



# How to:

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# Develop Research Questions

# Important notice



At the end of this presentation there is a link to a Microsoft Forms quiz. It is recommended that you score 80% or higher.

Please take your time viewing and studying this material before you proceed with the quiz.

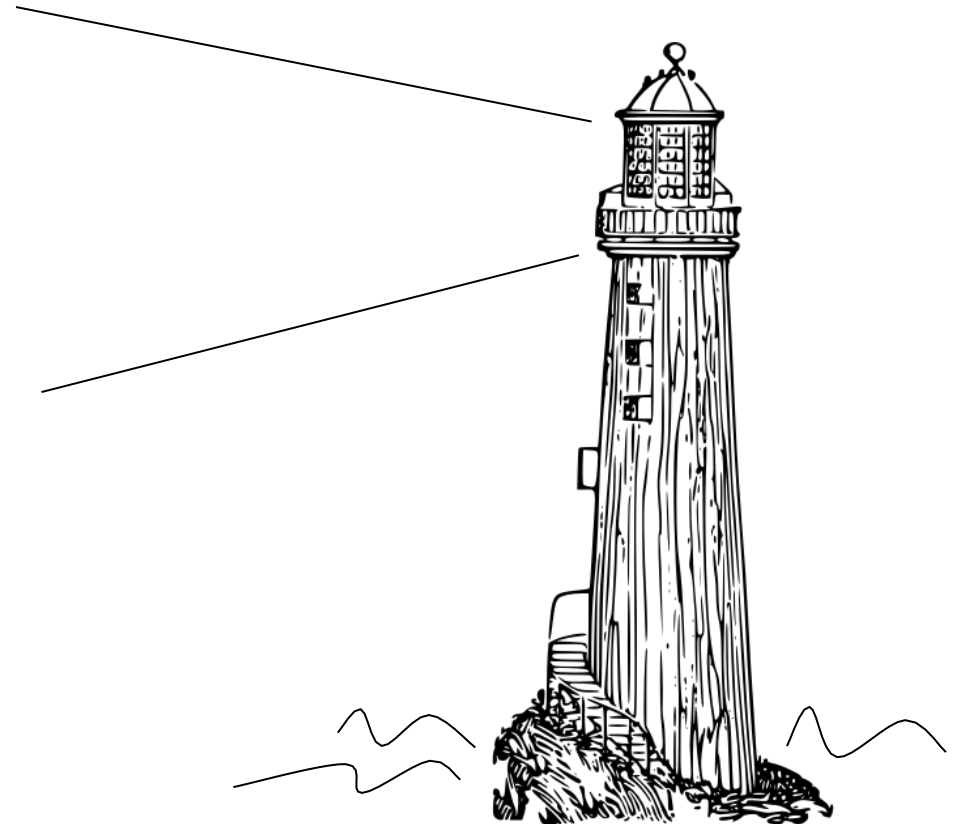
# Objectives

After studying this module, students will:

- Understand how to develop a research question.
- Comprehend the importance of developing effective research questions.
- Familiarize themselves with the steps to develop research questions.
- Know which steps follow in the research process after developing their research questions.

# What is a Research Question?

A research question is the question around which you **center your research**. It guides your analysis and arguments about a particular subject.



# A research question is:

*Based on the  
information of The  
Writing Center at  
George Mason  
University*

- **Arguable:** It should not yield a simple “yes” or “no” answer. In order to answer the question fully, it must include a **deep analysis and synthesis of sources** before any conclusion can be made on the topic. This means that the question should encourage discussion.
- **Focused:** The scope of the question should equal the amount of time given to conduct your research. **Avoid subjects that are too broad.**
- **Clear:** The **audience** or reader should be considered when formulating your research question. This will determine the amount of information needed to clearly state your idea.
- **Concise:** Be **brief and to the point**. Most research questions are created with one or two proper nouns (the key concepts you will evaluate in your sentence) and a verb (that communicates how you will analyze your key concepts).

