Develop a Good Research Question

1. Focus

Explain Developing a Good Research Question

Say: Before you write an informational report, you have to become a “mini-expert” on the topic you’re writing about. This means you understand the topic well enough to write about it using your own words. To help focus your report, you will write a research question. The question shouldn’t be too broad, or general, or you’ll have too much to write about. It shouldn’t be too narrow, or specific, or you won’t have enough to write about. And it has to be something that is researchable. In other words, it can’t be something that is just an opinion question, such as, “Which animal is better, emus or goats?” Today we’ll practice developing good research questions together.

Model Developing a Good Research Question

Write your research question on chart paper as you talk about it.

Sample think-aloud. Say: My research question must be open-ended. In other words, it can’t have a yes or no or right or wrong answer. I’m going to think about the research question having two parts: the topic and the point. The topic is the subject of the report. The topic of my informational report is the American Revolution. The point helps me narrow the topic. The point is what I intend to show in my report. The point of my topic is the causes of the American Revolution. So, now I can write a research question. If I ask, “Were taxes a cause of the American Revolution?” I will get a yes or no answer. The question is too specific, and what if there were other causes of the American Revolution? Would this question lead me to explore other causes? Probably not, because I would be focusing just on taxes. A better research question is, “What were the causes of the American Revolution?” Now I have an open-ended question that focuses my research on any and all of the causes.
2. Rehearse

**Practice Developing a Good Research Question**

Ask students to use the topics of their informational reports to develop a research question. Encourage students to share their questions with a partner and discuss whether the questions are too broad or too narrow. Ask students to revise their questions if they need to.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

**Share Ideas**

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share their research questions. Ask: *After the discussions with your partners, did you revise your questions? Why or why not?* Ask students to discuss how they can continue to apply this strategy to their independent research.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: *Today we learned about developing good research questions. We don’t want questions that are too narrow or too broad. A good research question will help us focus our research. It also helps provide us with a goal for our research.*

Make BLM 3 available to students who are ready to write their research questions during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite two or three students to read aloud their research questions and discuss how they plan to find information to answer their questions.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Work one on one with beginning ELs. Help them develop a research question related to their topics.

**Intermediate**

Pair ELs with more fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Write the following sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to contribute ideas; for example:

- *My topic is _____.*
- *The point of my topic is _____.*
- *My research question is: _____.*

**Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.