

Testing Your Research Question

The function of a research question is to:

- clarify the area of concern, help to organise the project and give it coherence
- identify the sort of information that needs to be collected and provide a framework for writing up the project
- guide the researcher on how to collect information and keep them focused and re-focused
- provide a framework for developing and writing up the project
- enable the reader to make judgements about the project.

But how can you test whether a research question is a good one or a bad one for you? The following points might help:

1. **Does your research question make sense?** This may not just be for your benefit but also for non-academics. Talk to your peers about your project and see if they understand what you are trying to find out.
2. **Is your research question clear?** Avoid any ambiguity as part of your research question. Look carefully at how the question has been framed.
3. **Are you sufficiently interested in eliciting the answers to your research question over the period of your dissertation and will this sustain your interest?** This is a very individual thing. You really need to be interested and connected to your area of research. In the early stages, if you have any doubts, then look for an alternative by undertaking some more reading.
4. **What was in your mind when you set the question and how will it support your C.V.?** A clear purpose of the research is to support your own personal development and also help you to show how you have specialised in an area while at university.
5. **What is the value of your research?** Are there any ostensible or tangible benefits from this process of research? What are its unique elements and what areas of knowledge would you expect to generate? Consider whether the area of research is worthy of your interest. Does it give you a buzz and excite you? Are you stimulated and motivated to complete your project?
6. **Is it possible to justify your research and, if so, how?** In other words, what contribution is your research making to knowledge in your chosen area? Consider the value that you are adding and why your question is important.

7. **Why are you carrying out this research?** Although very personal, it does help to analyse your own motives for undertaking the research. It is also important to realise from the early phases that the research is there to inform you and not you and your values the research!
8. **What fields or disciplines are your research grounded in?** You might want to think about how it relates to all that you have learnt beforehand as well as the areas that you have studied, so that you can make links. For example, it could relate to specific areas of child psychology and perhaps link these in a practical and questioning way to practices within an educational setting.
9. **How novel or original is your research?** This is very much the icing on the cake. What is different about your research? Is it novel, surprising, paradoxical and stimulating?
10. **Is the question capable of being answered within a reasonable timeframe?** From the outset you have to consider whether your research question is doable and within your powers. This means that you need to be realistic in being able to assess whether you can really answer or do justice to the question.