**IB Extended Essay—Lesson #9: Formulating a Research Question**

In this lesson you will need to start thinking about your initial research question.

Don't worry at this point nothing is final. Just as you may make some modifications on your topic at the end of this lesson, at this stage you will also have a research question which will still need to be modified.

Research Question versus Title

The first thing to point out here is that these are not the same thing.

The title of your essay will be a clear, focused summative statement of your research, which gives the reader an indication of your research topic.

This will be one of the last things you finalise in your essay. You can think about it as you go along, but the exact wording rarely becomes clear until the very end.

The research question is what you focus on in terms of developing your essay.

## Understanding the Concept of a Research Question

The IB defines a research question as follows:

*A research question is a clear and focused question centred on a research topic. Research questions usually emerge when questions are asked about a particular issue that a student is interested in or curious about.*

*A research question helps to focus the research, providing a path through which students will undertake the research and writing process. A clear and well-focused research question, which has a specific aim, will allow a student to work towards developing a reasoned argument within the scope of the task, rather than the kind of “all about” essay that an unfocused research question can lead to.*

(Source: IB Extended Essay Guide website)

So it is the research question that will be at the forefront of what you do. By the end of the essay your aim is to have answered the research question.

Ultimately you will need to answer the four following questions about your research question:

* Is it clear?  Will the reader understand the nature of my research?  Will the research question direct the research being undertaken?
* Is it focused? Is the research question specific enough to allow for exploration within the scope of the task (4000 words)?
* Is it manageable?  Will I be able to manage this research within the time frame?
* Is it arguable?  Does the research question allow for analysis, evaluation and the development of a reasoned argument?

*(Source: IB Extended Essay Guide website)*

Your research question will often contain a **command term** from your subject area. Remember that some command terms may be more appropriate than others in the formulation of a research question. Below are a listing of some command terms:

Analyze Compare Compare and Contrast Contrast

Describe Discuss Evaluate Examine

Explain Explore Identify Justify

Outline To What Extent

# **Reflection: My Initial Research Question**

You now need to develop an initial research question. The following activity should help you in this process. Record your work here in the Journal activity or paste in the link to your shared document you created earlier.

**Step 1. State your research topic**

* Try to describe your research by developing a question that specifies something about your topic. Define what you are thinking of studying and why.
* **Topic statement:**I am studying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out (who, what, when, where, whether, why or how) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Example: I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are on low incomes.

**Step 2. Suggest a question**

* Now try to form a research question and include a command term from your subject area.
* Example research question: To what extent are the arts accessible to people who belong to the class of the working poor?

**Step 3. Evaluate your question**

Answer these questions.

* Will you be able to argue a specific position?
* What are some possible issues or arguments?
* Is there a range of perspectives on this topic?
* Does the research question allow for analysis, evaluation and the development of a reasoned argument?

Rewording in the following form might help.

* **Revised topic statement:** I am studying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in order to understand (how, why or whether) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Example: I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to the working poor so I can determine whether tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status.

**Step 4. Restate your question using a different command term**

* Asking the question in a different way might help you view your topic in a different way.
* Try different command terms and write down different versions.

**Step 5. Reflection**

* Does your research question allow you to adequately respond to the question “so what?” when applied to your research question? If so, it is probably open to analysis.
* Explain the ‘so what?’

Once you have gone through these various steps, you should have a good idea as to what your research question will be. Go ahead and place that in your Research Planning Sheet that can be found in Lesson #2. Make sure that this information is located in your EE Gdoc. Once you have completed this, email your supervisor for approval.

(Note: This assignment is not graded - it will just be reviewed by your supervisor.)