databases, and services to acquire resources that are not in-house.

Sometimes your question seems doable at first but when you begin your research, it turns out not to be the case. Because most often you are doing a literature search for the results of previous research (as opposed to original research), it is recommended that you do a preliminary search to test if you can get enough material, and then, if necessary, revise your question.