

FRAMING YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION

Framing a clear research question is a crucial part of developing your research proposal, and should be seen as emerging from a dialogue between a developing theoretical position and decisions you need to take about research design and subsequent data analysis.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL ANTECEDENTS



RESEARCH QUESTION



RESEARCH DESIGN (What, when, where, how, with/from whom)

The following criteria are intended as a GUIDE to assist you in framing your research question, and enabling you to assist your peers in developing their own.

1. Does the research question provide a clear idea of what the research project is about/hopes to address?
2. Is the question one that can be addressed by research?
3. Is the question researchable?
4. Is it possible to deduce from the research question:
 - a. Possible “answers” or modes of addressing the question?
 - b. Feasible fieldwork, in terms of sampling and data collection?
5. A researchable question will provide some indication of how the research design is likely to unfold. If you think about the fieldwork component of the project (that is, your data collection) can this be contained comfortably within a two-month period? This is not a hard and fast rule, but a guide. Masters students expecting to complete their projects in a year need to be very clear about their fieldwork and what length of time this will take. A time period in excess of two months for fieldwork is likely to cause problems.
6. Is the question interesting, relevant and important? Is it important that it should be so?
7. Is there a single question? You should aim for a single research question, developed through sub questions, rather than generate a collection of questions, although this is not always possible.
8. A good research question, although it is addressed through a fairly small-scale empirical study, is drawn from more general theoretical and methodological issues. Does the research question emerge from and point only at a local context. Or does it emerge from a broader set of disciplinary or professional issues?