



Acknowledgments

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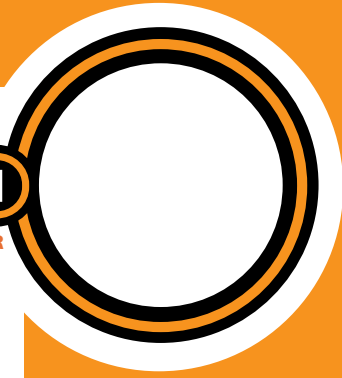
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YRN TOOLKIT



Stage 4:

Writing your research question

Key Words: Qualitative, Quantitative

What is a 'research question'?

1. A research question is the question that you as a young researcher really want to know the answer to. **It is the purpose of the investigation.**
2. The research question is exactly what you will try and answer with your research. A research question is what you will go on to investigate from your initial idea, topic or concern.
3. There are three different types of questions you can ask. These differ according to whether you want to **explore, describe** or **explain** something.

Exploratory

This type of question is about exploring the topic. Usually this will help people to have new insights, ask further questions, assess in a new light or raise awareness of something that might be happening.

For example, how do 13 to 16-year-old boys from Birmingham access youth provision?

(usually qualitative – can be quantitative).

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Descriptive

This type of question is about describing something. Answering this question will give you an accurate description or understanding of people, events, situations or experiences.

For example, what are the different types of youth provision on offer for 13 to 16-year-old boys in Birmingham?

(can be qualitative or quantitative).

Explanatory

This type of question is about trying to find an explanation for a situation or problem. Answering this type of question often helps people to decide what are important factors in making something happen, or have an understanding of causality.

For example, why do 13 to 16 year-old-boys perform better in single sex positive activities?

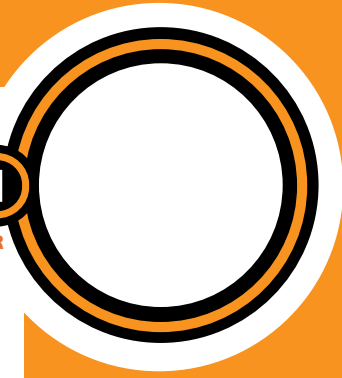
(can be qualitative or quantitative).

Why develop a research question?

Developing a good research question takes time and effort. However, a good research question will give you a well defined research project. This will help you to,

- narrow your focus;
- manage time;
- remain motivated; and
- achieve a carefully planned and evidenced investigation.





How to get started

1. Developing your research question will be helped by:

- **Knowing the area** (completing a literature review, see sheet 2).
- **Widening the base of your experience** (talk with other young people, youth workers and council officials).
- **Trying techniques for enhancing creativity and ideas** (for example group work).

2. Don't be tempted to be guided by a research method that you have used before! Your question should be formed by the evidence that you need to know rather than the way of gathering that evidence.

3. When deciding upon the question(s) you should not forget the purpose of your research. This might be to help campaign for organisational change (a youth club night at your school) or to make a contribution to some wider political effort (positive stories of young people in the media).

4. A good research question has two **key qualities**.

- **It is focused and defines the limits of the research**

So a research question should not be "what do young people want?" Which could go on and on and on ...

A more focused question might be "What facilities do young people from Nottingham want in their local area?"

- **It is answerable**

So a research question might be "What will young people be doing in ten years time?" This is not possible to answer, as no one can predict the future accurately. A more precise question could be, "What do young people **think** they will be doing in ten years time?"

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So once you think you have a research question – put it to the test!

- Can you think of a way to answer this question? Try it!
Are you actually getting the information that you need to answer your question?
- Is your research question defined and focussed? Is it doable or is it too large? Are you interested in too many things? Refine and Define!

Top Tips:

- Do not allow your **familiarity with a certain method/technique** to decide the research question.
- Do not use research questions that **cannot be answered**.
- Do not ask **questions that have been already answered** satisfactorily.
- Do not develop your research question without considering the **practicalities** and the **ethics** of what you can do, and how you do it.