

DEVELOPING A LIST OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As you prepare to write a research paper, your professor may task you with developing a list of research questions based either on a predetermined subject or a subject of your choice. This resource aims to offer tips and guidance as you develop your list of research questions so that you can feel appropriately challenged and inspired during this stage of the writing/research process!

NOTE: While you will only pick one specific question around which to build your paper and develop your thesis statement, any other questions you create at this time can still be used later in the paper and give you direction for your research!

STEPS TO DEVELOPING A LIST OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **Assess the assignment** – Does your professor have any specific guidelines or instructions? i.e., Does he or she ask you to do research within a particular time period (past, present, or future) or career field (e.g., healthcare, business, government, education, etc.)?
2. **Choose your topic** – When choosing your topic,
 - a. **Ensure it fits within your professor’s specifications.**
 - b. **Ensure it can be researched (Empire State University, n.d.)** – If your professor provides some specifications but leaves the choice of topic to you, remember: this is a *research paper*, so you must only consider topics that you can research through the materials provided by the [Regent University library](#) or through [other scholarly sources](#).
 - c. **Consider your own knowledge of the topic (Empire State University, n.d.)** – What do you know and what do you *not* know about your subject? Assessing your subject in this way allows you to better determine the direction of your research; additionally, it gives you the opportunity to begin brainstorming questions.
3. **Spend some time writing down your list of questions** - As you completed the previous two steps, did any questions arise about your topic to which you would like answers? Write them down, and continue to brainstorm! Ask however many questions you would like - you can always narrow down your list if necessary later on.

TIP: Try asking some questions that begin with **Why, When, What, Who, and/or How**.

4. **Finally, from your list, choose a question that is “neither too broad nor too narrow” as your main research question (Empire State University, n.d.)** – This question should 1) succinctly encompass some of the others on your list, and 2) have a definitive answer (or answers) that can be derived from thorough research. It must also be “focused enough to research in some

depth” (Empire State University, n.d.). If necessary, you can combine several of your questions to craft your main research question.

EXAMPLE: DEVELOPING A LIST OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Assignment Prompt: You have spent the past week studying the different illnesses and maladies that can affect our pets, animals, and sometimes even ourselves. Parvo, ear mites, fleas, ringworm, and skin allergies are just a few of these ailments. Choose one to focus on in your research paper this week.

The student’s chosen topic: Ringworm.

What the student already knows about the topic:

- Many people identify ringworm by the bald spot it develops on an animal’s body (typically on the ear or face).
- Ringworm is highly contagious to humans and animals.
- Ringworm is not really a worm, but a type of fungus.

What the student does not know but would like to research:

- *What* initially causes ringworm if not a worm?
- *How* can someone best treat their pet that has ringworm?
- *When* can a pet owner tell that their animal has completely recovered from ringworm?
- *Why* can ringworm cause balding on an animal?
- *Who* is usually most affected by ringworm: dogs or cats?
- **The student’s main research question:** Based on an examination of the cause, effects, and symptoms of ringworm, what are the best ways to treat and prevent the infection?

NOTE that the student combines several of his questions to craft his main research question and that this question, while specific, is still general enough to encourage thorough research. As you develop your main question, ensure that the answer(s) are research-based and accurate!

PRACTICE NOW

Reference

Developing a research question. (n.d.). Empire State University, [https://www.sunyempire.edu/online-writing-support/resources/research/research-paper-steps/developing-questions/\(sunyempire.edu\)](https://www.sunyempire.edu/online-writing-support/resources/research/research-paper-steps/developing-questions/(sunyempire.edu)).