# Examples of research questions



## **Unclear, too broad and unfocused**

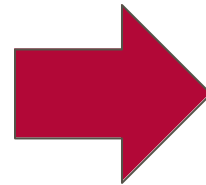
How do some plays of William Shakespeare touch the problems of colonialism?

- Although you have chosen a topic, it is unclear which plays the writer will analyze and the specific issues of colonialism.

## **Oversimplification**

What is the main problem in the novel *Texaco* by Patrick Chamoiseau?

- A novel usually contains more than one problem in the storyline. Due to the complexity of the genre, this question is too simple to base a research question.

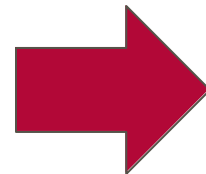


## **Correction**

How does *The Tempest* through the character of Caliban approach the subject of slavery during colonialism?

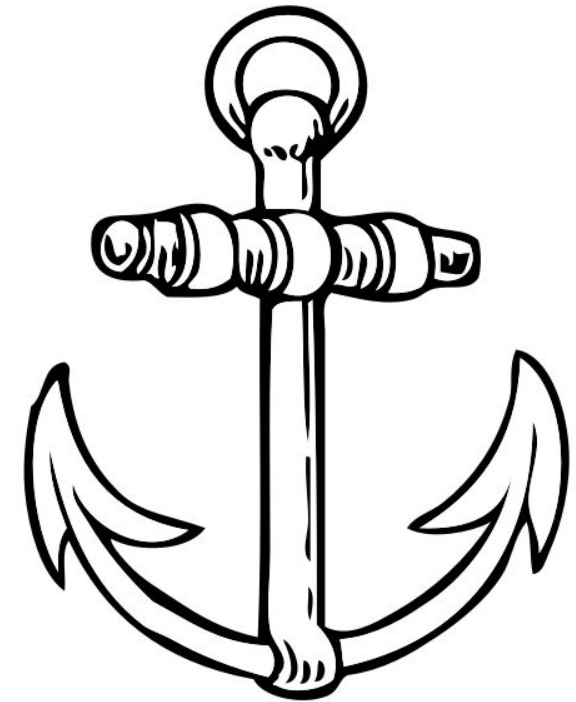
## **Correction**

In *Texaco*, what is the relation of language and social class in the novel?



# Why are research questions essential for the research process?

Every research project **starts** with a question, or an assumption which can be rephrased as a question. A research question is, then, a **guide** used to focus the research process. It **organizes** your research process by determining the design and methodology of your project. It also helps create valuable research by helping **avoid generalized and superficial research.**



# Steps to Developing a Research Question:

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# Step 1: Choose a General Research Topic

To create a research question, first you have to choose a general topic to examine.

For your research to be successful, the topic should have the following qualities:

- **Genuine interest:** The topic should captivate your interest and make you feel encouraged to read more about it.
- **Relevancy:** It should be appropriate for the task assigned by your instructor.
- **Significant:** It should contribute to the field related to the topic.

# Step 2: Find Background Information

In order to find a focal point for your research, it is necessary to refine and limit your topic to a more manageable size. Investigations are about **specific subjects**.

“Refining your topic can be difficult if you are not deeply familiar with your general area of interest. In order to help you focus your topic, it is important that you gather background information early on in your research.”

*From University of Lethbridge's Library "Plan Your Research: Developing a Research Question"*

The purpose of gathering background information is:

- Contextualization and overview of the topic.
- Be aware of key issues and controversies.
- Comprehend the role of the topic in the related fields.
- Become familiarized with specialized vocabulary that is pertinent to the topic.

# Step 3: Narrowing Down your Topic

Selecting a **niche** or identifying a specific issue within a broader subject will help make your work be feasible in the time given to carry out your research.

Remember: a research question determines the **scope of your project**. Usually, for shorter projects only one research question is developed (for example: an essay or paper for a class); while more than one research question is asked for longer projects (like, a *tesina* or undergraduate dissertation).

