

# How to frame a

# research question

The first key to any good humanities project is to ask a good research question. You can hardly discover anything interesting if you cannot even establish a sound framework for inquiry. But how do you ask good research questions? Here is one way to approach that challenge –ask questions about your question. In other words:

## 1. What would interest you?

Take this to mean what would you like to learn? You can explore topics that deepen existing knowledge or take yourself into new territory, but here is where you need to take control of your own education and figure out exactly what you want for your own intellectual development.

## 2. What would interest your audience?

This second questions reminds you that you are not alone in this process. Never forget your potential audience and always remind yourself that a good project aspires to reach past just a single teacher or professor. All good humanists think about how their projects might make a contribution to the general pursuit of knowledge. If you are writing an academic paper, then this question addresses a scholarly audience: What would contribute to this field? How does it build on previous scholarship? If you are writing a blog post or personal essay, then this question addresses the needs of a more general audience: What would engage my readers? How can I capture their attention?

## 3. Can you test your question with evidence?

Nothing actually matters more for a successful undergraduate paper than this last question. Humanists are not scientists, but they still need to test propositions and they definitely need evidence. Nowadays, undergraduates have access to a wide array of primary and secondary sources, but still it's quite possible that some essential evidence is not available to you, or at least not available under the time constraints you face. So plan carefully and never fully commit to a project until you have explored the availability of evidence.

Asking these questions about your question can help clarify your thinking and set you in motion toward academic success.