Troubleshooting:

Is this a good research question?

We have created a list of questions you can ask yourself if you want to check if your research question is a good one! While this isn't everything you need to consider, this document may help you refer back to some common problems.

To help describe some of these ideas, we'll use an example research question that needs some work. We'll show you how, by asking yourselves these questions, you can improve on the idea.

Let's say you would like to research the importance of learning Indigenous languages for young people.

QUESTION 1: Can I test my theory? After I do my research, can I convincingly argue that my results are correct?

Bad Research Question	Some Potential Issues	Better Research Question	Why is it better?
Why does learning Indigenous languages make you better?	• This is really hard to run an experiment to prove! What do you mean by "better"? • This is very subjective – it means different things to different people. What I think makes a 'better' person might be different from what you think makes a person better.	What are the effects of learning an Indigenous language on people?	• This question is more open-ended. It does not assume a positive end point – it's not that it automatically makes you better, but instead let's look at all the consequences • You can test this a lot easier – but it still needs to be narrowed down. Would you like to know the effects on… memory? We can test that!

QUESTION 2: Does my question make it sound like I already know the answer?

Can I answer the question in many different ways?

Bad Research Question	Some Potential Issues	Better Research Question	Why is it better?
Why is it good to teach kids Indigenous languages?	• This question *assumes* it is naturally a good thing to learn Indigenous languages. You may believe it is beneficial, but in research, you have to allow for other possibilities. What if it turns out it isn't a good thing?	How does teaching Indigenous language to kids affect their growth?	• By asking *how,* you allow for many possible answers. Perhaps it has no affect at all! You can't know for sure until you research it. • This question still needs to be focused and narrowed down for you to study it properly. Who counts as a 'kid'?

QUESTION 3: Can I break big "why" questions into smaller questions I can test and answer?

Bad Research Question	Some Potential Issues	Better Research Question	Why is it better?
How does teaching Indigenous languages to children affect their growth?	• This is a HUGE question! Where do you even start when trying to answer this? • If you split this up into more specific questions, you can do your research more easily	What are the effects of teaching Indigenous languages to kids on how happy they are, if they do well in school, and their involvement in their communities?	• By specifying particular things you are interested in, you can more easily come up with tests for them. For example, before and after surveys asking how much people volunteer in their communities. • This question still needs a bit of work to make it more specific and clear, but it's coming along!

QUESTION 4: Is this question clear and precise? Do I use words that are vague or unclear?

Bad Research Question	Some Potential Issues	Better Research Question	Why is it better?
What are the effects of teaching Indigenous languages to kids on how happy they are, if they do well in school, and their involvement in their communities?	• Having three distinct things you are looking for is a good start for being precise—but some of the language is still vague • For example: would you like to specify which communities or languages? All Indigenous languages is a lot—and maybe this changes for Indigenous communities in Northern Canada as opposed to Indigenous communities in Mozambique! • Are you interested in the effects of learning languages at home, or are you thinking about courses based in schools?	What are the effects of teaching Indigenous languages to youth, aged 13-18, in schools in Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Inuvik and Aklavik on: personal happiness levels, school attendance rates, and youth involvement in their communities?	• It's much longer, but it's getting to be very specific! The clearer you are with what you want to know, the better.

QUESTION 5: Is the question too 'big' or too 'small' for the sort of research project I am interested in? Writing an essay in a College course should have a simpler research question, while huge research projects can often allow for more detailed topics.

QUESTION 6: Can I explain why the answer matters? Why is my research important?