

Selecting refining a research question

1. Brainstorm to get ideas for a research topic

To get some ideas for a research topic, talk to some colleagues and do some reading and try to write down any words or phrases that may be of interest to you. Some of these words may lead.

Exercise:

Do brainstorming with a few of your fellow students and write down a few ideas for research you to your broad topic

2. Focus in on your topic

Your topic will usually be broad at the beginning but a broad topic will be difficult to research. If your topic is too broad, here are some ways of limiting it:

- Geographical region
- Population
- Age group
- Time

Exercise:

Identify three narrower aspects of the following broad topics i.e. what aspects of these areas you could investigate?

Environment

Smoking

Nutritional disorders

3. Make a list of useful keywords for your topic

Look for words that best describe your topic. You may find these word in published papers, books or hear them in discussions, seminars etc. Remember synonyms, broader, and narrower terms for each keyword.

Exercise:

Imagine that you have been assigned research on the following topics. Find 5 keywords you might use to look for information on each.

Air pollution

Obesity

Smoking

4. Define your topic as a focused research question

You will often begin with general topics or ideas of interest, and then limit it in some way by formulating to a research question and then refine this question.

- Ideas: Nutritional disorders
- Research Question: what is the prevalence of obesity?
- Refined research question: Does prevalence of obesity differ in males and females amongst primary school children in Sulaymaniyah?

Exercise:

Formulate a research question and refine on the following topics:

Air pollution

Smoking

5. Research and read more about your topic

Use the keywords from step three to research in the library and online databases. You will need to do some research and reading before you select your final question. Remember, selecting a topic is an important and complex part of the research process.

6. Formulate a hypothesis

Write your question as a hypothesis. This may be the answer to your research question and/or a way to clearly state the purpose of your research. Your hypothesis will usually be one or two sentences that states precisely what is to be answered about your topic.

Example of hypothesis: prevalence of obesity is more in male pupils than females.

The question was: Does prevalence of obesity differ in males and females amongst primary school children in Sulaymaniyah?

Exercise:

Write hypotheses for the following research questions.

How satisfied are medical students with their learning outcome?

What are the risk factors of obesity amongst primary school children?

How can stress affect achievement in examinations?