

Developing Research Questions

How you conduct a research study depends largely upon what your research question(s) are. But how do you develop a set of research questions? First of all, it is important to analyze your research topic. You will need to develop, focus and narrow your research topic. For example, perhaps your research topic is “alcohol use.” You will think about your research interests with respect to this topic. A starting point may be just to ask yourself: Who? Where? When? What? or Why?

Potential answers might include:

Who – students at Al Akhawayn University
male students at Al Akhawayn University
male undergraduate students at Al Akhawayn University
male business undergraduate students at Al Akhawayn University

Where – In Ifrane
In hometowns

When – During weeknights
During weekends
Both

It is then possible to ask yourself who are the stakeholders in this issue. Who or which groups have some stake in this topic area?

Potential answers might include:

Drinkers
Other Students
Staff (Security)
Police
Faculty
Administration
Others?

It is then possible to ask yourself about the issues are important in this topic area?

Effects on health
Effects on academics
Effects on social life
Effects on conflict
Effects on sexual harassment
Others?

Assumptions

What assumptions are you making? For example:

- “Alcohol use by undergraduate males is a problem at AUI.”
- “Undergraduate males drink too much alcohol at AUI.”
- “Undergraduate males are problem drinkers at AUI.”

From this you can identify a real problem than deserves investigation. For example:

This research proposes to investigate the effects of alcohol use on conflict management by male undergraduates at AUI.

From this preliminary analysis it is possible to develop a list of research questions that the team is interested in answering.

Some possible Research Questions. For example:

1. Does alcohol use by undergraduate males affect conflict management at AUI?
2. What are the drinking behaviors of undergraduate males during social gatherings where alcohol is present?
3. How do undergraduate males manage to abstain from drinking (e.g. avoidance rituals) while in social situations where alcohol is present?
4. How do male business undergraduates define appropriate drinking practices at AUI?
5. How do male AUI undergraduates define alcoholism?

Your team may wish to focus on one or more of these questions. However, it is always best to limit the scope of your project. Time constraints will make this important. You may need to refine your research question(s) as you complete your literature review. Knowledge gained in the literature review may lead to a deeper understanding of the issues involved in your research topic.