



# Research Questions

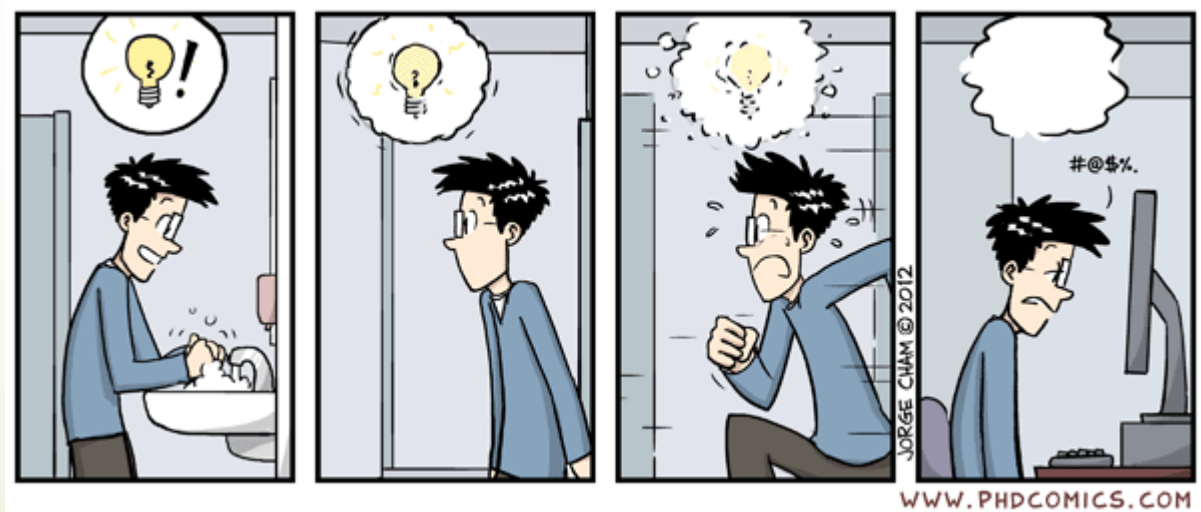
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# Outline

- Defining a research question and subquestions
- Characteristics of research questions
- Sample research questions
- An example from one of my research projects
- Some questions to get you started



# What is a research question

- Umbrella questions that address your topic
- Include KEY WORDS and PHRASES to help guide your research and approach to database and library searches
- Questions you don't know the answer to
- You are doing research to gain new knowledge
- Not too narrow and not too broad
- Focused, clear and appropriately complex





# Why Are they Important?

- ▶ 'the single most important component of a study is the research question. It is the keystone of the entire exercise' (Bordage & Dawson, 2003, p. 378)
- ▶ WHY?
  - ▶ Identifies your unique contribution to the field
  - ▶ clear focus for research process
  - ▶ Influence your literature review
  - ▶ Influence how you will collect data, the kinds of questions you will ask
  - ▶ Helps you think about how others will argue against it

# Importance of Sub Questions



- ▶ Provide further support for your research question
- ▶ Subquestions are narrower questions that answer research questions.
- ▶ **Good sub-questions should:**
  - ▶ Be 'open' questions (This means that they cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. Usually this means starting the question with: who, what, when, where, why, or how)
  - ▶ Incorporate terms and concepts that you learnt during your background research
- ▶ Offer a roadmap to break up your PhD into manageable pieces
- ▶ Make the PhD process less daunting



# Sample Research questions

Clear, focused and appropriately complex



# Clarity



- ▶ Unclear:
- ▶ Why are social networking sites harmful?
- ▶ Clear:
- ▶ How are online users experiencing or addressing privacy issues on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook?



