

Developing a Good Research Question

Purpose: Writing a good research paper involves more than picking an interesting topic and reporting information on it. A research paper should attempt to answer a question or address a problem. To write a good research paper, you'll need to develop a good research question. Developing a research question is a process, and you will probably need to revise it before it will make for a high quality research paper. Writing down short answers to the questions in this guide will help you through the process of developing and revising a research question.

Instructions: Write down short responses in the boxes below.

1. *What is your topic?* Write down your topic in the box below. If you do not yet have a topic or are having trouble selecting one, consider using the guide entitled "Picking a topic: What interests you?" first. You may need to check with your instructor to make sure the topic you choose is appropriate for your assignment.

Example: Video games

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2. *What do you want to know?* Write down several questions about your topic that you would like to know the answer to. *Examples: Do video games cause violence? Can video games improve academic performance?*

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3. *Select and evaluate your question.* Of the questions you wrote down, select just one that your research paper will focus on. Write that question down in the box that says *initial question* in the grid on the next page. Then, move down the grid one row at a time. Use the text in the boxes on the left to guide you, and revise and rewrite your question in the boxes on the right as needed. After you have worked through the grid you should have a clear and focused question from which you can build a good research paper.

Write down your question in the box to the right.	<i>Initial question</i>
<p>Is your question <u>answerable</u>?</p> <p>Some questions are simply not answerable. A question like “What would ancient people think of modern technology” is interesting, but impossible to answer without just guessing. There needs to be enough available information to answer your question. If you think your question is not answerable, you should select a different question altogether.</p>	<i>Revision</i>
<p>Is your question a <u>multi-part</u> question?</p> <p>If so, narrow it down to just <u>one</u> question. For example, don’t ask “Do video games cause violence and lower grades in school?” Instead, pick just one: “Are players of violent video games prone to real-world violence?”</p>	<i>Revision</i>
<p>Is your question too <u>open-ended</u>?</p> <p>Avoid questions that could have many possible answers. For example, don’t ask “How will technology improve our lives in the future?” Ask something more specific, like “Does access to tablet computers improve performance among high school students?”</p>	<i>Revision</i>
Write your revised research question in the box to the right.	<i>Revised research question</i>

This guide is designed to help you to develop a research question that will make for an interesting and focused paper. However, developing a research question is a process, and you may find that you need to revise your question further or change directions as you do more research. You can always return to this guide to make sure any changes you make to your question will keep you on track for a high quality research paper.