

The Research Question: The Starting Point

The research question is **the most important** component of research.

Features of a good research question always consider all of the following:

- **Relevance:** It has to be an issue covered by the research.
- **Manageable:** It has to be within scope, not too large, not too small.
- **Specific:** It has to be measurable and possible to investigate.
- **Clear and simple:** Investigators/readers all must understand what you're hoping to find out.
- **Interesting:** Investigators/readers are interested in the research; it must be a substantial question.
- **Legitimate:** Is it a question, not a statement.
- **Answerable:** It must be a question that you can actually provide a direct answer for.

The Research Question: FINER Framework

A framework in research offers structure and guidance for planning methodologies, prioritizing the right questions, and constructing logical presentation sequences of the research itself.

FINER: a research framework

FINER criteria allow scientists to formulate a good research question, by highlighting useful topics:

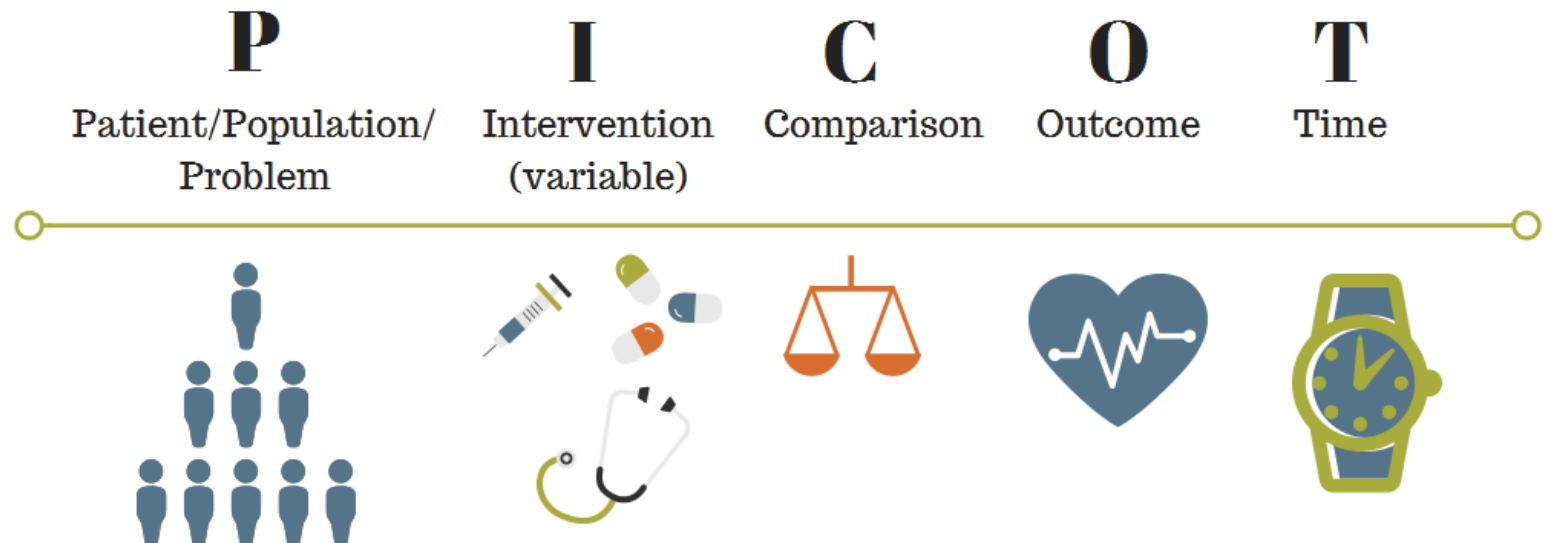
- ✓ **Feasible**
Research questions should be answered under objective aspects like time, scope, resources, expertise, or funding.
- ✓ **Interesting**
Regardless of your own personal motivation about a subject, it is important to check if your question corresponds to more practical and broader interests.
- ✓ **Novel**
Answer to an existing gap in knowledge. Filling one of these gaps is important.
- ✓ **Ethical**
In empirical research, ethics is an absolute MUST.
- ✓ **Relevant**
Relevance can lead to real, visible changes in society.

The Research Question: PICO

The PICO format is commonly used in evidence-based clinical practice.

Format creates a well-built question that identifies four concepts:

1. Population
2. Intervention
3. Control
4. Outcome



Good and Bad Research Questions

BAD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Not Empirically Testable, Nonscientific Questions

- Should abortion be legal?
- Is it right to have capital punishment?

General Topics, Not Research Questions

- Treatment of alcohol and drug abuse
- Sexuality and aging

Set of Variables, Not Questions

- Capital punishment and racial discrimination
- Urban decay and gangs

Too Vague, Ambiguous

- Do police affect delinquency?
- What can be done to prevent child abuse?

Need to Be Still More Specific

- Has the incidence of child abuse risen?
- How does poverty affect children?
- What problems do children who grow up in poverty experience that others do not?

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Exploratory Questions

- Has the incidence of new forms of child abuse appeared in Wisconsin in the past 10 years?

Descriptive Questions

- Is child abuse, violent or sexual, more common in families that have experienced a divorce than in intact, never-divorced families?
- Are the children raised in impoverished households more likely to have medical, learning, and social-emotional adjustment difficulties than children who are not living in poverty?

Explanatory Questions

- Does the emotional instability created by experiencing a divorce increase the chances that divorced parents will physically abuse their children?
- Is a lack of sufficient funds for preventive treatment a major cause of more serious medical problems among children raised in families in poverty?