



Beginning Your Research

Topics and Leading Questions:

The first step in research is creating a leading question about the topic you would like to explore. Your question will direct your research. By viewing your research as an attempt to answer a specific question you will be able to conduct a clear and focused investigation. If you begin your research without a leading question, your research is in danger of lacking a central point.

Strategies for Finding a Leading Question:

After choosing a topic that interests you and fulfills program expectations, generate a list of possible leading questions by considering the following:

- What question/s do you already have about the topic?
- What are possible connections you could explore between your topic and other class themes?
- Is there already a debate over this topic that you could evaluate?
- What specific event or individual could you investigate in order to make conclusions about your topic?

Qualities of a Good Leading Question:

Good research starts with good questions. Here are three characteristics of a good question:

1) Appropriate in Scope

Avoid broad or undefined questions by including specific people, places, and situations. Avoid narrow subjects by creating questions that cannot be answered with only one piece of evidence.

Example

Not specific enough:

What is the role of Christianity in American politics?

Revised:

What role does Christianity play in shaping current U.S. government policy-regulating women's healthcare, despite the separation between church and state?



2) Controversial

If the answer to your question is obvious, it will be hard to create an interesting essay. Create a controversial or challenging question and you will be guaranteed more engaging research and an interesting thesis sentence.

Example

Not controversial enough:

After the events of 9/11, did the role of racial profiling in U.S. immigration policy change and, if so, how?

Revised:

Is racial profiling a necessary component for immigration policies that ensure the security of U.S. citizens?

3) Interesting to You!

Choose a question that intrigues you. Research will be much more interesting if you care about the answer to your question.

Note: Sometimes determining leading questions can be challenging because you are not yet knowledgeable about the subject. Do not be afraid to revise your question when you are more familiar with the topic. Often leading questions evolve as a result of discoveries during the research process. These changes are fine as long as you maintain focus for the direction of your research.