



Beginning Your Inquiry

Choosing Your Question

Good research starts with good questions.

Characteristics of a good Question

1) Appropriate in Scope

Avoid broad or undefined questions by including specific people, places, and situations. Avoid narrow subjects by creating questions that cannot be answered with only one piece of evidence.

Example

Not specific enough:

What is the role of Christianity in American politics?

Revised:

What role does Christianity play in shaping current U.S. government policy-regulating women's healthcare, despite the separation between church and state?

2) Controversial

If the answer to your question is obvious, it will be hard to create an interesting essay. Create a controversial or challenging question and you will be guaranteed more engaging research and an interesting thesis sentence.

Example

Not controversial enough:

After the events of 9/11, did the role of racial profiling in U.S. immigration policy change and, if so, how?

Revised:

Is racial profiling a necessary component for immigration policies that ensure the security of U.S. citizens?

3) Interesting to You!

Choose a question that intrigues you. Research will be much more interesting if you care about the answer to your question. The answer to your research question should have some important implications that you'd like your readers to know about. Think about why your research is important, and make sure you're doing all this work for the right reasons.

Create a Preliminary Outline

Step One: Now that you have a question, generate a list of questions that would have to be answered in order to fully answer your question. Think of as many questions as you can.

Step Two: Evaluate your questions and identify where sections may be emerging. Choose three or four main trunk questions, these will serve as sections for which you can then classify the remaining questions under.

Step Three: Create an outline for which to use while you research. This can be done as a mind map, as a tree, or in any way that will make sense to you.



Research and Note Taking

Research: When conducting research, you look for information that will answer your leading question and support your thesis statement. This information becomes an important component of your essay because you must use it as evidence to support your assertions or topic sentences. Without supporting evidence, your reader will not believe your ideas.

Effective Note Taking: It is vital to take effective notes. They give you a complete record of the information you found and can begin the process of original interpretation. Here is a two-part strategy for effective note taking:

Separate your page into two areas for recording information or use both sides of a notecard.

Part One: Evidence

In the first space:

Record the Evidence

You must make an effort to record the evidence accurately and include complete bibliographic information. Otherwise, you're in danger of misrepresenting the original author or committing plagiarism. Make sure to record the following:

- 1) The book's title, author, and publication information. (You must record the book's complete bibliographic information at least once.)
- 2) One piece of information you find pertinent to your thesis or leading question. (Make sure to put all of the author's original words in quotes.)
- 3) The specific page number for the information you recorded.

Part Two: Interpretation

In the second space:

Record Your Interpretation of the Evidence

All information is open to interpretation. Immediately recording your perspective on the evidence will make you much more prepared to write your essay. Record your interpretation of the evidence by writing down your answer to one or more of the following questions:

- 1) What is this information's connection to my thesis or leading question?
- 2) Does this idea support or contradict my thesis?
- 3) How does this information support or contradict other evidence I have gathered?
- 4) How might the author's bias be slanting this information?
- 5) Does this evidence give me new ideas about my subject?
- 6) What is the greater significance of this piece of evidence?

Note: When using this method of taking notes, you will produce one piece of evidence per page or notecard. This allows the separate pages/cards of evidence to be organized or rearranged in order to help during the outlining process.