

Research Questions 101

Research questions are an important part of the historical research process. They will help you to move from just finding facts about your topic, to answering historical questions about our past, and answering them with evidence.

Research questions are not the same as your research topic, but they're connected to it.

Your topic is where you start. It's the subject (person, place, event, idea) that you are learning more about. Your research question helps you to dig deeper into something specific about your topic.

You won't be able to write research questions right away. You first need to learn the basics - who was involved, what happened, when and where it took place. You will answer these questions with pre-research, or information gathering.

Good research questions **involve a historical concept**. Think about:

- Cause and effect
- Significance or impact in history
- Connection to historical context
- Comparison and contrast
- Change and continuity over time
- Connections to larger issues or trends in history

In a National History Day project, you may also want to consider research questions that **connect to the annual theme**.

Characteristic	Instead of...	Try...
Good research questions are open-ended . Think why and how, not who, when, or where.	<i>Who was Rosa Parks? Where did she live? What did she do?</i>	<i>How did non-violent protest strategies impact public support for the Montgomery bus boycott?</i>
Good research questions need to be answered analysis, not just a few facts .	<i>How did women fight for the right to vote?</i>	<i>How did global events influence the suffrage movement in the United States?</i>
Good research questions are the right size for your project . Not too <u>broad</u> .	<i>How has women's fashion changed over time?</i>	<i>How did women's changing roles during WWII impact US women's fashion?</i>
Good research questions are not biased . They don't include the answer or a set point of view in the question.	<i>How did the foolishness of the captain of the Titanic cause it to hit an iceberg and sink?</i>	<i>How did safety precautions influence the building and use of the Titanic?</i>
Good research questions are knowable . There is historical evidence to help you answer it.	<i>What is the meaning of life?</i>	<i>How did the 1925 Scopes Trial impact the teaching of science and evolution?</i>
Good research questions are historical . Avoid moral or ethical questions.	<i>Was it right for the United States to drop an atomic bomb on Japan during World War II?</i>	<i>How did the first use of the atomic bomb impact future military conflicts?</i>
Good research questions are not "what if history." There's no way to know the answer to these questions.	<i>What if Abraham Lincoln didn't issue the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863?</i>	<i>How did the Emancipation Proclamation change the Civil War and public opinion about it?</i>