

What is a good Inquiry question?

1. Most importantly...something you are interested in.

2. The question is open to research.

- This means you should be able to find some answers to the question by doing research.
- An understanding of the question can be obtained within the scope of the course. "Who am I?" may be difficult to find an answer to through research, although you could adapt this question to make it open to research.

3. You don't already know the answer, or have not already decided on the answer before doing the research.

- Too often we go after questions for which we already have some kind of answer.
- This might make it easier to write a quick paper but really violates the spirit of genuine inquiry.

4. The question may have multiple possible answers when initially asked.

- The question should not be answered by a simple yes/no.
- Questions that examine "why" rather than "what" can help. "What" tends to lead to descriptions or single right answers. "Why" tends to lead to explanations.
- For example: Do we use all of our brain? This is too restricted. The answer is either yes or no.

5. It has a clear focus.

- Some **focus** is required to allow productive research. An initial *general* question can get things started, but it will also likely need to be revised and focussed as the research continues.
- Your final question should be as direct and specific as possible, or have clear subquestions. This will give you a good starting point as well as some direction in terms of how to proceed with your research.
- For example: What is the mind? This is much too broad. Where would you start? How could you find an answer to this question? This question could be refined to "How does the mind form short-term versus long-term memories?" or "Why does memory differ in a six-year-old vs. an adult?"
- How you decide to refine your question will depend on your own interests.

6. The question should be reasonable.

- This means that there should be credible information which you can use to research your question.
- This does NOT mean the question has to be in the area of science, but it does mean that you should take a scientific approach (critical analysis) in researching your question.
- For example: Do angels exist? You might have difficulty finding information on this topic. Not to mention that it is a yes or no question. Why do people believe in angels in today's society? This type of question can be more objective and will allow you to elaborate more on your topic.

7. Try to avoid or rephrase questions which have a premise.

- For example: Why do we only use 3% of our brain?
- With this question comes the assumption that we do, in fact, only use 3% of our brain.
- What if you use this question as the basis for your research, only to discover that is isn't true? A better alternative might be: What influences the percentage of our brain that we use? This questions doesn't make any initial assumptions and leaves room for many possible alternatives.

8. Make sure you have defined all the terms in your question so you know exactly what you are asking.

- If you are using subjective terms such as "latest" or "most recent", be sure to define exactly what you mean by this. For example, "most recent" as in the 1st century? the last decade? the last two years?

9. A new question can be asked once all your information is gathered.

- A good inquiry never really completely ends. It should trigger new questions and things you are curious about.

10. Having the right answer matters to you.

- This may seem an odd thing to include but it is at the foundation to inquiry.
- Inquiry is about needing to know the answer to a question, or researching a question where the answer has consequences, so there is some pressure to get it right. Anything short of this can be a game, fun, mentally stimulating, but isn't genuine inquiry.