

WORKSHEET: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Successful research involves more than just finding all the information out there about a topic. You will never be able to find—or read—all this information. Having a narrow topic will help you to keep their projects to a manageable size, but you can focus your research and project even more by developing research questions.

Writing Research Questions

Good historical research questions will allow you to investigate issues of cause and effect, change over time, differences in perspective, etc. What were the causes of past events? What were the effects? How did past decisions or actions affect future choices? What has changed?

Research questions are different than information-seeking questions. Information-seeking questions help you to understand the basic facts about your topic. When was the 19th amendment passed? Who was the first president of the United States? How does a bill become a law? You will likely answer these questions just by reading an encyclopedia article about your topic.

TRY IT: WRITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Brainstorm a variety of questions about your topic. Try selecting the most interesting two or three questions to guide your research.

Category	Sample: Rosa Parks	Your Topic
Cause and Effect What were the causes of past events? What were the effects?	Why did the city of Montgomery have these policies? Why did Rosa Parks and others decide that it was a good time to take a stand? What impact did the bus boycott have in and beyond Montgomery?	
Through their Eyes How did people in the past view their world?	What motivated Rosa Parks to take a stand against segregation? What were the motivations of city officials in Montgomery for arresting her?	
Change and Continuity What has changed? What has remained the same?	How did the city of Montgomery and government policy change during the course of the Civil Rights Movement?	
Turning Points How did past decisions or actions affect future choices?	How was the Montgomery Bus Boycott a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement? How were things different in Montgomery and the Civil Rights Movement after this event?	

Question categories adapted from "Thinking Like a Historian" by Bobbie Malone and Nikki Mandell, published by the Wisconsin Historical Society.