



Overview of Research



RANDOM THOUGHTS ABOUT "THE QUESTION"

**MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM
SUMMER 2012**

Where do research questions come from?



- A predetermined assignment
- A longstanding interest
- An new interest – something you read, saw, heard
- A question that begs for an answer – and you know you are the one to provide it!
- Important: test your interest before committing

Some stuff to consider



Ask yourself these questions about your question:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How

They help to narrow/refine question

They help to narrow/refine research

Some additional “intellectual” considerations



- Is the scope of your question appropriate: not too wide, not too narrow?
- Is it manageable within the time constraints allowed?
- Will the answer fit the page and word requirements of the assignment?
- Can you find sufficient and timely information in the library?
- Will work in the lab provide sufficient and timely information?
- Will Internet, Web, and field research produce more source material?
- Is your question simple enough to seek just one answer, not several?
- Is it specific enough that your audience will understand your objective?
- Will the results be interesting? Does it concern a real and debatable issue?
- Does your question really interest you? Do you honestly crave the answer?

Some additional format considerations



- Introduce topic early on – don't make it a guessing game for the reader
- “Topic sentence” often needs to be longer than one sentence but aim to be brief/concise
- Make good use of your introduction; provide the back story for your topic

Turn a question into a thesis



- Which is:
- The central claim or main argument of the paper.
- Think of a thesis in terms of parts:
- Part A: it should tell what you plan to argue.
- Part B it should "telegraph" how you plan to argue—that is, what particular support for your claim is going where in your paper.

Some caveats from our friends at Harvard



- **A thesis is never a question.**
- **A thesis is never a list.**
- **A thesis should never be vague, combative or confrontational.**
- **An effective thesis has a definable, arguable claim.**
- **A thesis should be as clear and specific as possible.**

Important stuff to remember



- Choose a topic that will hold your interest
- “Brainstorm” with yourself about the topic; identify relevant issues and questions
- Narrow, refine, define before settling on a research question
- Remember the difference between a question and a thesis