

## HOW TO WRITE A GOOD RESEARCH QUESTION<sup>1</sup>

A good research question is the start to any research project worth your time and energy. When writing a research question, first consider its focus: Is the target of the inquiry clear and specific? Then consider the scope of your question: Will answering the question lead you to investigate a broad or a narrow range of topics, issues, etc.? In AP Capstone, good research questions:

- Require a judgment or evaluation to be made (not just description)
- Are researchable (i.e., it is possible to find relevant and credible sources)
- Involve genuine points of ongoing debate
- Invite engagement with alternative perspectives
- Are simple and do not contain multiple, nested questions

Use the following rubric to determine the quality of your own research questions:

	Low	Medium	High
<b>Criteria</b>	The question lacks a clear focus <u>or</u> is either too broad or too narrow in scope. It is unlikely that the student can find relevant and credible sources that uncover the complexity of the research topic in the amount of time given. An answer to the question will be descriptive rather than evaluative.	The question has a clear focus and an adequately defined scope. It is possible to find relevant and credible sources given the project's time frame. An answer to the question will be evaluative, but may not address the complexity of the issue.	The question has a clear focus and an adequately defined scope. It is possible to find relevant and credible sources given the project's time frame. The question encourages the researcher to arrive at a conclusion that takes into account the complexity of the issue and the multiple perspectives one can take.
<b>Sample</b>	What attitudes do people around the world have about the relationship between parents and children?	How do the attitudes about the relationship between parents and children differ between Americans and Chinese?	Should Americans adopt an approach to parenting that resembles approaches taken in Chinese culture?
<b>Notes</b>	<i>This question has a clear topic, but is too broad. The researcher could improve the question by narrowing the scope or focus: Where in the world? What aspect of the relationship?</i>	<i>This question requires the researcher to make a judgment about the extent of similarity, but it doesn't encourage them to engage in a debate or investigate alternative perspectives.</i>	<i>This question will lead the researcher to make an argument. Doing so requires that the researcher engage with multiple perspectives. Ideally, the researcher will need to explore the various layers of this question before arriving at an answer: Which aspects of parenting? What are the pros and cons? What are the limits of taking ideas from one culture and applying them to another?</i>

<sup>1</sup> Based on criteria and reminders found in the College Board AP Seminar Workshop Handbook pp.43-45.

***Some additional tips and reminders:***

- \* Good research questions often begin with the following words: *what, why, when, where, who, how, would, could, and should.*
- \* Your research question will and should evolve as your research progresses. If preliminary research yields too many results, you should probably limit the scope of your research. If you receive too few results, you should broaden the scope. Don't forget to return to your question to make these small adjustments!
- \* Be prepared to defend and explain the context/significance of your research question. Ask yourself: Why is this a question worth exploring? What importance does it have, and to whom or what?
- \* If you have a research question worth exploring, then there should exist numerous voices that offer genuine points of ongoing debate. Remember that those voices don't have to contradict each other; they might offer complementary perspectives from different lenses.