Here are some tips for narrowing down your topic:

- **Identify specific issues and key debates** that exist within the broader topic.
- **Focus on a particular** period of time, a particular geographical location, or a particular demographic.
- **Reflect on your opinion** about the topic: What do you want to say in your paper about a certain issue?

# Step 4: Formulating your Question

The way you formulate your question will determine the **type of research** you are going to do. And the way you ask questions depends on the field of study chosen to analyze your topic. In other words, your research questions will depend on the course you are taking or your major.

Here are some common research types:

**Comparative research:** Discovers similarities and differences between two or more subjects.

**Correlational research:** Identifies and describes relationships between subjects.

**Descriptive research:** Focuses on explaining a particular issue, phenomenon, or event.

You could come up with many research ideas through different ways of formulating a research question.

# Step 5: Writing your Research Question

When writing your research question it is important to include the following elements:

- **Main research subject(s)**: the proper noun(s) of the subjects you will study.
- **Key concept(s)**: any term(s) that you use to analyze your subjects which are specific to a certain field of knowledge.
- **Context information**: any relevant contextual information that narrows down your topic, like time periods, geographical location, or particular population.

# After the Research Question:

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# Outlining your Research: Proposals & Drafts

After deciding on your research question, it is time to put it to the test. You will have to do a **trial** of your research, in other words, practice the development of your work.

If you did not do the background information steps, it is **highly recommended** to do this to obtain sources to defend your arguments.

To achieve this, the following steps are necessary:

1. **Create various outlines:** For every source, do small outlines of the main ideas. On the side, write down the important details that pertain to your research question. Afterwards, on a new paper join all information recollected in this process and see how they all connect to one another.
2. **Start a proposal:** Proposals are a great way to start the structure of your paper. It forces the writer to analyze and assess the relevancy of not only each source, but the ideas and plans one may have for the research. The outlines made in the last step will help you with the information required for this step.
3. **Repeat the process until a proposal is completed and research is the upcoming step.**

# Seek Advice

The selection of an advisor for your research is one of the most important choices you will have to make for this process. It doesn't matter if it is at the undergraduate or graduate level, having an instructor to guide you during your research will facilitate the process of the investigation. For example, they may help by:

- Provide relevant information to utilize for your investigation.
  - This includes sources or pointing out when you are heading in the wrong direction.
- Possible access to older sources.
- Reviewing your work as you are working on it.
- Provide a new point of view to the research.
- Serve as an expert or more involved person in the field.
  - Insight of the field.



# Research Question Checklist:

- Is my RQ something that I am curious about and that others might care about? Does it present an issue on which I can take a stand?
- Does my RQ contribute new information or a new perspective in my field/topic?
- Is my RQ too broad, too narrow, or OK?
- Is the investigation process doable within the time frame given for the assignment?
- What resources are available at my location?
- Is there data to support or contradict a position?
- Do I have the sources and the type of information that I need to answer my RQ (journals, books, internet resources, government documents, interviews with people)?

**The answer to a good research question is coinciding with the THESIS of your research paper!**

Keep in mind that:

- Research may not always be what was your hypothesis or prognosis, but these are signs of being open minded during the process, doing efficient work, and the nature of investigations.

# Other Helpful Material

The CDCL has other helpful material for research related work:

- Posters
  - **How to Brainstorm for a Research Topic**
- Infographics
  - **How to Check a Source's Reliability**
  - **The CRAAP TEST**
- Videos
  - **Basic Steps in the Research Process**
- Modules
  - **Proposal module**
  - **[Brainstorming and Outlining](#)**

# References:

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- Vanderbilt University. (2008, August 8). *Formulating your research question - Vanderbilt University*. Vanderbilt University. Retrieved December 4, 2021, from <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/wp-content/uploads/sites/164/2016/10/Formulating-Your-Research-Question.pdf>

After completing the module, click on the following link to take the quiz and send the report to your professor:

<https://forms.office.com/r/XFV7HnaQnz>

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<http://generales.uprrp.edu/competencias-linguisticas/>



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