

HOW DO I ... form research questions?

When researchers set out to investigate, they begin by determining what they would like to find out. When you research you will need to decide what will be:

1. the FOCUS QUESTION and
2. the SUBQUESTIONS and
3. the HYPOTHESIS

The Focus Question

is the **main subject, theme or topic** of your research.

- It must be specific
- It needs to be limited by time
- It needs to be limited by place

All this means you need to have some background knowledge, or have read generally about your research theme first before deciding on a focus question

EXAMPLE

***DROUGHTS** Not a good focus question - too broad*

***DROUGHTS IN THAILAND** Improving, but still too wide a theme to research*

***DROUGHTS IN NORTH EAST OF THAILAND** A more limited title. Workable, but could be improved.*

***THE 2004 DROUGHT IN NORTH EAST OF THAILAND** Title is quite specific. It will make research a lot easier as it narrows down the field by both time and place. It could in fact be made more specific by relating it to a particular group - eg. farmers, graziers, investors, etc.*

Subquestions

These often vary according to the major theme. Here are some examples of very generalised subquestions which you could find useful to begin with.

Handy words to start subquestions are:

WHO WHERE WHY HOW WHEN WHAT

TO WHAT EXTENT

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

WHO was involved/started this/was the cause of this?

WHAT were the changes/ problems /effects/ results?

WHAT were the short term/long term causes?

WHAT were the main events?

WHAT were the main/ some of the significant reasons for this?

HOW was this caused/did people organise themselves/rule/make laws/did this change take place/ did this affect other groups?

HOW do these people live/work/obtain food/did this change happen/event come about?

WHEN did this begin/take place/end?

WHY did this happen/people do this/change occur?

TO WHAT EXTENT was this a success/a failure/have an impact on people/government/economy/social structure/lifestyle/industry or other things?

HOW successful/effective/useful/important/significant was all this ?

WHAT were the long term effects/results/consequences of all this?

WHAT were the short term effects/results/consequences of all this?

WHAT were the overall term effects/results/consequences of all this?

Now to your Hypothesis!

Like your Research Question, your Hypothesis needs to be:

- specific
- limited by time
- limited by place

It also needs to be:

- an educated opinion based on fact
- able to be argued with supporting information

Your hypothesis may be one or two sentences in length.

EXAMPLES

DROUGHTS IN AUSTRALIA CAUSE HARDSHIP TO FARMERS *Not a good hypothesis - it is a fact, rather than an educated opinion and it is far too broad*

DROUGHTS IN THAILAND DURING THE 2000'S CAUSED HARDSHIP TO FARMERS *Improving, but still too wide a theme to research. Besides, it's still a fact rather than an educated opinion.*

THE HARDSHIP OF THE DROUGHTS IN THE 2000'S CAUSED NORTH EAST OF THAILAND FARMERS TO REASSESS THEIR SITUATION *A more limited title. Workable, but could be improved. "Their situation" could mean anything!*

THE HARDSHIP OF THE DROUGHTS IN THE 2000'S CAUSED MANY NORTH EAST OF THAILAND FARMERS TO REASSESS THE VIABILITY OF MONOCULTURAL AGRICULTURE. *Title is quite specific. It will make research a lot easier as it narrows down the field by both time and place. It has defined the viability of monocultural agriculture as the theme which has narrowed down your research even more. A reasonable hypothesis.*

HOW DO I

know what the question means?

INSTRUCTIONS

Most research statements or questions will contain a key word telling you what to do about the theme. Here are explanations for some of the instructions words you may come across.

ANALYSE Separate or break up a whole in order to examine the inter-relationship of ideas and themes

COMMENT Make critical comments - positive and negative

COMPARE Say what is alike, similar and what is different between two or more ideas, events, interpretations. Concentrate on what is alike.

CONTRAST. As above, but concentrate on what is different.

CRITICISE Consider the facts, discuss the strengths and the weaknesses then give your own judgement.

DEFINE Provide brief, clear meanings

DIAGRAM Present a drawing, plan, graph or a table in your answer. You are expected to label the diagram and to give a title (a brief explanation or description)

DISCUSS Present a point of view. This will need description and interpretation (saying why, how). You will need to support your opinion by carefully chosen evidence and or facts.

EVALUATE Present a judgement which is based on strengths and advantages and weaknesses and limitations. Say how important this is.

EXPLAIN Present the facts, focussing on the why and the how. Clearly tell the reasons, causes and effects. This instruction is asking you to show that you understand the issue and can think critically.

IDENTIFY Select the most important events, issues, ideas, features or characteristics.

ILLUSTRATE Explain - either in writing - or by presenting a picture or a diagram

INTERPRET Give your own considered judgement of the situation

LIST Present a set of items in a series or a table. This expects you to be concise.

OUTLINE A description which gives main points or essential details only. It omits minor details. Aim to present information in an organised way

RELATE Show relationships, connections, links or connections between things, ideas, events etc.

STATE Tell the main points briefly and clearly. Avoid detailed descriptions

SUMMARISE Provide the main points. Avoid detailed description

TRACE Describe the development or history of an event, idea, or a thing. Ensure your ideas are organised in order.