

GB6013

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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# WHAT IS A RESEARCH QUESTION?



A research question is the question around which you center your research.

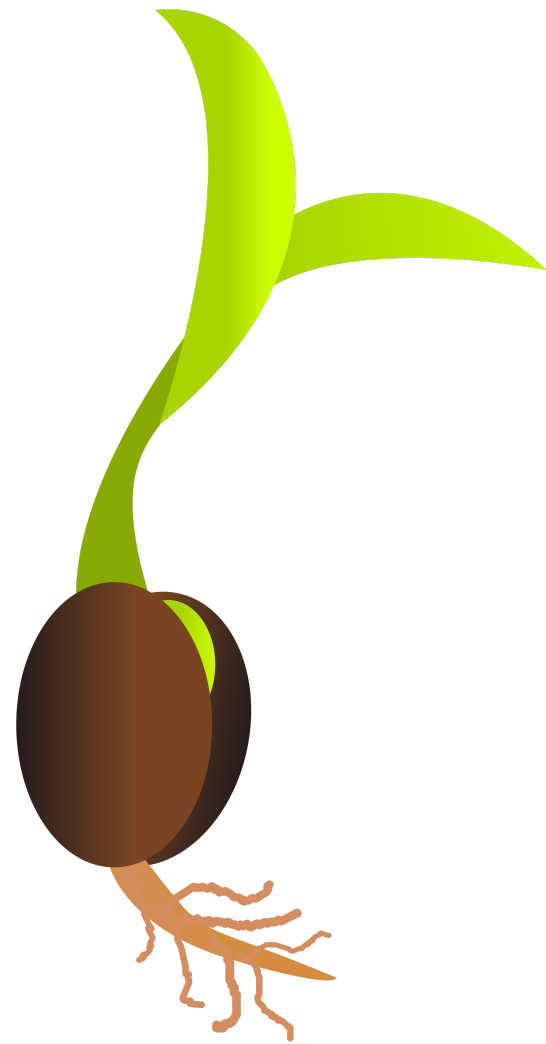
# RESEARCH QUESTION



The research question is one of the most important parts of your research project, thesis or dissertation.

Thus, it is important to spend some time assessing and refining your question before you get started.

# RESEARCH QUESTION



- The exact form of your question will depend on on the length of your project, the type of research, the topic, and the research problem.
- But all research questions should be **focused, specific, appropriately complex, and relevant to a social or scholarly issue.**

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS SHOULD BE:



- clear: it provides enough specifics that one's audience can easily understand its purpose without needing additional explanation.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS SHOULD BE:



- focused: it is narrow enough that it can be answered thoroughly in the space the writing task allows.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS SHOULD BE:



- concise: it is expressed in the fewest possible words.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS SHOULD BE:



- complex: it is not answerable with a simple “yes” or “no,” but rather requires synthesis and analysis of ideas and sources prior to composition of an answer.



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS SHOULD BE:



- arguable: its potential answers are open to debate rather than accepted facts.

# WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL?



- Research questions help writers focus their research by providing a path through the research and writing process. The specificity of a well-developed research question helps writers avoid the “all-about” paper and work toward supporting a specific, arguable thesis.

# WRITING YOUR RQS

- Choose a broad topic
- Do some preliminary reading to find out about topical debates and issues
- Narrow down a specific niche that you want to focus on
- Identify a practical or theoretical research problem that you will address

# WRITING YOUR RQS

- When you have a clearly-defined problem, you need to formulate one or more questions.
- Think about exactly what you want to know and how it will contribute to resolving the problem.

# RESEARCH PROBLEM

The teachers at school X do not have the skills to recognize or properly guide gifted children in the classroom.

# RESEARCH QUESTION

What practical techniques can teachers at school X use to better identify and guide gifted children?

