

Rough Draft of the Research Question

A good research question is the central element of a well-written paper. It's a strong question that you can support with **evidence** or "grounds." You are likely to offer **warrants**, those general principles that explain why you think your evidence is relevant to your research question (and perhaps why your readers should believe you and change their way of thinking), and **qualifications** that will make your question and supporting evidence more detailed and precise. This is an opportunity for you to make connections between published research on your topic and what you think. While this may seem difficult at times, it is something that you will do very, very often throughout your college career.

A research question is not simplistic. Your research question must be contestable in some way or you cannot proceed until it is. Your research question must lead your readers to *think* (because they've never before thought about your claim) or *rethink* (because they have long thought about your claim in a different way). Your research question is the product of your own critical thinking after you have done some preliminary research and/or background reading. To assume at this point, in other words, that your research question is already complete, is to endanger your EE.

A. Writing Purposeful Questions

Step 1. Name your topic. Describe your work in one sentence. Use adjectives to describe your nouns.

I am learning about (or reading about, or studying) _____.

Example: I am studying public funding for the arts.

Step 2. Suggest a question. Try to describe your research by developing a question that specifies something about your topic.

I am studying _____ because (in order to) I want to find out (who, what, when, where, whether, why, or how) _____.

Example: I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to know if all socio-economic classes have equal access to the arts.

Direct Question: Are the arts equally accessible to all socio-economic classes?

Step 3. Add a rationale. Take your questioning one step further by adding a second question aimed at determining your rationale.

I am studying _____ because I want to find out _____ in order to understand (how, why, to what extent or whether) _____.

Example: I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out to what extent the arts are accessible to the working poor so I can determine whether our tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status. (Note the rephrasing of the purpose stem "if" to "to what extent.")

Direct Question: To what extent are state and federal tax dollars used to support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status?

Step 4. Repeat the process. Now, repeat steps 1-3 as often as it takes for you to write enough detail to believe in what you are researching, know what you want to find out, and understand your reason for undertaking your research. Oh—and in between your attempts to work through these steps—have someone read your answers. This will force you to stay on track and keep working.

****When you can adequately state the “because I want to find out _____” portion of your topic, you have determined your reason/purpose for studying and writing about it.****

Be aware that this is a critical yet difficult step in the research process. You cannot write a full statement of purpose/rationale until you have gathered and read some solid information on your topic. Once you have done so, you’ll almost be ready to write your research question. If you struggle, this is okay, but give it your best shot, and take it to your supervisor.

Work Space: Practice writing your questions here. Keep trying. Writing a strong, focused research question is an integral part of your extended essay research: _____

B. Is My Research Question Manageable?

1. It is extremely important that your proposed question aligns with your background reading. Even a great EE question can go unanswered or create tons of extra work if you stray from your reading now. Examine the kinds of information you have gathered in background reading—pay attention to your notes or highlighted passages in articles and reference materials. Does it look like I have enough evidence to support my research question? Or, if not, are you fairly comfortable from your background reading that you will be able to find enough evidence to support your research question if you continue to research?
2. If I have more than one question as a possibly, which question—based on my background reading—do I have enough evidence to support?
3. Evaluate your research question. Which of the following successful EE approaches does your research question employ? Circle Yes/No for each.

Your Extended Essay question allows you to...

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|--------|---|
| YES/NO | Define a problem and state your opinion about it |
| YES/NO | Discuss the current state of an issue or problem and suggest/predict how it can be resolved |
| YES/NO | Offer a possible solution to a problem |
| YES/NO | Offer a new perspective on an issue or problem |
| YES/NO | Theorize or propose how a situation should be changed or viewed differently |
| YES/NO | Compare or contrast (to some end or for some purpose!) |
| YES/NO | Offer ideas as to how something has been influenced to be the way that it is/was |

Example: To what extent do United States’ tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status?

Example: How does the political structure in certain African countries where there exists a highest prevalence of AIDS/HIV play a role in prevention and treatment of the disease?