

POSING INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Successful research results from posing good inquiry questions. When you have to solve a difficult problem or want to investigate a complex idea or issue, **developing questions about things you need to know helps guide your research and analysis**. But not all questions are created equal. Some lead to dead ends, while others open up vistas of knowledge and understanding...or best of all: *more questions!*

GENERATING QUESTIONS

Generating questions is most fun and effective with friends—the more minds the merrier. And **starting with lots of questions** helps you find the best ones. When brainstorming questions, consider many things about your area of investigation, for instance:

- **How is it defined?**
- **Where did it originate?**
- **What is its history?**
- **What are its important places, things, people, and experts?**
- **What are its major aspects?**
- **What are its causes and implications?**
- **What other things is it connected to or associated with?**

SELECTING AND REFINING QUESTIONS

Once you have a huge list of possible questions, select and refine them by asking yourself a few things about them:

Are you genuinely interested in answering your question?

Research requires hard work and endurance. If you don't care about your questions you won't do the work to answer them. The best questions are about things you actually want and need to know.

Can your question truly be answered through your research?

Some questions are unanswerable (How many walnuts are there in the world?) or take years to answer (What is the meaning of life?) Your inquiry questions must put you on a reachable path.

Is your question clear?

Can you pose your question in a way that you and others understand what you are asking? If it's confusing, then perhaps you are asking more than one thing. That's great: just break it into two questions. The more good inquiry questions you have the better.

What sort of answers does your question require?

Interesting, meaningful research comes from interesting questions. Good inquiry questions are rich enough to support lots of investigation that may even lead to multiple answers, and more questions. Questions that can be answered with a simple YES or NO generally do not make good inquiry questions.

Do you already know what the answer is?

Good inquiry questions are actually questions. If you already have answered the questions for yourself, then you won't really be inquiring through your research. If you already know what you think, then you won't get the true reward of research: a deeper knowledge and understanding of things you want to know about.