

Practice Exercise: Writing Purposeful Questions

Step 1. Name your topic. Early in your research, 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 find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are members of the working poor.

Direct Question: How accessible are the arts to people who belong to the class of the working poor?

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, or whether) _____.

Example: I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are 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 stems.**)

Direct Question: To what extent do state and federal tax dollars 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.

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