Developing a Research Question

A research question guides and centers your research. It should be clear and focused, as well as synthesize multiple sources to present your unique argument. Even if your instructor has given you a specific assignment, the research question should ideally be something that you are interested in or care about.

The chart below provides examples of how broad topics can be narrowed to research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Topic</th>
<th>Narrowed a bit</th>
<th>Narrowed even more</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Acid Rain</td>
<td>Acid rain in the United States</td>
<td>What can the US do to prevent acid rain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>Commercial fishing</td>
<td>Fishing regulations and New England</td>
<td>What impact do fishing regulations have on commercial fishing in New England?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Internet and China</td>
<td>How will China’s effort to censor the Internet affect its citizens?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>Diets</td>
<td>Vegetarianism</td>
<td>What nutritional benefits are there to vegetarianism?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is useful to explore variations of your topic idea to see how it could change slightly, be improved, or amended. Complete the areas for Topics 1, 2, and 3 below with variations of the same idea, or alternative ideas you are considering.

Broad Topic 1:
Narrowed a bit:
Narrowed even more:
Research question:

Broad Topic 2:
Narrowed a bit:
Narrowed even more:
Research question:

Broad Topic 3:
Narrowed a bit:
Narrowed even more:
Research question:
What type of question did you design?

- Comparison
- Cause and effect
- Measuring
- Process

Check to be sure that the research question meets these criteria:

- It is open-ended (cannot be answered with simple yes or no)
- It addresses an issue or controversy and/or solves a problem
- It is something that you can take a stand/position/perspectives on

Adapted from: