

## Developing Research Questions

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Hi, in this video we'll be looking at research questions. Specifically, we'll go over what a research question is, why you need one, how you can create one and check to make sure it's a good one, and, finally, what you do with it what you have one.

First, let's look at what a research question is. A research question is an actual question you ask yourself about your topic. It is some aspect of the topic that you're interested in and want to find out more about. All good academic research starts with a research question. The research question doesn't usually show up in the final paper, but we can see evidence that there was one. In this article, for example, the authors state that the call of there article is to assess the factors that make people willing to pirate digital music. They don't tell us what the research question was, but based on their goal we can assume they had one and that it was something like "why do consumers pirate digital music ?" You'll almost never be asked specifically to create a research question as part of a research paper, but you should always start with one anyway.

Now that you know what a research question is, why do you need one ? Most students find a topic, then start working on a research paper right away. For example, you might decide your topic is the number of women in politics. A topic is a starting point for a research question. You ask a research question about a topic. For example, on our topic we could ask the research question "Why do some countries have more women politicians than others?"

There are lots of possible research questions you could ask about any topic. For example, we could also ask "Does having more women politicians lead to better laws for women?" Picking one question over others helps you focus and gives you an angle to approach the topic. This helps you streamline your research and writing, which will save you a lot of time and make your papers better. Now you know why you should use a research question, next you'll find out how to create one. It isn't hard to come up with a research question. We'll follow a few steps. First, pick a topic you're interested in, then find one aspect of the topic you want to focus on. Think of some questions you can ask about that aspect, pick one and then make sure it's a good question.

We'll go through the steps using an example. First, pick a topic you're interested in. We'll use earlier topic "women in politics." Once you've picked a topic, the next step is to think of what different aspects to the topic there are and pick one. In our example we've mapped out some other different aspects of the topic "women in politics." One might be, for example, women voters--they vote, what influences them or what issues are important to them. Another aspect might be "women politicians--how they're different from male politicians, what levels of government they're at or how many there are, what a affects that, how it varies in different countries, and how that influences government policies."

Once you've mapped out some possibilities, pick one aspect. We'll pick "numbers of women politicians" and, specifically, what affects those numbers. What you've narrowed your topic, think of some possible questions about that topic. "Why" and "how" questions are best. For example, we could ask questions like:

"Why do some countries have more women politicians than others?"

"Why does Canada have fewer high-profile women in politics than the US?"

When you're done, pick one to work with. We'll pick "Why do some countries have more women politicians than others?" Once you've picked your question, look at it carefully and try to make it as specific as possible. Make sure your question is clear about who, what, where and when you're talking about.

Let's see how we can make this more specific. We don't want to know about women politicians at all levels of government so specify the national level only. Some countries is also quite vague. We should focus on some specific countries to compare, like Canada and Sweden. In that case, a more specific question would be "why does Sweden have more women politicians at the national level than Canada?" That's how you come up with the research question.

But how do you know if it's a good question? A good question focuses on only one issue and doesn't try to fit in too much. It requires analysis and thinking. It doesn't have an obvious answer. How and why questions are best for this. It's specific and focused, not too broad. It's also clear with all the vague words defined or made more specific.

You don't usually put your research question into your final paper. What you do with it then? A research question will help focus your research. You'll need to find information that helps you answer your research question. For our question--why Sweden has more women politicians than Canada--we might need some statistics. For example, we might also need to know the reasons why Sweden has a lot of women politicians, then we would need to know what how that is different from Canada. Knowing what information we need to answer a question helps make the research more efficient.

Your research question also helps you create your thesis. Your thesis summarizes the answer to your question in one sentence. For example, our thesis might be "Sweden has more women politicians because their electoral system encourages women to participate better than Canada's does." The rest of your paper will support the thesis with more detailed arguments. Your whole paper, therefore, will focus on answering your research question, which helps give structure and focus to your paper. Try it yourself.