

TIPS FOR FORMULATING GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Creating a research question is a task that needs to be completed with thought and organization in order to ensure that your work is sound. It is not an easy task! Good research questions are formulated, explored, continuously revised, and rarely just stumbled upon. Start with what interests you and refine it until it works for your purpose(s). There is no recipe for the perfect question, but there can be bad research questions. The following tips highlight the features of good questions.

Relevant: There should be a clear purpose for your research. E.g., are you filling a gap in knowledge?

Interesting and opens up the inquiry: People in the field should find your focus interesting and it should provoke a response to the inquiry. It is also important that you find it interesting because this will be your motivation to continue work on it. Here are two cautions when considering your question:

1. Some questions are made out of convenience. E.g., the best question you can create when asked to fill out a research ethics form
2. Some questions are fads. Once the situation changes, you lose enthusiasm for the topic or subject matter.



Manageable in terms of research and your own abilities: You must be realistic about the scope and scale of your project. E.g., are you able to collect the documents that you need in order to answer your research question? Sometimes you may start and find out after that your study is not feasible. If this happens, it is necessary for you to document your challenges and reflect on lessons learned.

Original or builds on current knowledge: Your research question should show your imagination and ability to create and develop an unique approach that will be useful to the community. As well, a good research question can also build on current knowledge or understandings in a field of study.

Clear and straightforward: It is important that your question is clear and straightforward. A muddled question is likely to generate muddled data and equally muddled analysis. You may find that a clear and straightforward question becomes more complicated as you work through your study. Focusing on one key question with sub-components will guide you.

Consistent with the way you will be collecting information: Your question must allow for the collection of data that will work to answer your question. E.g., if you have decided to survey grade 1 parents about their children's transition from full day kindergarten to grade 1, ensure you have access to this group of parents.