

The Research Question

What is 'the Research Question'?

A research question is a **clear and focused** question centered on a research topic. Research questions usually emerge when you start asking questions about the particular issue that you are interested in or curious about.

A research question helps to focus the research, providing a path through which you will undertake the research and writing process. A clear and well-focused research question, which has a specific aim, will allow you to work towards developing a reasoned argument within the scope of the task, rather than the kind of “all about” essay that an unfocused research question can lead to.

Can I change my Research Question?

Yes - sometimes it's necessary to change your RQ as you work through the essay. Perhaps your first RQ was not worded precisely enough, or you have uncovered material during the research phase which means you have been asking the wrong question. Changing your RQ can, in fact, be the sign of good research. A research question should always be considered provisional until you have enough research data to make a reasoned argument.

What is the difference between the Research Question, and the Title?

- **The title** is a clear, focused summative statement of the research which gives the reader an indication of the research topic.
- **The research question** indicates the specific topic of research and must be phrased as a question.

What does a good Research Question look like?

See the sample research questions below to get a sense of what a good RQ looks like.

The following table gives guidance on the difference between unclear and unfocused research questions and those that are appropriately clear and focused, lending themselves to in-depth research.

Unclear, unfocused and unarguable research questions	Clear, focused, narrow research questions lending themselves to in-depth research
What was the impact of Ho Chi Minh's allegiance to Lenin?	To what extent was nationalism the guiding factor in Ho Chi Minh's adoption of Leninism in 1920?
What is the history of Chinese theatre?	How does the legacy of Mei Lan Fang contribute to modern Jingju?
How important is chlorophyll to plant life?	What is the effect of different concentrations of kinetin on leaves aging and the biosynthesis of chlorophyll?
How can the US government's spending policy be reformed?	To what extent did the rising COE prices affect the demand for new and used cars by the consumer