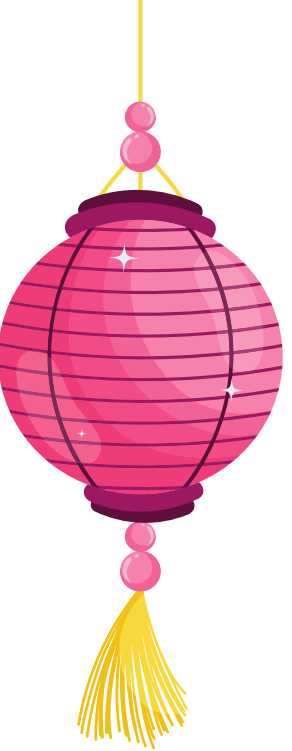
# TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Both qualitative and quantitative research require research questions.
- The kind of question you use depends on what you want to find out about and the type of research you want to do.
- It will shape your research design.

# TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION TYPE	FORMULATION
Descriptive research	What are the characteristics of X?
Comparative research	What are the differences and similarities between X and Y?
Correlational research	What is the relationship between variable X and variable Y?
Exploratory research	What are the main factors in X? What is the role of Y in Z?
Explanatory research	Does X have an effect on Y? What is the impact of Y on Z? What are the causes of X?
Action research	How can X be achieved? What are the most effective strategies to improve Y?

# EXAMPLE OF AN UNCLEAR RQ



"How should social networking sites address the harm they cause?"

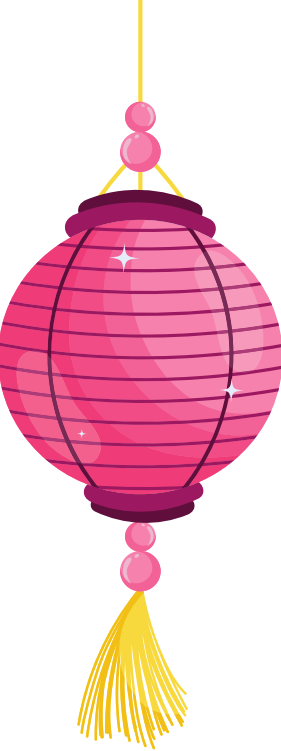
## WHY?

This question doesn't specify which social networking sites or suggest what kind of harm the sites might be causing. It also assumes that this "harm" is proven and/or accepted.



# EXAMPLE OF A CLEAR RQ

"What action should social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook take to protect users' personal information and privacy?"



## WHY?

It specifies sites (MySpace and Facebook), the type of potential harm (privacy issues), and who may be experiencing that harm (users). **A strong research question should never leave room for ambiguity or interpretation.**

# EXAMPLE OF UNFOCUSED RQ



"What is the effect on the environment from global warming?"

## WHY?

It is so broad that it couldn't be adequately answered in a book-length piece, let alone a standard college-level paper.

# EXAMPLE OF A FOCUSED RQ

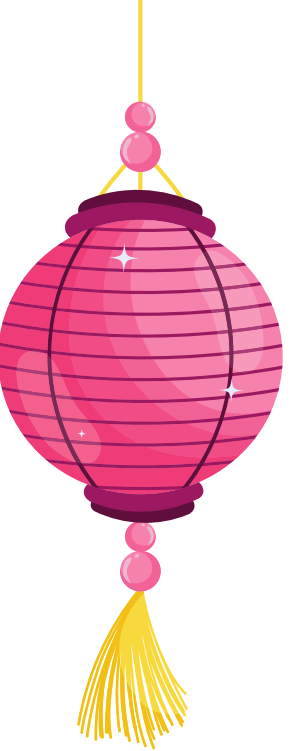


"What is the most significant effect of glacial melting on the lives of penguins in Antarctica?"

## WHY?

It narrows down to a specific effect of global warming (glacial melting), a specific place (Antarctica), and a specific animal that is affected (penguins). It also requires the writer to take a stance on which effect has the greatest impact on the affected animal. **When in doubt, make a research question as narrow and focused as possible.**

# EXAMPLE OF A TOO SIMPLE RQ



"How are doctors addressing diabetes in the U.S.?"

## WHY?

The simple version of this question can be looked up online and answered in a few factual sentences; it leaves no room for analysis.

# EXAMPLE OF AN APPROPRIATELY COMPLEX RQ



"What main environmental, behavioral, and genetic factors predict whether Americans will develop diabetes, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease?"

## WHY?

The more complex version is written in two parts; it is thought provoking and requires both significant investigation and evaluation from the writer