

[What makes a Good Research Topic? \(Video\)](#)

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Summary

Writing a research question can be a very helpful exercise as you prepare to start your research. Writing research questions forces you to think carefully and clearly about what you want to learn. Plus, once written, a research question is useful for identifying keywords for your search. Here are a few tips:

Transcript

What makes a good topic for a paper?

Where do I find a good topic?

First, let's throw out the whole idea of the topic. The word topic really applies better to a report or a list of facts. What if you could create something that is actually interesting and meaningful to both your professor and yourself? What if you could learn something that you didn't know before? Let's replace the word topic with the word question or research question. This implies a quest for something. It's more than just a subject or a topic. It implies that you may or may not find a precise answer, that you are involved in an investigation, following the clues and weighing the evidence.

What makes a really good research question?

Let's start with a regular old question, and see if we can figure this out.

Do stricter gun control laws save lives? As far as I can tell, this question has only two possible answers, yes or no. You might be able to construct some pretty good arguments for one side or the other but there's still basically only two sides to this coin. Not a lot of active pursuit going on. So let's try again.

Why should the United States increase gun control? Well, this seems to be a little better, but I have a feeling you either already know the answer or have selected what you believe to be the best answer. Plus, what kind of evidence are you likely to find to answer this question? Let's try again.

How does the media influence attitudes towards guns and gun control?

This question does not have a yes or no answer. It's very open-ended and it does not try to lead me into an answer. I see possibilities here for investigating the nature of social media, peer pressure and the like, but there are still problems with this question.

When you say attitudes, what are you talking about? The attitudes of any person? Old people? Young people? All nationalities? What about the media? Do you mean newspapers? News channels? Twitter, Facebook, or Blogs? That's a lot of territories to cover in a single paper. What about this?

How does social media influence teenagers' attitudes toward gun control?

Personally, I feel more comfortable with this question and here are a few reasons why.

- a) It's not oversimplified. There is no yes or no answer.
 - b) I believe you can locate some evidence, social, psychological, statistical, that would help answer this question.
 - c) It's an interesting and relevant question that you might already be following in the news and on your social media channels.
- And d) this question is manageable.

I believe you can answer it within the confines of the assignment. Best of all, you might learn something new in the process and your investigation could have positive consequences.

Keep in mind, that in many cases, your research question will evolve as you do your research. Stay flexible and give yourself time to reevaluate your question as you go.

Finally, make sure your question fulfills the requirement of the assignment and always remember that you are engaged in research to find answers and not to reinforce opinions or ideas that you already have.