

## Practice Exercise: Writing Purposeful Research Questions

### WHAT IS A GOOD RESEARCH QUESTION?

- \*One formulated by the student out of his/her own curiosity or interest
- \*Non-trivial (i.e., substantial, not speculative or too limited in scope, not self-evident)
- \*Sharply enough focused so that the student can answer it in 4,000 words

**Step 1. Name your topic.** Early in your research, describe your work in one sentence. Use adjectives to describe your nouns.

I am learning about (or reading about, or studying)\_\_\_\_\_.

**Example:** I am studying public funding in the arts.

**Step 2. Suggest a question.** Try to describe your research by developing a question that specifies something about your topic.

I am studying\_\_\_\_\_because (in order to) I want to find out (who, what, when, where, whether, why, or how)\_\_\_\_\_.

**Example:** I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are members of the working poor.

**Direct Question:** How accessible are the arts to people who belong to the class of the working poor?

**Step 3. Add a rationale.** Take your questioning one step further by adding a second question aimed at determining your rationale.

I am studying\_\_\_\_\_because I want to find out\_\_\_\_\_in order to understand (how, why, or whether)\_\_\_\_\_.

**Example:** I am studying public funding for the arts because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to the working poor, so I can determine whether our tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status. (**Note the rephrasing of the purpose stems.**)

**Direct Question:** To what extent do state and federal tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of tier socio-economic status?

**Step 4. Repeat the process.** Now, repeat steps 1-3 as often as it takes for you to write enough detail to believe in what you are researching, know what you want to find out, and understand your reason for undertaking your research. Oh—and in between your attempts to work through these steps—have someone read your answers. This will force you to stay on track and keep working.

**\*\*When you can adequately state the “because I want to find out” portion of your topic, you have determined your reason/purpose for studying and writing about it\*\***

Be aware that this is a critical yet difficult step in the research process. You cannot write a full statement of purpose/rationale until you have gathered and read some solid information on your topic. Once you have done so, you'll almost be ready to write your research question.