

Crafting the Right Research Question

A GUIDE FOR DISSERTATION STUDENTS



As a dissertation coach, I've had the pleasure of working with many students who navigate the exciting yet sometimes challenging process of developing a clear and focused research question.

A well-crafted research question is the heart of a successful dissertation, and getting it right can really set you on the path to success!



Why is a research question important?



Your research question is the central inquiry that drives your dissertation - it sets the tone for your entire project and influences everything from your literature review to your methodology, data collection, and analysis.

A clear research question helps you:

1. **Focus your research:** A well-defined question keeps you centered and helps you avoid unnecessary detours.
2. **Identify relevant literature:** Your research question acts like a compass for your literature review, pointing you toward relevant studies and theories.
3. **Design a suitable methodology:** Your question helps shape your research design, methods, and data collection strategies.
4. **Collect and analyze data:** A clear question guides you in determining the right data to collect and how to analyze it.

4 STEPS TO DEVELOP STRONG RESEARCH QUESTIONS



STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING AND REFLECTION

To kick things off, take some time to brainstorm and reflect on your interests and goals.

Ask yourself:

1. What topics truly excite you?
2. What problems or issues do you feel passionate about addressing?
3. What are your research goals and objectives?
4. What key concepts and theories are related to your topic?

Don't hesitate to write down your ideas - even if they feel a little vague at first.

This step is essential in generating potential research questions.

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STEP 2: CONDUCTING PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Next, dive into some preliminary research to deepen your understanding of your topic.

Read relevant literature, attend seminars, and chat with experts in the field.

This exploration will help you:

1. Identify gaps in existing research
2. Grasp the current state of knowledge on your topic
3. Get a sense of what has already been explored and what remains unknown

Take notes on key findings, debates, and controversies in your field.

This will help you refine your research question even further.

4 STEPS TO DEVELOP STRONG RESEARCH QUESTIONS



STEP 3: NARROWING DOWN YOUR OPTIONS

With a clearer understanding of your topic, it's time to start narrowing down your options.

Consider:

1. What specific aspect of the topic are you most interested in investigating?
2. What key variables or factors do you think are involved?
3. What are the potential outcomes or implications of your research?

Here are a few techniques to help you refine your question:

1. Mind mapping: Create a visual map of your ideas, connecting related concepts and keywords to see the bigger picture.
2. SWOT analysis: Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to your topic to gain a well-rounded perspective.
3. Concept mapping: Design a diagram that illustrates the relationships between key concepts and theories.

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STEP 4: CRAFTING YOUR RESEEEARCH QUESTION

With a clear direction, it's time to craft your research question!

Consider the following:

1. Specificity: Make sure your question is specific and focused.
2. Clarity: Ensure your question is easy to understand and free of ambiguity.
3. Relevance: Align your question with your research goals and objectives.
4. Feasibility: Make sure your question is doable within the scope of your dissertation.

To help you structure your research question, try using these formats:

1. What is the relationship between [variable 1] and [variable 2] in [context]?
2. How does [variable 1] affect [variable 2] in [context]?
3. What are the implications of [variable 1] on [variable 2] in [context]?

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID



1. Overly broad questions that can't be effectively answered within your dissertation's scope.
 2. Questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
 3. Questions that are too narrow and might limit your analysis.
 4. Biased or leading questions that presuppose certain outcomes.
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EVALUATE YOUR QUESTION



Assess your research question using the FINER framework:

1. Feasible: Can it be answered within your timeframe and resources?
 2. Interesting: Does it captivate you and potential readers?
 3. Novel: Does it contribute something new to the field?
 4. Ethical: Can it be researched ethically?
 5. Relevant: Is it significant to your field of study?
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Developing a research question is a crucial step in the dissertation process.

By following these steps, you'll be well on your way to crafting a clear and focused research question that will guide your dissertation journey.

Remember to stay flexible and open to refinement as you progress.

I'm here to support you every step of the way as your dissertation coach!