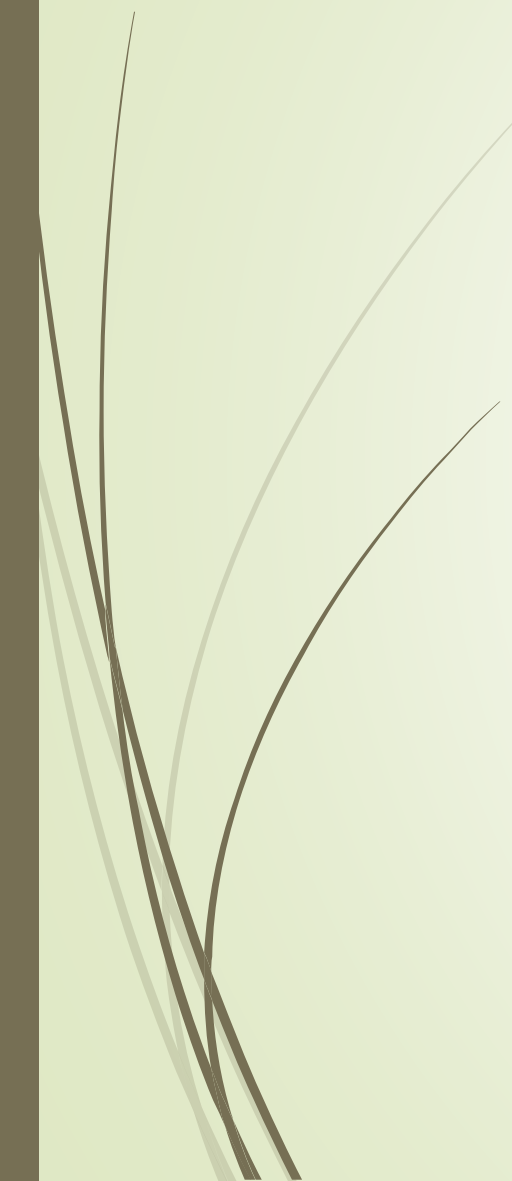
# Focused

- ▶ Unfocused:
  - ▶ What is the effect on the environment from global warming?
- ▶ Focused:
  - ▶ How is glacial melting affecting penguins in Antarctica?





# Simple vs. Complex

- ▶ Too simple:
  - ▶ How are doctors addressing diabetes in the U.S.?
  - ▶ Appropriately complex:
  - ▶ What are common traits of those suffering from diabetes in America, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease?
- 



# Characteristics of My Research Questions

1. Reflects what I already know about the subject
2. Asks a specific, clear and discrete question that can be answered via research
3. Offers a problem that needs solving
4. If I'm applying for funding I always try to link to the strategic priorities of funder



# For example

- ▶ Research Question

- ▶ If people with disabilities require accessibility options to fully experience television, will this group benefit from the introduction of video on demand in Australia, if it is not subject to the same access requirements of broadcast television?

- ▶ Subquestions/ areas of focus

- ▶ 1. Identify what Australian consumers with disabilities want from VOD and investigate how they currently use it
- ▶ 2. Determine which accessibility features would most benefit this group
- ▶ 3. Evaluate VOD in Australia against existing legislation and W3C recommendations
- ▶ 4. Compare access features on current and emerging Australian VOD with international offerings eg netflix in the US and Amazon Prime in UK

# Choose a topic

- ▶ Some of you will already have a topic in mind when you start a PhD
- ▶ Others won't
- ▶ You will need a topic that can sustain you for 3.5+ years
- ▶ Generic Advice
  - ▶ Choose a topic you know a lot about
  - ▶ Chose a topic you want to know more about
  - ▶ Funding/Supervisor influences
- ▶ Something else to consider: What you don't want to do



# From Topic to Research Question:


- ▶ After choosing a topic and gathering background information, add focus with a research question.
- ▶ **What do you already know about your subject?**  
Keep a list of key words, names, and events.
- ▶ **How long has your subject existed?**  
Is it a relatively new concept with a lot published about it, or new and undiscovered?
- ▶ **What discipline does your topic fall into?**  
A discipline is an area of study or branch of learning (e.g., History, Biology). Each has its own best starting points.
- ▶ **How are you viewing the topic?**  
Think about what you are planning to emphasize: politics, history, or another aspect?





# Another Approach: Sentences

- ▶ Write an explanation of your topic, justifying it on multiple levels:
- ▶ *I am studying...*
- ▶ *in order to find out...*
- ▶ *in order to help my reader understand...*



# Where to Next? Hypothesize.

- ▶ After you've come up with a question, consider the path your answer might take.
- ▶ If you are making an argument, what will you say?
- ▶ Why does your argument matter?
- ▶ How might others challenge your argument?
- ▶ What kind of sources will you need to support your argument?

# Final Words

- ▶ A clear, focused and appropriately complex research question will guide your research from your background study, literature review, candidacy proposal and final thesis. GOOD LUCK!

