



Exploration 2: Crafting a Research Question

CODE 123: Research & Systems Thinking

Objective

Great research projects begin with great research questions. What makes a question “good” can look very different depending on who is asking! Historians might ask about how something changed over time, a sociologist might ask about structural inequality, and a psychologist might ask about internal thought processes that led to a measurable behavior.

In this activity, you will practice drafting a research question that is not only “FINER” (Feasible, Interesting, Novel, Ethical, and Relevant) but **also** connected to our community here at **SIUE**.

Part 1: Considering Disciplines as Lenses

Before writing your own research question, let’s think about how different disciplines solve problems. Choose two of the following disciplines and answer the questions below.

Note: *If you feel stuck, check the “Thinking Prompts” on page 2 of this document!*

Disciplines: English, History, Business, Nursing, Sociology, Art, Biology, Social Work

- **Discipline 1:** How would a researcher in this field approach a problem at SIUE? What kind of data would they examine? Who would they talk to?
- **Discipline 2:** How would a researcher in this field approach the same problem at SIUE?
- Which approach feels more aligned with the work *you* want to do in this class? Why?

Part 2: Drafting Your Research Question

Using the FINER framework (developed by Brian Hulley), draft a research question for your semester project.

- **Proposed research question:** [write your question here]
- **Target Population:** Who does this question apply to? (e.g., first-year students, SIUE faculty, commuter students, administrative staff)

Part 3: The FINER Check

Test your research question using the criteria below. If your question does not meet one of these areas, that is okay! You can revise it. Fill in this table with your answers.

Criteria	The FINER Framework Reflection
Feasible	Can this be answered in one semester with the resources and time you have? Do you have access to the people/data needed?
Interesting	Why does this matter to you? Does it spark your curiosity?
Novel	Does this question bring a new perspective? How is your angle unique or specific?
Ethical	Can you answer your question without harming or exploiting any participants? (Think back to the CITI training).
Relevant	The SIUE Connection: Does this question help us understand or improve SIUE in some way? Why should others care about the outcome?

Thinking Prompts

- **Historian (History, Archival Research):** Asks about the past. They look for patterns of change over time, root causes, and historical documents.
 - **Questions research questions they may ask:** How did we get here? What did this place look like 100 years ago?
- **Natural Scientist (Biologist, Chemist, Environmental Scientist):** Asks about the physical world. They look for cause-and-effect in nature, biological health, and human impacts on the environment.
 - **Research questions they may ask:** How can we measure this physical or chemical process? What physical or social impact does this event have on the environment?
- **Social Scientist (Sociology, Psychology, Political Scientist):** Asks about people and systems. They look for patterns in behavior, social rules, inequalities, or individual perceptions.
 - **Possible research question:** How do people experience this? Who has power here and who doesn't?
- **Applied Professions (Business, Engineering):** Ask about solutions and efficiency. They look for how to fix a problem, how much it costs, or how to build something better.
 - **Possible research questions:** Does this work? How efficient is this process? How could we optimize this solution?

Grading Rubric

Criteria	A Proficient Exploration Will...	A Developing Exploration Will...	An Exploration Still in Need of Work...
Part 1: Disciplinary Lenses	Choose 2 distinct disciplines; provide clear explanation how disciplines approach the problem; include a thoughtful reflection on which approach aligns with personal interests.	Choose 1 or 2 disciplines; provide unclear explanation how discipline addresses problem; include vague, surface-level reflection on how approach aligns with personal interests.	Does not choose and apply a discipline; does not apply and explore disciplinary lenses.
Part 2: Research Question	Propose a research question that is specific and reasonable for a semester-long project, explicitly connected to SIUE community; clearly define target population.	Propose a research question that is too broad (e.g., homelessness) or lacks specific connection to SIUE; vaguely define target population (e.g., "people").	Does not propose research question; does not define target population.
Part 3: FINER Framework Reflection	Honestly evaluate research question against all 5 FINER criteria; admit potential challenges.	Check the boxes for FINER criteria but offer very limited reasoning as to why research question fits the criteria.	Does not complete FINER reflection (blank table).