

1. Why are open-ended questions so important?
 - They require a person to pause, think, and reflect.
 - Answers include personal feelings, opinions, or ideas about a subject.
 - The control of the conversation switches from the person asking the question to the person being asked the question. It begins an exchange between the caseworker and the family. If the control of the conversation stays with the caseworker, you are asking closed-ended questions.
2. Open-ended questions begin in very specific ways. Open-ended questions begin with the following words: why, how, what, describe, tell me about..., or what do you think about...
3. Use open-ended questions as follow ups for other questions. These follow ups can be asked after open or closed-ended questions.
 - Ask "why" and "how" to follow up and gain a more thorough answer after asking a closed-ended question.
 - When the participant has finished talking, ask an open-ended question that refers to what they just said, or is related to what they just said. This keeps the conversation flowing in an open and engaging way.
4. Wording is very important when asking open-ended questions, especially if you are looking for a certain type of answer.
 - Gauge the family's comfort level when asking questions. Be careful when asking questions that are very personal or require too much personal information early in the conversation.
 - A person who is uncomfortable answering open-ended questions either doesn't understand where you are going with it or doesn't want to answer. Explain why you are asking the question, re-phrase the question or save the question for another time.
 - Open-ended questions can result in long answers. If you would like to keep them brief or relevant, be specific when asking the question.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

Use open-ended questions as follow ups for other questions; can be asked after open or closed-ended questions.

1. How did you get involved in...?
2. What kind of challenges are you facing?
3. What's the most important priority to you? Why?
4. What could make this no longer a priority?
5. What other issues are important to you?
6. What would you like to see improved?
7. Who else is involved in this decision?
8. What do you see as the next steps?
9. How do you measure that?
10. What is your timeline for implementing this action?
11. What is it that you'd like to see accomplished?
12. What are your expectations?
13. How do you see this happening?
14. With whom have you had success in the past?
15. With whom have you had difficulties in the past?
16. Can you help me understand that a little better?
17. What concerns do you have?
18. What's changed since we last talked?
19. What other items should we discuss?
20. How did you reach this decision?

NARROWING A TOPIC AND DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION

Narrowing a Topic

You may not know right away what your research question is. Gather information on the broader topic to explore new possibilities and to help narrow your topic.

- **Choose an interesting topic.** If you're interested in your topic, chances are that others will be, too. Plus researching will be a lot more fun!
- **Gather background information.**
 - For a general overview, **reference sources** may be useful.
 - The database **OneSearch@IU** is also a good place to start narrowing your focus and finding resources (libraries.iub.edu/onsearch).
 - Ask yourself:
 - What subtopics relate to the broader topic?
 - What questions do these sources raise?
 - What do you find interesting about the topic?
- **Consider your audience.** Who would be interested in the issue?

Reference Sources

Reference sources are a great place to begin your research. They provide:

- a way to identify potential research topics.
- a starting point to gather information on your topic.
- an introduction to major works and key issues related to your topic.
- key authors in your area of research.

General Reference Sources

Dictionaries and encyclopedias provide general information about a variety of subjects. They also include definitions that may help you break down and better understand your topic. They are generally not cited, since they mainly give an overview of a topic.

From Topic to Research Question

After choosing a topic and gathering background information, add focus with a research question.

- **Explore questions.**
 - Ask open-ended "how" and "why" questions about your general topic.
 - Consider the "so what" of your topic. Why does this topic matter to you? Why should it matter to others?
 - Reflect on the questions you have considered. Identify one or two questions you find engaging and which could be explored further through research.
- **Determine and evaluate your research question.**
 - What aspect of the more general topic you will explore?
 - Is your research question clear?
 - Is your research question focused?
(Research questions must be specific enough to be well covered in the space available.)
 - Is your research question complex?
(Questions shouldn't have a simple yes/no answer and should require research and analysis.)
- **Hypothesize.** After you've come up with a question, consider the path your answer might take.
 - If you are making an argument, what will you say?
 - Why does your argument matter?
 - How might others challenge your argument?
 - What kind of sources will you need to support your argument?

Sample Research Questions

Clarity

Unclear: Why are social networking sites harmful?

Clear: How are online users experiencing or addressing privacy issues on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook?

Focused

Unfocused: What is the effect on the environment from global warming?

Focused: How is glacial melting affecting penguins in Antarctica?

Simple vs. Complex

Too simple: How are doctors addressing diabetes in the U.S.?

Appropriately complex: What are common traits of those suffering from diabetes in America, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease?