

# How to Write a Research Question for 2025: Types, Steps, and Examples



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## A note from the author, Imed Bouchrika, PhD, career planning and academic research expert:

From conducting preliminary literature reviews to collecting data, every part of the research process relies on a research question. As an expert with more than 10 years of experience in academic research and writing, I know well that identifying a research question can be challenging even with [primary and secondary research](#) sources as the literature body continues to expand. Given this challenge, I have created this guide on how to create a good research question based on actual practices in the academe. Through this guide, I hope to impart knowledge that can help you in identifying a research question and also in creating a study that can significantly impact your field.

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## What is a Research Question?

A research question is a question that a study or research project, through its thesis statement, aims to answer. This question often addresses an issue or a problem, which, through analysis and interpretation of data, is answered in the study's conclusion. In most studies, the **research question** is written so that it outlines various aspects of the study, including the population and variables to be studied and the problem the study addresses.

As their name implies, a **research question** is often grounded on research. As a result, these questions are dynamic; this means researchers can change or refine the research question as they review related literature and develop a framework for the study. While many research projects will focus on a single research question, larger studies often use more than one research question.

### The Path to a Research Question: From Broad Topic to a Specific Question



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## Importance of the research question

The primary importance of developing a research question is that it narrows down a broad topic of interest into a specific area of study (Creswell, 2014). Research questions, along with hypotheses, also serve as a guiding framework for research. These questions also specifically reveal the boundaries of the study, setting its limits, and ensuring cohesion.

## Types of Research Questions

**Research questions** can be classified into different categories, depending on the type of research to be done. Knowing what type of research one wants to do—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies—can help in writing effective research questions.

Doody and Bailey (2016) suggest a number of common types of research questions, as outlined below.

### Quantitative research questions

Quantitative research questions are precise. These questions typically include the population to be studied, dependent and independent variables, and the research design to be used. They are usually framed and finalized at the start of the study (Berger, 2015).

Quantitative research questions also establish a link between the research question and the research design. Moreover, these questions are not answerable with “yes” or “no” responses. As a result, quantitative research questions don’t use words such as “is,” “are,” “do,” or “does.”

Quantitative research questions usually seek to understand particular social, familial, or educational experiences or processes that occur in a particular context and/or location (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). They can be further categorized into three types: descriptive, comparative, and relationship.

- Descriptive research questions aim to measure the responses of a study’s population to one or more variables or describe variables that the research will measure. These questions typically begin with “what”. Students aim for a what is research question to uncover particular processes.
- Comparative research questions aim to discover the differences between two or more groups for an outcome variable. These questions can be causal, as well. For instance, the researcher may compare a group where a certain variable is involved and another group where that variable is not present.
- Relationship research questions seek to explore and define trends and interactions between two or more variables. This research question design often includes both dependent and independent variables and use words such as “association” or “trends.”

### Qualitative research questions

Qualitative research questions may concern broad areas of research or more specific areas of study. Similar to quantitative research questions, qualitative research questions are linked to research design. Unlike their quantitative counterparts, though, qualitative research questions

research questions into a number of types, as listed below:

- Contextual research questions seek to describe the nature of what already exists.
- Descriptive research questions attempt to describe a phenomenon.
- Emancipatory research questions aim to produce knowledge that allows for engagement in social action, especially for the benefit of disadvantaged people.
- Evaluative research questions assess the effectiveness of existing methods or paradigms.
- Explanatory research questions seek to expound on a phenomenon or examine reasons for and associations between what exists.
- Exploratory research questions investigate little-known areas of a particular topic.
- Generative research questions aim to provide new ideas for the development of theories and actions.
- Ideological research questions are used in research that aims to advance specific ideologies of a position.

The following table illustrates the differences between quantitative and qualitative research questions.

## Mixed-methods studies

Mixed-methods studies typically require a set of both quantitative and qualitative research questions. Separate questions are appropriate when the mixed-methods study focuses on the significance and differences in quantitative and qualitative methods and not on the study's integrative component (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Researchers also have the option to develop a single mixed-methods research question. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), this suggests an integrative process or component between the study's quantitative and qualitative research methods.

## Steps to Developing a Good Research Question

Before learning [how to write a research paper](#), you must first learn how to create a research question. Based on the research question definition provided, formulate your query. If you are looking for criteria for a good research question, Stone (2002) says that a good research question should be relevant, decided, and meaningful. Creating a research question can be a tricky process, but there is a specific method you can follow to ease the process.

The following steps will guide you on how to formulate a research question:

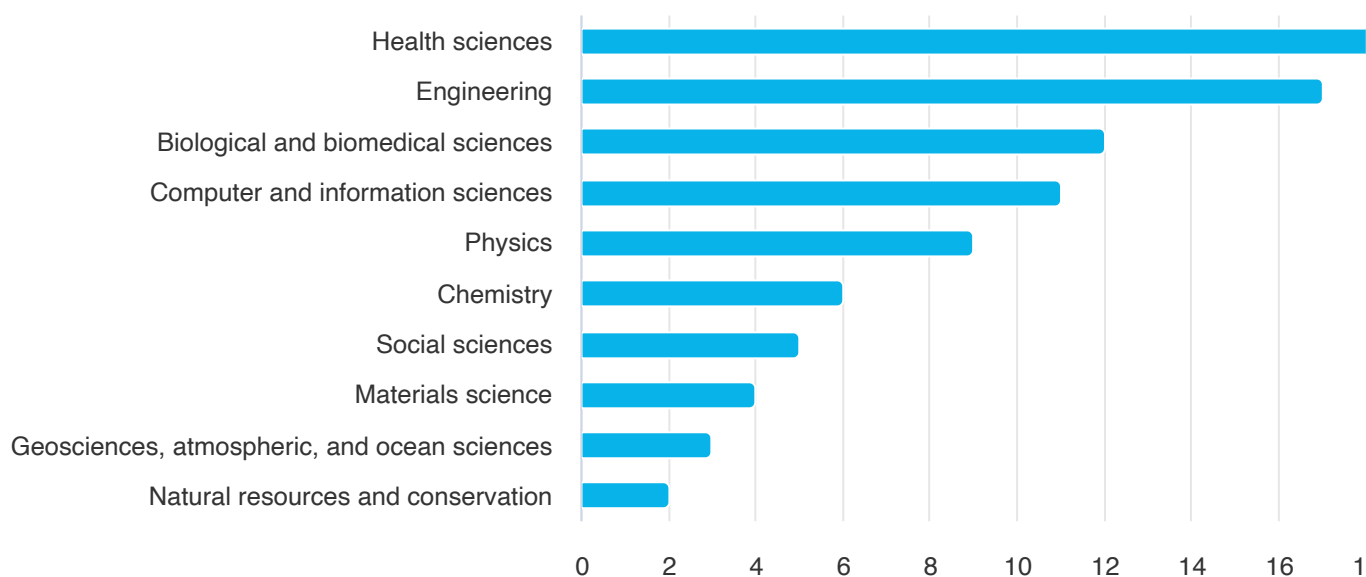
### 1. Start with a broad topic.

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techniques can organize your thoughts so you can identify connections and relevant themes within a broad topic.

When searching for a topic, it's wise to choose an area of study that you are genuinely interested in, since your interest in a topic will affect your motivation levels throughout your research. It's also wise to consider the interests being addressed recently by the research community, as this may affect your paper's chances of getting published.

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## 2. Do preliminary research to learn about topical issues.

Once you have picked a topic, you can start doing preliminary research. This initial stage of research accomplishes two goals. First, a preliminary review of related literature allows you to discover issues that are currently being discussed by scholars and fellow researchers. This way, you get up-to-date, relevant knowledge on your topic.

Second, a preliminary review of related literature allows you to spot existing gaps or limitations in existing knowledge of your topic. With a certain amount of fine-tuning, you can later use these gaps as the focus of your research question.

Moreover, according to Farrugia et al. (2010), certain institutions that provide grants encourage applicants to conduct a systematic review of available studies and evidence to see if a similar, recent study doesn't already exist, before applying for a grant.

## 3. Narrow down your topic and determine potential research questions.

identified limitations in literature and overlooked areas of study. Similarly, researchers can choose research questions that extend or complement the findings of existing literature.

Another way of identifying and constructing research questions: problematization (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). As a research question methodology, problematization aims to challenge and scrutinize assumptions that support others' and the researcher's theoretical position. This means constructing research questions that challenge your views or knowledge of the area of study.

Lipowski (2008), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of taking into consideration the researcher's personal experiences in the process of developing a research question. Researchers who are also practitioners, for instance, can reflect on problematic areas of their practice. Patterns and trends in practice may also provide new insights and potential research question examples.

## 4. Evaluate the soundness of your research question.

At this point, you should have a list of potential research questions to choose from. To narrow them down, you have to evaluate each potential option based on their soundness, which can mean a number of things. Aside from being clear or specific, a good research question will also need to be relevant. There are other factors to consider when choosing which research question to investigate. To create a better play-by-play, here are the most crucial characteristics of the research question that you are looking for according to Hulley et al. (2007) known as the "FINER" criteria to find out if you have a good research question. The FINER criteria are outlined below:

### **F Feasible**

A good research question is feasible, which means that the question is well within the researcher's ability to investigate. Researchers should be realistic about the scale of their research as well as their ability to collect data and complete the research with their skills and the resources available to them. It's also wise to have a contingency plan in place in case problems arise.

### **I Interesting**

The ideal research question is interesting not only to the researcher but also to their peers and community. This interest boosts the researcher's motivation to see the question answered. For instance, you can do research on [student housing trends](#) if it is right up your alley, as they do change often.

### **N Novel**

Your research question should be developed to bring new insights to the field of study you are investigating. The question may confirm or extend previous findings on the topic you are researching, for instance.

### **E Ethical**

This is one of the more important considerations of making a research question. Your research question and your subsequent study must be something that review boards and the appropriate authorities will approve.

### **R Relevant**

Aside from being interesting and novel, the research question should be relevant to the scientific

Considering research question importance, research questions should be structured properly to ensure clarity. Look for good research questions examples. There are a number of frameworks that you can use for properly constructing a research question. The two most commonly used frameworks are explained below.

PICOT framework

The PICOT research question framework was first introduced in 1995 by Richardson et al. Using the PICOT framework, research questions can be constructed to address important elements of the study, including the population to be studied, the expected outcomes, and the time it takes to achieve the outcome. With these elements, the framework is more commonly used in clinical research and evidence-based studies.

- P population, patients, or problem
- I intervention or indicator being studied
- C comparison group
- O outcome of interest
- T timeframe of the study

The sample research question below illustrates how to write research questions based on the PICOT framework and its elements:

PEO framework

Like the PICOT framework, the PEO framework is commonly used in clinical studies as well. However, this framework is more useful for qualitative research questions. This framework includes these elements:

- P population being studied
- E exposure to preexisting conditions
- O outcome of interest

Below is an example of research question in the PEO framework:

Paper section and topic	Description
1. Title and title page	Identify variables and theoretical issues under investigation and the relationship between them; Author note contains acknowledgment of special circumstances.



research, include genus and species Study method; Findings, including effect sizes and confidence intervals and/or statistical significance levels; Conclusions and the implications or applications

### 3. Introduction

The importance of the problem; Review of relevant scholarship; Specific hypotheses and objectives; How hypotheses and research design relate to one another

### 4. Method

#### Participant characteristics

Eligibility and exclusion criteria; Major demographic characteristics as well as important topic-specific characteristics.

#### Sampling procedures

Procedures for selecting participants; Settings and locations where data were collected; Agreements and payments made to participants; Institutional review board agreements, ethical standards met, safety monitoring

#### Sample size, power, and precision

Intended sample size; Actual sample size; How sample size was determined

#### Measures and covariates

Definitions of all primary and secondary measures and covariates; Methods used to collect data; Methods used to enhance the quality of measurements; Information on validated or ad hoc instruments created for individual studies



## 5. Results

Participant flow	Total number of participants; Flow of participants through each stage of the study
Recruitment	Dates defining the periods of recruitment and repeated measurements or follow-up
Statistics and data analysis	Information concerning problems with statistical assumptions and/or data distributions that could affect the validity of findings; Missing data, etc. Statistical software program, if specialized procedures were used Report any other analyses performed,
Ancillary analyses	Discussion of implications of ancillary analyses for statistical error rates.
6. Discussion	Statement of support or nonsupport for all original hypotheses; Similarities and differences between the results and work of others Interpretation of the results; Generalizability (external validity) of the findings; Discussion of implications for future research, program, or policy.

Other commonly used frameworks for research questions include the SPIDER (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type) and CLIP (Client group, Location of provided service, Improvement/Information/Innovation, Professionals) frameworks. Aside from helping researchers properly structure research questions, these frameworks also help refine research results and improve the focus of data analysis.

## Examples of Good and Bad Research Questions

The following [research question examples](#) can further guide researchers on properly constructing a research question.

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under 16?

The first research question is considered bad because of the vagueness of "social media" as a concept and the question's lack of specificity. A good research question should be specific and focused, and its answer should be discovered through data collection and analysis. You can also hone your ability to construct well-worded and specific research questions by [improving reading skills](#).

Example no. 2

**Bad:** Has there been an increase in childhood obesity in the US in the past 10 years?

**Good:** How have school intervention programs and parental education levels affected the rate of childhood obesity among 1st to 6th-grade students?

In the second example, the first research question is not ideal because it's too simple, and it's easily answerable by a "yes" or "no." The second research question is more complicated; to answer it, the researcher must collect data, perform in-depth data analysis, and form an argument that leads to further discussion.

## Common Pitfalls in Formulating Research Questions

When developing a research question, it's crucial to be aware of common pitfalls that can hinder the clarity and effectiveness of your inquiry. Recognizing these pitfalls can help ensure that your research question is robust and well-positioned to guide your study effectively.

- 1. Overly Broad Questions:** One of the most frequent mistakes is crafting a research question that is too broad or vague. Such questions can lead to unfocused research and make it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions. Aim for specificity by clearly defining the scope and parameters of your study.
- 2. Lack of Feasibility:** It's essential to ensure that your research question is feasible given your resources, time constraints, and access to data. Questions that are overly ambitious or complex may not be practical to investigate thoroughly.
- 3. Ambiguous Language:** Using vague or ambiguous terms can lead to misunderstandings about the intent and focus of your research. Strive for precision in your wording to enhance clarity and facilitate effective communication with your audience.
- 4. Neglecting Existing Literature:** Failing to review existing literature before formulating your research question can result in redundancy or the pursuit of questions that have already been adequately addressed. Conducting a thorough literature review is vital to identify gaps in knowledge and inform your research focus.

reconsidered.

## How Can You Validate Your Research Question Effectively?

To ensure your research question is both methodologically sound and practically applicable, begin by engaging in structured peer review sessions with subject-matter experts. Solicit targeted feedback to identify potential gaps in clarity and feasibility, and consider conducting limited pilot studies that provide preliminary data on possible challenges in data collection and analysis. Assess the question against established benchmark criteria and review frameworks to confirm its novelty and ethical viability. In addition, seek interdisciplinary consultations to refine complexity and scope, thereby cementing its relevance in evolving academic contexts. This rigorous validation process not only elevates the study's quality but also aligns research goals with career prospects, as seen in academic programs offering insights into [highest paying bachelor degrees](#).

## How to Align Research Questions with Study Objectives and Outcomes

### The Importance of Aligning Research Questions with Objectives and Outcomes

A well-constructed research question is not an isolated element of a study; it must be closely aligned with the study's objectives and anticipated outcomes. This alignment ensures that the research remains focused, coherent, and purposeful. Without such alignment, a study risks becoming disjointed or failing to produce actionable insights.

### Steps to Achieve Alignment

- 1. Define Clear Objectives** Start by establishing the primary purpose of your study. Objectives should clearly state what you aim to achieve through your research. For example:
- 2. Identify Measurable Outcomes** Outcomes refer to the specific results you expect to achieve through your study. These outcomes should correspond to your objectives and be measurable or observable. For instance:
- 3. Use a Framework for Consistency** Utilize established frameworks like FINER or PICOT to ensure your research questions align with objectives and outcomes. For instance:

### Examples of Alignment

#### Example 1: Misaligned Research Question

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**Problem:** The question focuses on perceptions rather than the direct impact of diet on performance, misaligning with the objective.

### Example 2: Aligned Research Question

- **Objective:** To assess the impact of diet on athletic performance.
- **Research Question:** How does adherence to a high-protein diet affect endurance levels in marathon runners?

**Solution:** This question directly addresses the objective, ensuring the study will produce relevant and actionable results.

## Why Alignment Matters

- **Clarity:** Ensures readers understand the purpose of your research.
- **Focus:** Keeps your study targeted and efficient, avoiding extraneous data collection.
- **Actionable Results:** Produces insights that directly address the research problem.

Aligning research questions with objectives and outcomes is not just a best practice; it is essential for producing high-quality, impactful research. By following these steps, you can ensure your study is coherent, meaningful, and capable of advancing knowledge in your field.

## Important Points to Keep in Mind in Creating a Research Question

Developing the right research question is a critical first step in the research process. The examples of research questions provided in this guide have illustrated what good research questions look like. The key points outlined below should help researchers in the pursuit:

- The development of a research question is an iterative process that involves continuously updating one's knowledge on the topic and refining ideas at all stages (Maxwell, 2013).
- Remain updated on current trends, state-of-the-art research studies, and technological advances in the field of study you are pursuing.
- Make the research question as specific and concise as possible to ensure clarity. Avoid using words or terms that don't add to the meaning of the research question.
- Aside from doing a literature review, seek the input of experts in the field, mentors, and colleagues. Such inputs can prove beneficial not only for the research question but also for creating the rest of the study.

## How Can Strong Research Question Formulation Propel Your Career?

Effective research question formulation sharpens critical thinking, enhances problem-solving skills, and demonstrates an ability to tackle complex issues—traits that are highly prized in professional environments. Employers in research-intensive roles, consulting, and even in business strategy value individuals who can systematically break down problems and develop innovative solutions. These skills can open doors to high-paying career opportunities, particularly for those holding advanced qualifications as seen in [4 year degrees that pay over 100k](#). Demonstrating proficiency in this area not only increases your effectiveness in academic and professional settings but also substantiates your potential for leadership and strategic impact in any industry.

## Strategies for Strengthening Research Question Formulation Skills

Improving your ability to design robust research questions requires both practice and adherence to best practices established in academic research. One effective strategy is to engage in systematic evaluation of how existing questions align with their intended study goals. By critically analyzing published research within your field, you can develop insights into constructing questions that are impactful and clearly defined. For example, assess how the nuances in language, specificity, and balance of scope influence the effectiveness of research questions.

Additionally, researchers can benefit from exploring structured academic programs that enhance research literacy and critical thinking skills. For students or professionals aiming to refine these competencies affordably, the [cheapest online EDD programs](#) provide excellent opportunities to gain expertise at a manageable cost. By immersing yourself in formal academic training, you can integrate advanced methodologies and align your research designs effectively with evolving scholarly standards.

Finally, consider building a habit of testing your questions against frameworks like FINER or PICOT immediately after formulation. This practice not only strengthens your research design but also ensures that your questions remain feasible, novel, and ethically sound. Integrating these strategies into your research process will reinforce your ability to contribute meaningfully to your academic or professional field.

## How Can Formal Education Enhance Your Research Question Formulation?

Formal academic programs offer structured environments that help researchers refine their inquiry skills, gain a deeper understanding of methodological frameworks, and learn advanced analytical techniques. Enrolling in [accredited online bachelor degree programs](#) can provide

## Can Technological Online Certifications Enhance Your Research Question Formulation?

Leveraging continuous online education can offer professionals updated methodologies and analytical techniques that complement formal academic training. Specialized digital courses and microcredentials provide researchers with innovative frameworks for refining complex research inquiries in rapidly evolving fields. Supplemental certifications focus on emerging trends, data literacy, and critical evaluation, empowering scholars to adapt their research methodologies to interdisciplinary advancements and technological innovations. Engaging with [accredited online certificate programs](#) can expand methodological expertise and ensure that research questions remain robust, innovative, and in line with current best practices.

## Can Technological Innovations Boost Your Research Question Formulation?

Recent advancements in digital research methodologies provide researchers with innovative tools to critically assess and refine their research questions. Emerging technologies such as data analytics platforms, automated literature review software, and collaborative digital workspaces enable a more efficient and comprehensive examination of existing literature while identifying novel research gaps. Additionally, integrating technical skill sets with traditional academic training enhances the ability to validate research questions through rigorous data-driven insights. Professionals seeking to combine practical technical expertise with academic rigor may benefit from exploring programs like [accelerated associates degree online](#), which offer an accelerated path to foundational skills in emerging fields.

## Do Peer Reviews and Mentorship Sessions Enhance Your Research Question Formulation?

Engaging with experienced mentors and peer review groups can refine your research question by providing objective feedback and highlighting nuances overlooked in solitary evaluations. Collaborating with skilled academics and industry practitioners offers fresh insights and practical validation, helping to align your inquiry with both theoretical frameworks and real-world applications. Furthermore, supplementing this guidance with targeted educational programs, such as the [fastest degree to get online](#), bridges the gap between academic theory and practical execution, enabling a more robust and actionable research approach.

## How Can Accredited Higher Education Institutions Bolster Your Research Question Formulation?

Enrolling in degree programs from leading institutions can provide scholars with extensive research support services, access to specialized academic libraries, and structured environments that foster rigorous inquiry. These resources enhance the overall research process by offering expert guidance, collaborative opportunities, and up-to-date methodologies that refine research questions effectively. Leveraging courses and support systems from the [best accredited non-](#)

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## Key Insights

- **Central Role of Research Questions:** A research question is foundational to the entire research process, guiding the scope, methodology, and analysis of a study.
- **Types of Research Questions:** Research questions can be categorized into quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods, each requiring different approaches and designs.
- **Quantitative Research Questions:** These are precise and structured, often exploring relationships, comparisons, or descriptions within a study.
- **Qualitative Research Questions:** These are flexible and exploratory, aiming to discover, explain, or describe phenomena.
- **Mixed-Methods Research Questions:** These incorporate both quantitative and qualitative elements, requiring comprehensive and integrative approaches.
- **Steps to Developing Research Questions:** The process involves starting with a broad topic, conducting preliminary research, narrowing down the topic, evaluating the soundness of potential questions, and properly constructing the final research question.
- **Criteria for Good Research Questions:** Good research questions should be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant (FINER criteria).
- **Frameworks for Constructing Research Questions:** Common frameworks include PICOT for quantitative research and PEO for qualitative research, helping to ensure clarity and focus.
- **Examples of Research Questions:** Clear examples illustrate the difference between poorly constructed and well-formulated research questions, highlighting the importance of specificity and focus.

## FAQ

### 1. What is a research question?

A research question is a query that a study aims to answer, often addressing an issue or problem. It outlines the study's focus, including the population, variables, and problem being investigated.

### 2. Why is developing a research question important?

Developing a research question is crucial because it narrows down a broad topic into a specific area of study. It also guides the research framework, methodology, and analysis, ensuring the study's cohesion and relevance.

### 3. What are the different types of research questions?



#### 4. How do you start developing a research question?

Start by choosing a broad topic of interest. Conduct preliminary research to learn about current issues and gaps in existing literature. Narrow down the topic to a specific area of study and identify potential research questions.

#### 5. What criteria should a good research question meet?

A good research question should be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant. This means it should be realistically investigable, engaging, provide new insights, be ethically sound, and pertinent to the field of study.

#### 6. How can frameworks help in constructing research questions?

Frameworks like PICOT for quantitative research and PEO for qualitative research help ensure that research questions are structured clearly and address essential elements such as population, intervention, and outcome, improving the study's focus and clarity.

#### 7. Can you provide examples of good and bad research questions?

Yes. A bad question might be vague or too simple, such as "How does social media affect people's behavior?" A good question is specific and focused, like "What effect does the daily use of YouTube have on the attention span of children aged under 16?"

#### 8. What are some common mistakes to avoid when framing research questions?

Avoid posing a question as an anticipated contribution or framing a question as a method. Ensure the question is clear, specific, and avoids terms that don't add meaningful context or clarity to the research focus.

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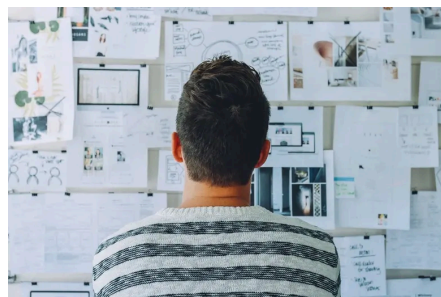
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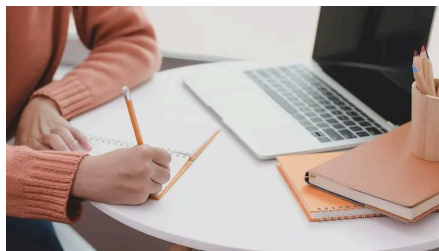
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