

From:

Zina O'Leary (2018).

*Little quick fix: Research question.*

*Thousand Oaks: Sage.*

# Section



**What  
is the  
power  
of the  
research  
question?**

# A



**Bow down to the  
research question.  
It is a powerful beast.**

A well-articulated research question does much more work than you might imagine. In fact, it is the driver of the entire research process.



## Research is a decision-making journey

You may be thinking, ‘I have a pretty good idea about what I want to research. Is articulating the exact question that important?’ The answer is YES. You cannot jump into your research project without one. A well-articulated research question is fundamental; and your ability to articulate one is essential. How will you know when you have found the answer to your question, if you don’t know what your question is?

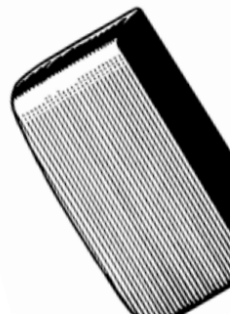
Research is a decision-making journey. You need to constantly engage in decision-making that is logical, consistent, and coherent. And the benchmark for logical, consistent, and coherent decision making? It’s that the choices you make must take you one step closer to being able to answer your research question credibly. So, without clear articulation of your question you are travelling blind.

*Research questions  
are essential because they*

# DEFINE AN INVESTIGATION

**A well-articulated research question** can provide both you and your readers with information about your project. It defines:

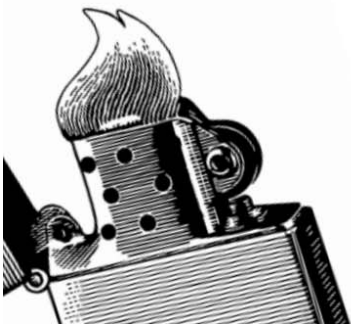
- the topic (say, for example, youth suicide)
- the nature of the research endeavour (to discover, explore, explain, describe, or compare)
- the questions you are interested in (what, where, who, how, when, why)
- constructs and variables (i.e., age, education, gender, self-esteem)
- and indicates whether you foresee a relationship between variables – impacts, increases, decreases, relationships, correlations, causes, etc.



# SET BOUNDARIES

**On your research journey** you are likely to find yourself facing many tangents, detours, and diversions. A well-defined question can help you set boundaries. When faced with an interesting tangent, ask yourself, 'What does this have to do with my question?' There are three potential answers here:

- 1 actually very little – *I will have to leave it and maybe pick it up in my next project;*
- 2 actually it is quite relevant – *if you think about it, it really does relate to...* (this can be exciting and add new dimensions to your work); and
- 3 well, nothing really, but I actually think this is at the heart of what I want to know – *perhaps I need to rethink my question.*



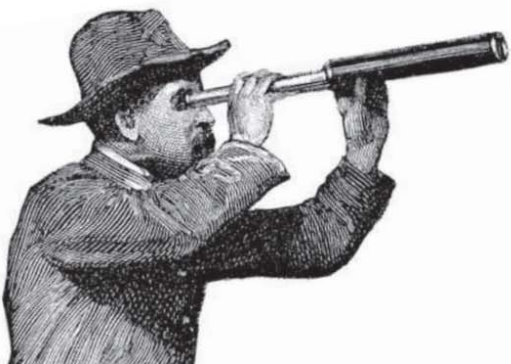
# PROVIDE DIRECTION

**A well-defined, well-articulated research question will act as a blueprint for your project.** It will point you towards the theory you need to explore; the literature you need to review; the data you need to gather; and the methods you need to call on. In fact, I would suggest that it is nearly impossible to define a clear methodology for an ill-defined research question. If you do not know what you want to know, you will not know how to find it out.



# ACT AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE

**Your question not only provides continuity** and sets the agenda for your entire study, it also acts as a benchmark for assessing decision making. The criteria for all decisions related to your project will be whether or not choices lead you closer to credible answers to your research question.





CHECKPOINT

# Got it?

**Q:** Why is being able to articulate your research question early on so important?

**Got it!**

**A:** Because it is the bedrock of your project. It defines your investigation, gives both direction and boundaries and keeps you on track.



Research questions are designed to provide insights into queries that are yet to be understood