

# BEFORE WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER: START WITH A QUESTION

THE WRITING CENTER 2018

## BEGINNING THE WRITING PROCESS

The first stages of writing a research paper can be daunting. Before you start to research, it can be helpful to have a clearer grasp on your general topic and what facets of that topic you are going to explore. When drafting and revising your research paper, remember to be flexible and keep an open mind. Refining your topic as you research can help you find a question that is meaningful and interesting to you. If your topic interests you, you are more likely to produce an essay that will interest your reader.

### TQS: HOW TO IDENTIFY A WORTHY RESEARCH QUESTION

You can help yourself think about your project by describing it in a three-step sentence that states your TOPIC + QUESTION + SIGNIFICANCE (or TQS) TOPIC:

I am working on the topic of \_\_\_\_\_, QUESTION: because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_, SIGNIFICANCE: so that I can help others understand \_\_\_\_\_,

Don't worry if at first you cannot find a worthy significance for the third step. As you develop your answer, you'll find ways to explain why your question is worth asking.

## FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING A QUESTION

1. Try to connect your research with your personal interests - if you are curious and engaged with your research question, the process will be more gratifying.
2. Keep your topic manageable by focusing on a specific aspect of a broad topic that will allow you to be more in-depth in your analysis.
3. Identify the scholarly conversation: how does your work relate to other scholarship? How does your project differ or build on the work that others have done? Are you filling a gap in the literature?
4. Revise your research question throughout the process in order to create the most precise thesis possible in response to this question.

## HELPFUL HINTS

For more information on developing a research question, see Turabian pgs 30-34.

Your research question is the driving force behind your paper; not only does it help establish your topic, but it also serves as a guide for your research. Thus, the more clarity you have about your research question and goals, the easier the writing process will be.

Need additional writing help?

The Writing Center is open: Sunday-Thursday 7:00-11:00pm on the ground floor of the library.