

Formulating well-focused research questions: a practice exercise

Developing a narrow, focused research question is an integral part of your extended essay process. A research question will provide a path along which you will undertake the research and writing process.

Step 1. Choose your subject area _____

Which subject area is of most personal interest to you? Is there something you are especially curious about in one of your IB courses? Did your Personal Project (if you completed the MYP) spark an idea that can be researched?

Step 2. Choose a topic that interests you

Describe your work in one sentence.
I want to learn about _____.
Example: I want to learn about public funding for the arts.

Step 3. Suggest a question

Try to describe your research by developing a question that specifies something about your topic.

I am studying _____ because I want to find out (who, what, when, where, whether, why, or how) _____.

Ex. I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are on low incomes.

Direct question: To what extent are the arts accessible to people who belong to the class of the working poor?

Include a command term from your subject area to help form the research question.
Will you be able to argue a specific position? What are some possible issues or arguments?

Step 4. Evaluate your question

*Answer the questions: Are there a range of perspectives on this topic?
Does the research question allow for analysis, evaluation and the development of a reasoned argument?*

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 tax dollars support cultural enrichment

	for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status.
Step 5. Restate your question using a different command term.	<i>Asking the question in a different way might help you view your topic in a different way. How does analyzing... To what extent...</i>
Step 6. Review with your supervisor.	<i>Is your supervisor able to understand the nature of your research? Is it clear to your supervisor how and why your topic is relevant in your subject area?</i>
Step 7. Reflection	<i>If you can adequately respond to the “so what” question, you may be on your way to a clear and focused research question using your initial topic idea.</i> Do that here:
You must now start some preliminary reading around the issue or topic. Remember that you will most likely need to revise your research question once you start to undertake your research. In this sense your research question should always be considered provisional until you have enough research data to make a reasoned argument.	