

Developing Your Research Questions

List the questions you want will answer so that the purpose of the study is achieved.

Ask yourself...

“What do I need to know and answer to achieve the purpose?”

Evaluate Your List:

“Are there other questions I should answer?”

“Are some of these I listed outside of my purpose?”

The Final Question: “If I answer all these questions will I have achieved the purpose?”

QUALITATIVE Research Questions are used if you have a QUALITATIVE Purpose(s)

QUANTITATIVE Research Questions are used if you have a QUANTITATIVE Purpose(s)

Quantitative Research Questions

THREE RULES for Quantitative Research Questions

1. They Begin with “How”, “What”, or “Why” and can NEVER be answered by a simple Yes or No
2. Specify the independent and dependent variables
3. IF your questions deal with connections among multiple variables, you will again - use relate or compare – just as you did in the purpose statement

General Descriptive Examples [using rules 1 and 2]:

What factors positively impact employee turnover rates of hourly workers?

Why do Asian-American students outscore other student groups on AP Calculus Exams?

In each of the scripts below you may need to tell the research site if they differ or not explained in the purpose statement.

Relationship Script:

How does (Ind Var) relate to (Dep Var) for (participants)?

Relationship Example [using all 3 rules]:

How does quarterly sales volume relate to employee morale for Hispanic-American hourly workers?

Comparison Script:

How does (group 1) compare with/differ from (group 2) in terms of (Dep Var) for (participants)?

Comparison Example [using all 3 rules]:

How do African American 10th grade females and White, non-Hispanic 10th grade females compare in their plans for post-secondary education?

Qualitative Research Questions

Guidelines

1. Ask only a few general questions [no Yes/No questions] to permit participants to share information with you
2. Ask questions that are neutral exploratory language that does not convey conclusions you expect
3. Design and write 2 question types: Central Questions and Sub-Questions
4. Questions often change between the Concept Paper and Proposal Stage... This is a “living” document.

Central Question Guidelines

1. Begin with “How” or “What”. **Avoid “Why”** [this is a quantitative term that implies cause and effect]
2. List the central phenomenon you plan to explore
3. Identify the participants and research site

Qualitative Central Question Script:

What is (the central phenomenon) of/for (participants) at/in (research site)?

Qualitative Examples:

What is the role of store managers in employee satisfaction of hourly workers at Staples?

What is the process of the curriculum committee in making decisions about courses?

How does a President's leadership style impact employee engagement at Saint Leo's University?

How will establishing a community advisory committee impact giving by senior citizens in Orlando, Florida?

How will CAI impact the reading achievement of at-risk third grade students at six elementary schools in Las Vegas, Nevada?

Sub-Question Guidelines – Same as for the Central Question but are more specific**Qualitative Sub-Question Script:**

What is (the sub-question issue) of/for (participants -optional) at/in (research site - optional)?

Qualitative Central Question Examples:**Central Question:**

What is the role of store managers in employee satisfaction of hourly workers at Staples?

Procedural Sub-Questions:

Who are the store managers?

What are their qualifications?

How do they interact with hourly employees?

How does their interaction differ between full- and part-time employees?

How does their interaction differ between day and evening employees?

Issue Sub-Questions:

When do hourly workers become aware of being dissatisfied?

What is the difficulty that managers have in determining hourly worker satisfaction?

Important Notes:

Notice that the sub-questions will now help you formulate the questions you would ask on a survey or in structured interviews, because these are the procedures and issues that you will need clarified to answer the central question.

Let me stress again – Your Purpose Statement and Research Questions are as closely bound together as the lock on a safe and its combination – Not just any set of numbers will unlock the lock. The entire collection of numbers must match before the safe may be opened.

Only when you get a good purpose statement or statements can you then formulate the set of research questions that must be answered to achieve the purpose of your study. Those that start with the questions are often doomed... Ok, maybe that is overstated, but take my advice, start with a solid purpose.

How Many Research Questions Did You End Up With In Your List?

There should be 3-5 questions.

Could there be 2? ... Maybe

Could there be 6 or 7? Maybe

The More There Are The More Difficult The Study.

Kern's Rule - IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN 5 or 6...NARROW THE PURPOSE FURTHER

THE BUCKET OF SAND ... not a Wheelbarrow