

Having a good topic may not be enough to start doing academic research. In order for your research to have a focus, you need to have a specific research question that guides what you do. Here are some steps you can take to shape your topic into a practical research question.

Narrow Your Topic

The first step is to narrow your topic. To do so, try to make your topic more “**dynamic**” and more “**specific**.”

To make your topic more “dynamic,” you should add words to it that indicate “actions” or “relationships.” To make the topic more “specific,” you should think about limiting the items in your topic to smaller parts of the same category. Consider this example:

Topic: “film industry” → more “**dynamic**” and more “**specific**” → Narrowed topic: “The effects of social media on Hollywood film industry”

As you see, a relationship has been established between the broader topic (film industry) and something else (social media), and therefore, the topic is now more “dynamic.” Also adding “Hollywood” to the topic has made it more “specific.”



Now try doing the same thing with your own topics:

Topic: _____

Narrowed down topic: _____

Topic: _____

Narrowed down topic: _____

Developing the Main Research Question

Even with a well-narrowed-down topic, you may not find it easy to write a good research paper. You need to turn that topic into a question. Your research paper will try to answer this question. Try these steps to turn your topic into a research question:



WH questions starting with “what,” “how,” and “why” will usually make better research questions. Pay attention to these examples:

Narrowed topic: “The effects of Social Media on Hollywood film industry”

Potential research question: “**What** are the effects of social media on Hollywood film industry?”

Note that the way you phrase your question determines how “original” and “significant” your papers topic would be. The above question will yield a more descriptive paper, in which you can discuss the effects of social media on Hollywood. However, you can play with the question’s phrasing and its level of specificity in order to write more argumentative papers.

Potential research question: “**Why** Hollywood film industry cannot compete with social media in ten years?”

Potential research question: “**How** can the effects of social media on Hollywood film industry be reversed?”



Now try doing the same thing with your own topics.

