

# Developing Your Research Questions



## Main Points for Developing your Research Questions

- 1) Before starting to develop your survey, identify your overarching topic and subtopics of interest.
- 2) Use your topics and subtopics of interest to develop specific questions that get at what you want to know from your research project.

## What is a research question?

A **research question** is a specific inquiry or investigation that guides the direction of a research project. It is a central question you are trying to answer in your research and helps to focus and direct your study. Developing your research questions (you can and often will have more than one!) ahead of time can help focus your study and ensure that you can achieve the goals of your research.

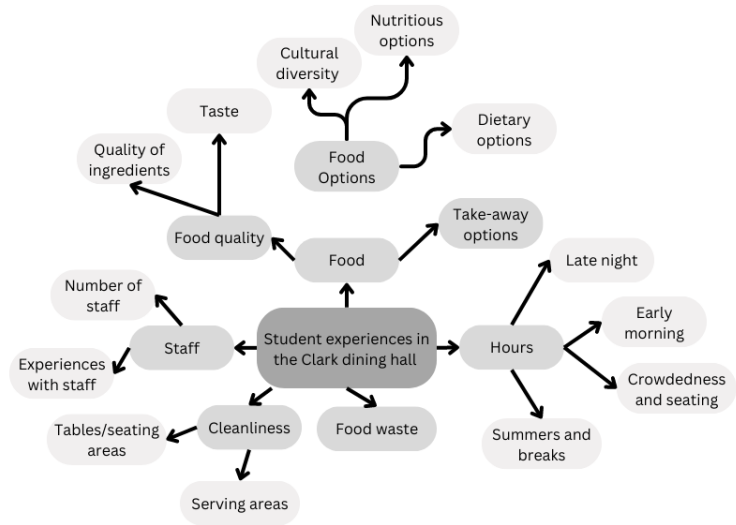
## How do I identify my research topics?

Before we identify research questions, it can be helpful to first identify your broader research topic. Think about why you want to do your research project. Is there a certain issue, problem, or experience that you're interested in? From there, you can think about the potential subtopics of that general topic that you are interested in. Depending on how you work best, one strategy can be to create an exhaustive list of subtopics to then narrow down. Another strategy can be to identify the top priority topics and add additional questions as they come up. When identifying your research topics, it is important to consider what parts of the topic or issue interest you, as well as what your audience will be interested in knowing.

*Sample ways to approach brainstorming research topics*

**General Topic:** Clark University student's thoughts about the dining hall

**Priority subtopics:** Dining hall usage, thoughts about cleanliness, satisfaction with options, favorite meals, dietary needs



**How do I turn my research topics into research questions?**

Once you have your topic and subtopics, it is useful to turn those topics into specific research questions. A **research question** is a specific inquiry or investigation that guides the direction of a research project. It is a central question you are trying to answer in your research and helps to focus and direct your study. Developing your research questions (you can and often will have more than one!) ahead of time can help focus your study and ensure that you can achieve the goals of your research.

For example, if I am interested in dining hall usage to determine if Clark needs to expand the dining hall hours, I might have a focused research question that asks “When are the most Clark students using the dining hall?” or “Are students satisfied with the hours of the dining hall?”

There are several types of research questions that you can use depending on the goals of your research project. Here are a few examples:

Type of Research Question	Description	Sample Research Question
Open-ended	Very broad, usually best to guide other research questions or answer with an open-response question/qualitatively	How do Clark University students feel about the food in the dining hall?

Focused & Descriptive	Summarizes a specific aspect of the topic.	Are Clark University students satisfied with the number of vegan options in the dining hall?
Longitudinal	Explores whether there has been change over time in a population	Have student feelings about the food in the dining hall changed from 2016 to present?
Cross-sectional	Explores if different sub-sections of your population have differential experiences or responses	Do international and domestic students differ in their level of satisfaction with the number of choices in the dining hall?
Evaluative	Explores whether certain experiences or interventions are associated with differential effects.	Did students who participated in new late night dining hours have a more favorable impression of the dining hall?

### **How many research questions do I need?**

There is no set number of research questions that you need. The number of research questions you have will depend on the scope and goals of your research project. It is important to have enough research questions to address your research goals and provide a comprehensive understanding of your topic, but not so many that your study becomes unfocused or unwieldy for people to fill out.