

Getting Started Developing Research Questions

(Adapted from the Bedford Research Room)

Developing a research question is a critical component when writing a research essay because it aides in collecting, critically reading, and evaluating possible sources. There are five essential steps to perform once you have chosen your topic:

1. considering your readers' needs and interests
2. reflecting on your role as a writer
3. generating potential research questions
4. selecting a preliminary research question
5. refining that question

Each of these steps allow for critical analysis of the needs you and your audience may have.

Considering your readers' needs and interests

Brainstorming is a wonderful way to begin considering what the audience wants or needs to know about a topic. The following is a series of questions to consider when assessing the reader:

1. Why will my readers care about this issue?
2. What will my readers want or need to know about this issue?
3. What do my readers already know about this issue?
4. What do I want my readers to learn about the issue?
5. If I am trying to persuade my readers of something, how easily will they be persuaded?
6. What will my readers use my writing for?

Reflecting on your role as a writer

Considering different roles one might adopt as a writer—such as reporter, advocator, or interpreter—is important. The writing process is aided when you understand how the different roles support accomplishing the purpose. Below are five possible roles to adopt:

1. Advocate
2. Reporter
3. Interpreter
4. Inquirer
5. Entertainer

Note: These roles are not mutually exclusive—you might adopt one role or another at different points in a project.

Generating potential research questions

After thinking about the reader and determining an adoptable role, the next step in generating a research question is drafting possible research questions. A possible way of beginning this process is by using words such as *what, why, when, where, who, how, would, should, or could* as starting points for questions.

Selecting a preliminary research question

Choosing a question that best fulfills the purpose of the assignment along with meeting the needs and interests of the audience, and the adopted role plays a major role in developing a research essay. Consider all of these when selecting a research question.

Refining that question

After choosing a research question, the next step is to narrow the scope of the question by replacing vague words and phrases with ones that are more specific. Adding limitations to a question can also be a valuable refining tool.

Now it's time to test your research question

Conducting preliminary searches (with an online library catalog, a database, or the Web) using words and phrases found in or related to your research question can determine the quality of the research question. For example, if using Google results in nearly one million results for a question search word, it may be useful to be more specific to reduce the number of hits.

For more advice on drafting the actual research question, see the handout "[How to Write a Good Research Question.](#)"

Works Cited

Palmquist, Mike. "How to Develop a Research Question." *The Bedford Research Room*, Bedford/St. Martin's, <https://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/WebPub/English/rewritinglit/Research%20Guides/questions/develop.htm>

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