

Creating Your Research Question or Statement

A well-written research question or statement clarifies exactly what your project is designed to do. It should have the following characteristics:

- The research *topic* is easily identifiable.
- The *purpose* of the research is clear.
- The question/statement is *focused*. The people who are listening to or reading the question/statement will know what you are going to be researching.

A good question requires thought and planning. Below are three examples of initial questions or statements and how they were improved.

Unacceptable Question/Statement	Why?	Acceptable Question/Statement
Is mathematics used in computer technology?	too general	What role has mathematics played in the development of computer animation?
Water is a shared resource.	too general	Homes, farms, ranches, and businesses east of the Rockies all use runoff water. When there is a shortage, that water must be shared.
Do driver's education programs help teenagers parallel park?	too specific, unless you are going to generate your own data	Do driver's education programs reduce the incidence of parking accidents?

Evaluating Your Research Question or Statement

You can use the following checklist to determine if your research question/statement is effective.

1. Does the question/statement clearly identify the main objective of the research? After you read the question/statement to a few classmates, can they tell you what you will be researching?
2. Are you confident that the question/statement will lead you to sufficient data to reach a conclusion?
3. Is the question/statement interesting? Does it make you want to learn more?
4. Is the topic you chose purely factual, or are you likely to encounter an issue, with different points of view?

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Writing a research question

Sarah chose the changes in population of the Western provinces and the territories over the last century as her topic. Below, she describes how she determined that her research question for this topic is effective.

Sarah's Question

My question is, "Which Western province or territory grew the fastest over the last century and why?" I will use 1900 to 2000 as the time period.

I evaluated my question using the research question checklist, and I feel that it is a good one. Here is why:

1. My question tells what I plan to do: I read my question to three friends, and they all described what I had in mind.
2. I am confident that there is a lot of data available on populations, and that there is a lot of historical information available on why the populations changed.
3. I'm really interested in history, but I don't know enough about how the West and North grew and why. I'll find out lots of new things. Whatever I find out should also interest some of my classmates, as it's about where we live.
4. I expect that I will find several different points of view on why populations grew, and I hope that I will be able to conclude which factors were most important.



Chinese immigrants and workers arrive at William Head Quarantine Station, British Columbia, in 1917. What factors affected where they chose to settle?



This photograph shows a potash mine in Saskatchewan. How do resources affect population growth?

Your Turn

- A. Write a research question for your topic.
- B. Use the checklist to evaluate your question. Adjust your question as needed.
- C. Make an appointment to discuss the pros and cons of your research question with your teacher. Be prepared to discuss your plan for collecting the data you will need to come to a conclusion. Adjust your question as needed.