

Brainstorm: Developing a research question—Competency: Research mechanics

When you begin a research project, you need to form a central topic that focuses your research methodology, and keeps your writing tight, supported, and in scope. This central topic will be the basis for the research question you develop. Think critically about the aspects of the topic that interest you, and how you can narrow the scope to form a concise and measurable research question. Ultimately, your research question should focus on something distinctive to add to the field of literature.

Tip

When you begin to form your research question, begin broadly and then start to add variables. Ask yourself *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* questions to build your research question.

For example, let's say we are interested in "corporate social responsibility." Some questions we can ask are:

- Who is (or isn't) practicing corporate social responsibility (CSR)?
- What is corporate social responsibility? What impact do CSR policies and actions have on businesses and their stakeholders?
- When did CSR start to become part of business practices? Is there a time period where CSR became prevalent?
- Where is CSR more heavily valued? Are there certain countries' whose companies are more likely to practice CSR?
- Why is CSR important (or not)? Why should companies care about CSR?

After answering these questions, consolidate what you want to research, and notice how much more specific your focus has become. Just be careful that your question does not become too narrow – you want to find the right balance. If you have trouble finding sources and/or data sources that address your research question, you can always adjust the research question to meet your needs.

Additional Resources

- Steps to get to a good research question <https://youtu.be/k4Lrx2eP444?t=112>
- Asking questions when brainstorming your research focus https://youtu.be/ZJHSxdNZV9U?list=PLTIC-wA0gcDj1OgDhYH_KTr4GP6yrNh0k&t=191
- Scroll to the black header "Choose a Topic" <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/honors-theses/>