The research question is arguably the most important part of the research process. A good research question focuses your research, frames your arguments, and engages your reader's interest. Thus, it is well worth your while to spend a considerable amount of your pre-search time focusing and rewriting your question.

**A good research question is:**

**Analytical:** It asks you to break something down at look at its parts. It asks you to dissect or explain.

**Arguable:** You need to take a stance and defend a point of view. Whether your answer is yes or no, you can make a valid case for your opinion.

**Researchable:** Obviously, you need to be able to find information on your topic. Many students have framed a good research question, then couldn't find the information necessary to answer it. Know the limitations of your resources!

**Focused:** Consider the scope of your assignment. Your question should be broad enough to give you room for an argument, but focused enough that you can explore it deeply and thoroughly within your page allotment.

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**Weak Questions:**

- What caused the Cold War?
- What is the process of glycolysis?
- How does Shakespeare develop the theme of madness in *Hamlet*?

**Stronger Questions:**

- Was containment an effective U.S. policy for dealing with Soviet expansion?
- Is heat or cold more effective in slowing the rate of glycolysis?
- Is there really a “method” in Hamlet’s madness, or have circumstances overwhelmed him?

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**Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.** *Voltaire*
FOCUS: Often, IB or your teacher will give you a broad research question or topic, and it is your job to focus it and make it more specific. If you’re on your own, you often start with just an idea or topic in which you’re interested.

EXAMPLE 1

| Idea: Interior design, architecture, I.M. Pei, Frank Lloyd Wright |
| Narrowed Question: How have Frank Lloyd Wright and I.M. Pei influenced modern architecture? (this is still very broad!) |
| Focused Question: Whose designs were more revolutionary, Frank Lloyd Wright’s or I.M. Peis? (still not great, but it’s focused, analytical and arguable) |

EXAMPLE 2

| Idea. Music, copyright |
| Narrowed Question: Are copyright laws helpful for musicians? |
| Focused Question: Do current copyright laws stifle creativity by limiting use of others’ materials? |

PRACTICE: Below are some general ideas. Choose ONE and turn it into a focused, analytical, arguable research question.

1. Sports, violence
2. Politics, media
3. Texting, teens
4. Energy, the environment
5. Jobs, economy, civil rights

| TOPIC: |
| NARROWED: |
| FOCUSED: |