# **How to Write Research Questions**

# **What is a research question?**

A research question is a clear, focused, concise, complex and arguable question around which you center your research. You should ask questions about an issue that you are genuinely curious about.

**Why is a research question essential to the research process?**

Research questions help writers focus their research by providing a path through the research and writing process. The specificity of a well-developed research question helps writers *avoid the “all-about”* paper and *work toward supporting a specific, arguable and testable hypothesis*.

**Steps to developing a research question:**

* ***Choose an interesting general topic***. Even directed academic research should focus on a topic in which the writer is at least somewhat personally invested. Writers should choose a broad topic about which they genuinely would like to know more.
* ***Do some preliminary research on your general topic.*** Do a few quick searches in current periodicals and journals on your topic to see what’s already been done and to help you narrow your focus. What questions does this early research raise?
* ***Consider your audience.*** For most papers, your audience will be academic, but always keep your audience in mind when narrowing your topic and developing your question. *Would that particular audience be interested in this question?*
* ***Start asking questions.*** Taking into consideration all of the above, start asking yourself open-ended “how” and “why” questions about your general topic.
* **Evaluate your questions**
  + - *Is your research question clear?*
    - *Is your research question focused?*
    - *Is your research question complex?*

\* Research questions should not be answerable with a simple “yes” or “no” or by easily-found facts. They should, instead, require both research and analysis on the part of the writer.

**Clear, Focused & Complex: Sample Questions**

A)

**Unclear:** *Why are social networking sites harmful?*

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

B)

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

***Focused:*** *How is glacial melting affecting penguins in Antarctica?*

C)

***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?*

*Adapted From:* [***http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=307***](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=307)