

How to Write a Research Question

Literature Review

In your future academic career, when developing a research question, it will be important for you to review scholarly literature on the topic of interest. This is referred to as a literature review which typically requires reading a significant number of studies and review articles. The purpose of a literature review is to understand what has already been done and to narrow your focus.

When conducting a literature review, you would consider the following:

- What topics have been covered?
- How have these topics been studied (i.e. research methodology)?
- What are the results of the studies?
- What are the limitations of the studies?
- What are the research gaps? What additional research is needed?
- What are the real-world applications of the study?

For the purpose of this assignment, you may want to review two or three articles to get a sense of the types of studies that have already been conducted. **However, since this is a draft research question, it is not necessary to conduct a literature review.**

Tips for Developing a Research Question

- Make sure the question is clear without the use of a lot of technical language. Consider your audience and write a question that can easily be understood without additional information.
- While the question should be simply stated in a concise manner, it should also be somewhat complex as opposed to something that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” response. Research questions require analytical processes that synthesize information and produce new knowledge.
- The question should be narrow enough to be answered within the context of the study you are developing. Some novice researchers write complex questions that cannot reasonably be answered in one study.
- Consider the extent to which your chosen topic will have real world applications and make a difference in the lives of others.
- Think about the nature of your research question. Is it a legitimate area of inquiry or are you studying the obvious?

Sample Research Questions

Qualitative Study

How do 15–16 year old students use scientific knowledge to justify their reasoning about human sexuality and relationships?

Reference

Lindahl, M. G., & Lundin, M. (2016). How do 15–16 year old students use scientific knowledge to justify their reasoning about human sexuality and relationships? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60(November), 121–130. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.009

Quantitative Study

Does exposure to scientific information on the origins of sexual orientation influence attitudes toward gay people and support for gay rights?

Reference

Suhay, E., & Garretson, J. (2018). Science, sexuality, and civil rights: Does information on the causes of sexual orientation change attitudes? *The Journal of Politics*, 80(2), 692–696. doi:10.1086/694896

There is no need to overthink this part of the assignment. It is understood that most undergraduate learners do not have extensive research experience. You can therefore develop a question based on the course materials for this assignment using some of the strategies outlined in this document.