

Learning Commons

Academic Writing Center - Graduate Students



Research Questions

Formulating a Research Question

What's the big deal with a research question?

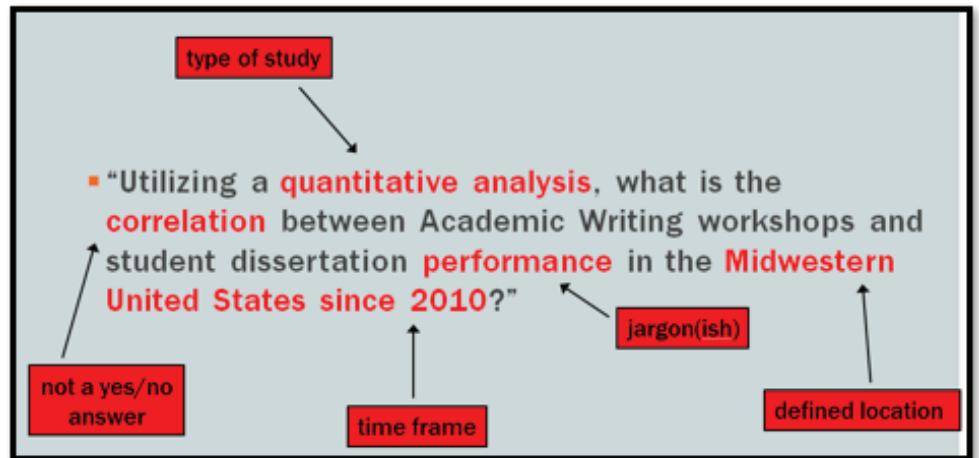
Developing and articulating a research question early in the dissertation writing process is important because it helps guide your research and writing for the duration of your project. A central question, or series of questions, also helps keep you focused on the most important aspects of your work and leads into your hypothesis.

Some questions to help figure out your Question

What is currently being researched in your field? Is there something missing in the research that has already been conducted? Can your work fill a gap in the research? Are there any studies you can improve? Will your research have an impact on your field? Will your research have implications beyond your field?

General helpful guidelines

The research question you ask should not have an intuitive answer; instead, it should be a question that can only be answered by your research. Similarly, in general, your question should not have a yes/no answer (or if it does, there should be follow-up questions about the implications of the yes/no result). Make sure you are specific – think of who/what/where/when/why as you frame your question. You also want to be sure you are doing something original and something you care about. Writing a dissertation is a long and challenging process; make sure you are really interested in finding the answer to your question.



Further Resources:

Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day by Joan Bolker
“Tips for Developing PhD Research Questions” by Holly Else in *Times Higher Education*
Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation by James E. Mauch, and Namgi Park.

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Last Revised: October 2018